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KIDS' VOICES IN EDUCATIONAL REFORM RESEARCH: WHAT REALLY MATTERS
THE SOCIAL NEGOTIATION OF ROLE AND DISCOURSE AS DEFINERS OF PEDAGOGY

DISSERTATION

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for

the Degree Doctor of Philosophy in the Graduate

School of The Ohio State University

By

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****

The Ohio State University
1996

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Student voices and perspectives have been largely absent from research and literature related to school reform. The focus has typically been on a more systemic, organizational level of change and when the focus shifts to the school and classroom level, student perspectives are still not a part of the discourse of school change. The student is often portrayed as the beneficiary of school reform efforts, rather than a partner in the processes of education and change. This study examines what is significant to students related to school reform and how they are impacted as learners and individuals. The study is both qualitative and collaborative in its nature, as the seventh grade student participants are involved in every aspect of the study from determining the focus of the literature review, to the synthesis, analysis and representation of the data and findings and the generation of grounded theory.

The findings reveal that issues of significance to students are related to two primary concepts, that of discourse and student/teacher role. Students reported that their experiences in reformed learning environments typically represented a shift from the monological nature of discourse in a traditional classroom to more of a dialogical approach where there is ongoing feedback, support, negotiation, and interaction between students and teachers to assure successful learning for students. The participants also
reported valuing interaction between teachers and students of a more personal nature, stepping out of traditional role expectations for students and teachers. This was far less common in their experiences both in traditional and reformed environments. They reported that interaction and relationships of a personal nature were vital to redefining learning in a manner to encourage risk taking, and exploration of learning through questioning and the generation of theory, as opposed to a content coverage or mastery of knowledge and skills approach in the classroom.

Research becomes an act of pedagogy when engaging in collaborative research with students. Issues of power, voice, role and relationships were pervasive in the findings. These same issues undergird many of the findings related to conducting collaborative research with young students. The challenges and benefits are discussed, as well as recommendations for engaging in educational research with students and specific strategies to do so.
Dedicated to my daughter, Paige,

who gave up so much of my time and attention so that I could invest it in my students and our study. It is her spirit, one shared with my students, that gives my work and words life and meaning. It is Paige's spirit that renews my commitment to making school a better place for her and all children.
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I am truly indebted to and often in awe of my colleagues in this study, my students. It is their strength, their determination, and their ongoing commitment to attend so many meetings and think so deeply with me, that enabled all of this work to be possible. It is their vision of what school could and should be and their commitment to make a difference that gives this study meaning and significance.
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**FIELDS OF STUDY**

Major: Education
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CHAPTER 1
Introduction to the Study

In an era of school change, much literature has been committed to issues embedded in the school reform movement and its inherently political nature. In an effort to prepare citizens for a future of constant change and the knowledge explosion of the information age, school reform efforts center on issues of developing students who can think critically, communicate effectively, work cooperatively, and participate actively in our democratic society now and in the fast-paced world of the future. Schools need to ensure citizens that can live in a more complex society as productive, law-abiding and socially-responsible members (Sarason & Davis in Fullan, 1982). Wilson (1994) focuses on the crisis of education which is "costing us the American dream" (p1) and resulting in inadequate skills of U.S. workers which drain billions from the Gross National Product. He continues to state that graduates can no longer sustain a middle-class income in an economy "based in knowledge, driven by information and defined by change" (p2). These inadequacies are asserted to be rooted in our nation's outmoded school system, which needs to change to focus on education as a lifelong process where students learn to manipulate information, solve problems, imagine, and create.

Fullan defines reform as a movement to "help schools accomplish their goals more effectively by replacing some structures, programs and/or practices with better ones"
Such structural changes are viewed as necessary for schools to educate students not only in academic and cognitive areas, but also in the individual and social skills necessary to function in a society defined by rapid change. Educational reform discourse mirrors the language and concepts of business reform, centering on issues of systemic change, empowerment of workers, and a focus on performance and outcomes, with a caution that innovations are not ends in themselves, but a means to obtain clearly articulated outcomes or performances (Fullan, 1982). But have the innovations themselves become the ends to school improvement?

Research on the educational change process tends to focus on structural concepts such as time, evaluation, curriculum, and power structures, which are manipulated and restructured, through processes such as TQE or total quality education, shared decision making, performance and proficiency-based curriculums. The list of innovations springing up across the country are too numerous to address at length, and are not the focus of this study of school change. This study instead focuses on what is commonly a missing link in these studies, the often overlooked crux of the entire school change movement, the student. Change efforts, no matter how radical, or how small will have little impact on learning if they do not impact students in significant and sustained ways. This focus looks at the nature of pedagogy and whether the roles and relationships upon which it is founded are changed. New labels, new curricula, new facilities and technologies, new time structures, new "schools" may not matter if there is little or no impact at the most intimate level of learning by students, the level of teachers and students creating relationships, meaning, and understanding together. As Fullan (1982) states, we need to
understand and realize the difference between change and progress in education; the fundamental question being, does educational change make things better? Not discounting changes which enable and improve the lives of teachers in the classroom, ultimately, the question is does it make things better for the student?

School reform movements that focus on the student have been around and around again in the cycle of school change, sometimes heralded as transformative (Jackson, 1968) and capable of producing the kinds of students needed to deal with change and ever changing our society. At other times they have been viewed with disdain as "soft pedagogy" (Katz, 1968) or "tender minded" (Jackson, 1986). Various forms of progressive education have claimed to be student centered (Cuban, 1984; Goodlad, 1984) and indeed the shift in focus in curricula, environment, and instruction seemed more cognizant of developmental psychology and meeting student academic, social and emotional needs. But how were decisions made to focus change in this direction? Did students have a voice in the change process? As "beneficiaries" of change did anyone ask them how they were affected by these changes? Were they part of the documentation and evaluation process?

Several forms of pedagogy such as engaged pedagogy (hooks, 1994) include students as an integral part of the learning decision-making process, encouraging student voice, perception and impact on learning to be experienced at the ‘deepest’ level of pedagogy and meaning making, the level at which learning affects student’s lives and understandings as people, not only within the classroom, but beyond it. On the whole, current school change discourse and implementation do not center on student involvement
in this deeply committed and embedded manner. Students are still viewed as passive, or not as major participants, in the decision making process, even when they are espoused to be at the center of decisions and active in the learning process. The deep role structures, language, discourse and relationships that constitute the constructed nature of teaching and learning, of pedagogy and their underlying belief structures, are often left unexplored as potential problems, and untapped as powerful resources.

Statement of the problem

As school improvement efforts continue to be implemented in schools throughout the nation, the focus on the students' perspectives on and role in such change processes has been largely neglected (Corbett & Wilson, 1995). Change, as it affects student learning, is typically evaluated through means such as test scores, work samples and other site embedded documentation processes, but little work has been done to explore and foster the student voice which is under represented in the school reform movement. Students are thought of as the beneficiary of the innovation (Fullan, 1991) but little work has been done to determine whether and how they benefit from such initiatives. In the midst of school reform, what is significant and meaningful to students as learners in the educational process?

Educational reform movements are well underway in pockets throughout the nation's schools. In order to broaden the definition of effectiveness of school reform, it is necessary to listen to student voices and perspectives on school reform, to determine if and how change impacts them as individuals and ultimately their learning. Little attention has been given to student perspectives on school reform (Fullan, 1991) and according to
Sizer (1992), student metacognition of learning, especially in restructured learning environments is virtually non-existent. School structures may be altered to varying degrees but motivation to learn and to take full advantage of these changes largely rests within the student (Glasser, 1986). How have school change initiatives affected student roles and relationships with teachers and other students and most fundamentally their disposition and ability to learn? How has the nature of teaching and learning been altered and improved from a student perspective? These are the major concerns of this study.

**Purpose**

The primary purpose of the study was to discover, from students' perspectives, the impact of specific school reform efforts on their roles and lives as learners in a "reformed learning environment." How did various innovations affect the nature of teaching and learning from students' points of view? Once these data were gathered and analyzed, the scope of the study broadened to include an examination of how the professional development and initial preparation of teachers may be informed by the student perspective on school change. This is addressed within the chapter five. A second purpose of the study was the exploration of what it is like to work collaboratively with middle grade students in the research process.

**Research questions**

This study ultimately focused on the "re-construction" of learning that might or might not result from student and teacher involvement in a school reform initiative. Data were gathered and analyzed from a critical sociocultural perspective focusing on aspects of role and discourse as social interaction between students and teachers in the classroom,
and the cultural power structures which undergird them. The concept of re-construction of the nature of learning within the classroom is grounded in constructivist theory. The study involved participatory research with a group of twelve seventh grade students who had been students in the "Collaborative Education" team in a suburban Middle School, a program which emphasized current trends in school improvement. The study focused on unearthing the underlying assumptions which guided pedagogical decisions and learning throughout the students' lives in schools in contrast to recording their experiences, as sixth graders, in this "reformed learning environment". The focus of our collaborative work was developing an understanding of what represented significant and positive changes from the students' point of view. If school improvement is to be maintained, what kinds of changes matter to students? What kinds of changes help them to be successful as learners and as people? This focus originated from the student participants in a pilot study, as their responses in initial interviews to the broad question of "What is learning?" led to discussions focused on intrinsic and extrinsic motivation, relationships, roles, power, and dialogue in the classroom as being central to learning in this "new environment". The specific research questions are as follows:

1. What matters most to students in school and school reform:
   How do school reform efforts influence the nature of learning for students?
   What changes do students report as most affecting and benefitting them as learners?

2. What can be learned about collaborative research with middle grade students?

Overview of the study

In this study I worked closely with twelve seventh grade students whom I had taught as part of a sixth grade team the previous year. Thus, we had already established a
working relationship as teacher and students in an educational setting committed to school improvement, the Collaborative Education Team at Ashton Middle School. The program was then in its fourth year of implementation and much work had been done to document its successes and needed improvements over the years. Students were always an informal part of this documentation process, and formally surveyed and interviewed as well. However, the questions for this documentation process were always determined by the teachers on the team and framed by their theoretical and practical constructs to examine what they determined as central to the Collaborative Education team. This documentation focused on concepts being utilized such as integration of curriculum, alternative assessment, student-driven curriculum, and parental involvement in the learning process. Questions which focused on student learning and motivation were also part of the mix, but they had not been studied in an in depth manner, especially from the students' point of view. When learning was the focus of the documentation process for the team, the talk still centered on what the teachers deemed important and the student responses to those questions. But was this really what the students considered important and meaningful?

As I began to talk with my students about my upcoming doctoral dissertation, the students began to suggest what I might study, why and even how. They further suggested that they could help me, since they were the ones who had been living our program for nearly a year. They believed that people outside of our team still didn't understand what we were doing and how much they were learning and changing and how much they as
students knew about teaching and learning and how school "should be". Thus we began our initial conversations and pilot study focusing on what they wanted to say about school change, what they knew and what mattered to them.

I made a commitment to working with the students rather than doing research "on" them. I wanted them to determine the focus of the study and to take part in data analysis, conceptualizing our "findings" and even in the construction of the text of this thesis. We talked about how different this would be for all of us, how we weren't sure what would or wouldn't work, and that we would be learning just as much about working together as researchers as we would school reform.

Methodology

The study involved group and individual interviews to gain knowledge of the students' experiences and understandings related to learning before, during, and after their involvement on the Collaborative Education team. Student participation was built into each phase of the research, from directing the focus of the study, to data collection, analysis, and representation of our findings. The interactive nature of the study served a way to continually provide member checks and allowed for changes to be made as students responded and added to the data throughout the process as themes, concepts and trends emerged. We learned to think and work together in our new roles as co-researchers, as well as learning even more about school reform and what really mattered in these student's lives as learners.
Significance of the study

The study provides an in depth look into educational reform efforts from a student perspective, a perspective which seems to be highly under represented in the literature on school change (Corbett & Wilson, 1995; Fullan, 1982). An examination of the underlying assumptions about school and school reform and how this impacts learning from a student standpoint could inform further implementation of educational innovations and the professional development and preparation of teachers who work with students in environments focused on school reform. As a focus on school reform continues to be pervasive in schools, colleges of education and political arenas, the discourse about change could also be expanded to include students as another participant in the change process, adding their knowledge of teaching and learning and their first hand experiences of school reform as learners, in order to achieve a more inclusive and informed approach to school change. If students are the center of schools and learning, this study allows them to be at the center of thinking and decision making related to school reform.

Context of the study

This study is uniquely situated in a context of specific school changes and influenced by the relationship between myself and the students with whom I worked, my own students from the previous school year. The findings are directly influenced by our relationships on the Collaborative Education teaching team. The findings are not intended to be generalized to all schools, all innovations, all students and all aspects of the change process; this study tells the unique story of our experiences in school and with
school reform. However, insights may be gained which may inform others engaged in school reform, as they are invited to take a look at school improvement efforts from a perspective that is often neglected, that of the student.

Conclusion

The study which follows emphasized the development of student voice in learning and the school reform process in two ways, first by focusing on their perspectives and understandings of what matters to them as students and individuals in their daily lives as learners. The second means was through engaging students in the process of research as active participants who guided and impacted every aspect of the study in varying ways and capacities. What may be learned from the students in this study might provide a place to begin thinking about taking more seriously the need to include students in our research and school improvement aims.
CHAPTER 2

Literature Review

Introduction

The nature of this study focuses on student perspectives and perhaps more centrally on the development of student voice in the area of school reform research. These student perspectives need to be reflected in all aspects of this study, if these aims are to be accomplished. To accomplish this, the literature review is framed in an "openly ideological" (Lather, 1986b) stance and this introduction seeks to articulate frames of references that influence its orientation. A literature review may typically be thought of as a general overview of the work and findings related to the topic of the study, however, the mainstream literature does not significantly reflect the students' perspectives and issues raised by them in this study. Further, collaborative research with young students is atypical. Given these two factors, the student's voice would not be reflected in a traditional literature review, thus this review is structured in such a manner to more closely reflect the students' impact on this study as a whole.

This literature review is based in a social constructivist frame of reference which attempts, specifically in the second section, to decode the "social reality" of the stories the students in the study tell to make sense of their lives in the classroom:
"To examine the stories and myths in school is to probe its embedded values and visions of education, society, and the roles of individuals within these contexts. Repeated stories and myths help create and maintain the status quo of a given institution of society, and thus they also can help us identify the views and actions of dissident actors." (Goodman, 1992 p45)

The personal, social focus of the study, derived from the pilot and initial group interviews, moves reform thinking from a macro level, typically present in mainstream reform literature, to a micro one, the level of experience for students. To examine the students’ perspectives is by definition concerned with the social and personal nature of students’ experiences in school, their socially-constructed reality. An examination of perspective offers an exploration and potential understanding of:

"the complex relationship between people’s beliefs, ideas, and perceptions and the way these are then manifested through actions within a given social context. As a result, focusing on educational perspectives allows us to closely examine social reality at both a conceptual and material level." (Goodman, 1992 p47)

The literature review is organized to provide an opportunity to reflect the students’ perspectives, situated within a broader context of school reform and then to provide an alternative review based on student perspectives. Seemingly conflicting or perhaps at time dichotomous perspectives may reflect a gap between the focus of school reform literature now and the perspectives of the students for which this study seeks to provide a forum.

Section one of the review gives a brief overview of the mainstream literature on school reform. In this body of literature, students are referred to, but not actually “present”. There has been much research and development of new practice related to student-centered learning, in fact meeting the increasingly diverse needs of students and our society is the foundation for much of the current reform agenda. However, within this
discourse of student centeredness, students are typically regarded as the beneficiaries of
school reform, rather than as active participants in broadening the knowledge base of
school reform. Further, the issues reported in the pilot study and the initial group
interviews with the student participants were not widely reflected in this literature. This
led to the development of a second section of the review focusing on what the students
had to say was important to them, as they began to determine the focus of the study.

The second section of the study looks at the issues, concerns and concepts brought
forth by the students. What the students initially reported as being important in their
experiences of school reform tended to focus on social and personal issues, rather than on
the structural, methodological, and curricular ones. Their focus was on the people
involved in school change, at the classroom level. They focused on students: their role,
power, experiences, feelings, thoughts and how this affected learning because it affected
them as people. This was coupled with talk of barriers that needed changed, often
embodied from their perspective, in the teacher as she represented to them the one who
stood for and enforced the seemingly "set" rules of the school culture and classroom
learning environment.

This focus on the people in the classroom related to social and personal issues
which the students reported as highly affecting their learning, was not the focus of
mainstream reform work. However, bits and pieces, sections of chapters could be found
focusing on the student role in reform and decision making, or the lack of it. These
references are shared in the second section, providing an intentionally different focus and
reading of some mainstream reform literature, one which seeks to validate what the
students reported, as they were helping to determine the study's focus and questions. Another body of literature, in the second section, was found which corresponded with and supported the voices of the students. This body of literature consisted mainly of educational studies and research related to the social psychology of the school and the classroom. Literature dating back to the origins of the progressive education movement also focused on the issues and concepts raised by the students, as did some more recent educational works which focused specifically on issues of power, control and roles, such as Glasser's *Control Theory in the Classroom*. The intention of this second section of the literature review is to attempt to find where these students' voices may already have some space within the current literature and to begin to form a theoretical framework which supports their perspective. It is a section which represents their struggles and concerns and connects them with a body of literature that shares these concerns.

The last section of the study draws from literature related to alternatives embodied in radical pedagogies. There is a gap between the way students are situated in the mainstream literature and the sometimes barrier laden student perspective of the second body of literature in the review. This last section seeks to find a way to bring the two sections together to bridge the gap, tying the personal/social level of the classroom which the students focused on with the broader context and systemic and cultural issues of both school and society. Again a gap exists, as the work of liberatory and democratic pedagogy tends to focus on the education of older students. However, there is some literature which relates to these early adolescent students and this represents a place to
begin to make such work and thinking more central to their potential roles in school and school reform, to build this vision into the current focus of school reform. Here is where their voices may begin to more significantly enter the discourse of school reform.

Section One: Mainstream Literature

Learner-centered school improvement

Recent school reform efforts, as well as many of the past, may be termed "learner centered", as issues and concerns of students are predominate in their change discourse. Learner-centered school improvement efforts emphasize cooperation among students, rich learning projects, the development of a fuller understanding of the self and the question of the rewards and punishments built into the institution of schooling, shunning formulas for educational success and stressing the need to consider individual contexts and students (Gardner, 1991). Such learner centered discourse may be traced back to the Progressive Education movements of the fifties and sixties and even further back to the theories and philosophical stances of John Dewey. Calls for refocusing education on the child continue to be recycled. In current school improvement efforts such calls are again being taken up through the voices of advocates such as Gardner, Sizer, Comer, Glasser, Goodlad, Levin and others.

Themes across the learner-centered movement

Several themes can be found throughout school improvement literature, which focus on the learner as the foundation for educational change. These efforts call into question the ability of schools to meet the needs of the child, in light of the prevalent culture and structure of schooling. Further, structural and cultural constraints often
impede individuals who work within them from putting learner-centered philosophies into practice. Characteristics of a more learner-centered school include a focus on the student as an individual within a framework of collaboration and community, development of thinking and deep understanding in learners, and the realization of success for all students.

**Student as Individual: Styles, Rates, Intelligences, Responsibility and Voice**

Attention is given to the concept of student as individual throughout learner-centered reform movements, in contrast to a factory, efficiency, focused model of education. In the "factory" model students receive instruction primarily from large group, monological teacher-centered lessons in which students tend to be passive recipients of knowledge. They often engage in rote memorization or skill related drills, and transmit "the right" answers back to the teacher through limited assessment strategies, typically in the form of written tests. Learner-centered reform calls attention to the inability of such an approach to meet the diverse needs of all students. This efficiency-based model tends to focus on the "middle" ability range of the class as the basis of instructional decisions rather than addressing differences in individual learning styles, rates, and even in the nature of student intelligence. In the words of Goodlad (1966), dating back to earlier progressive movements, but still evoked today, schools have been, "shamefully remiss in taking these differences into account in our educational planning and teaching" (p248). Sizer (1992) articulates this viewpoint in current learner centered efforts stating, "People do not learn in precisely similar ways...people do not learn alike, and to run school on the basis of One Best Curriculum and One Best Pedagogy, and One Best Pace of Learning, and one Best Test and March the Kids Through by Their Chronological Ages, is itself
profoundly discriminatory" (Sizer, 1992 p32). Gardner's (1991) work on multiple intelligences continues to stress the individuality of learners, indicating that not only are there differences in learning rates, styles and preferences, but in the very nature and types of intelligences learners possess. He defines seven types of intelligences, only two of which are stressed and consistently rewarded by the system of schooling, namely linguistic and logical intelligences. Learners possessing strengths in the other five intelligences, such as spatial representation, musical thinking, or the understanding of self and others, are typically labeled as unsuccessful, or as failures in school. Gardner (1991) states:

"We do not take advantage of ways in which multiple intelligences can be exploited to further the goals of school and broader culture...(which) can develop a broader range of talents and can make the standard curriculum accessible to a wider range of students" (p81).

The need for the curriculum, pedagogy, and environment of schools to become more cognizant of and tailored to students as individuals is central to many school improvement efforts of today.

Further, learner-centered movements acknowledge that students are the source of intrinsic motivation to learn, emphasizing the need for education to provide students with satisfaction from learning itself, rather than placing emphasis on external rewards (Goodlad, 1966). Regardless of the teacher's efforts, the decision for the student to use his or her mind is entirely up to the student (Sizer, 1992). Deeply connected to this intrinsic nature of learning and motivation are the individual's needs to express his or her own ideas and connect these interests to learning (Glasser, 1986). Gardner (1991) connects the experiences, interests, and motivation of the child with the child's natural
ability and desire to learn, embodied in the intuitive phase of learning which all children bring with them into the school. Unfortunately, when they arrive there they often find a mismatch between their natural inclination toward learning and ways of knowing and the expectations of the world of school. In order to connect with the child's internal motivation, learning must be relevant, meaningful and connected to the student, and acknowledge that the primary responsibility for learning lies both with and within the student.

Acknowledgement of the student as central to learning and motivation to learn implies further responsibility for the learner in the process of schooling. The Accelerated Schools movement, a current learner-centered school improvement model, embraces a constructivist approach where students are viewed as responsible for their own learning (Keller, 1995). The concept of student voice and decision making goes hand in hand with this expanded notion of student responsibility. Learner centered movements advocate student decision making in areas such as determining school and classroom rules, curricular and instructional activities, and assessment through peer and self evaluation. Students work with the teacher and their peers to make and implement such decisions in the classroom, enabling young minds to be treated with the respect that they deserve (Gardner, 1991). Many educational improvement efforts focus on developing an, "education that takes seriously the ideas and intuitions of the young child (which is) far more likely to achieve success than education that ignores these views" (Gardner, 1991 p248).
Community: Within Classrooms and Connected to Schools

A corollary to the concept of student as individual is the connectedness of this individual to a broader sense of community. Students work in environments where collaboration with others mirrors the realities of the collaborative world of work and family outside of the schools' walls. The concept of student responsibility for learning is broadened to the concept of responsibility as a community of learners, where students appreciate each other's strengths and work to develop each other's deficits, often through an emphasis on group projects and exhibitions of learning. The traditional notion of competition for grades is replaced by cooperative efforts to work toward success for all students and the development of every child's potential.

The learning community extends beyond the members of the classroom and school, into the community at large. Communication with the community, including parents, social agencies, city government and business is increased through participation of students in the community, and the community within the school. Sizer (1992) states that good schools make sure that students are legitimately needed within and beyond the schools and sees community service as an integral part of learning in secondary schools. Such efforts lead to a sense of commitment and ownership of education on the part of the entire community, providing a range of advocates and a support network to help schools meet the needs of both individual learners and the community as a whole.
The Goals of Education: Thinking, Understanding, and Learning to Learn

Learner-centered school improvement efforts consistently espouse that the aim of education is to teach young people to learn (Goodlad, 1966). A focus on developing deeper understanding, as opposed to content coverage and fact memorization is found in Ted Sizer's (1992) concept of "less is more" and his focus on the notion that "a wise school's goal is to get students into good intellectual habits" (p73) such as analysis, imagination and communication. It is necessary to challenge traditional notions of schooling that implicitly assume that "thinking is less valuable than memory for success" (Glasser, 1969 p29). Glasser's more recent work (Control Theory in the Classroom, 1986) like his work of the late sixties, continues to emphasize problem solving and inquiry as central to the educational process. There needs to be a shift to the notion of education for understanding, to close the gap between what now passes for understanding in the school, such as students continuing to answer preset kinds of problems, master lists of terms, and memorize and feed back definitions upon request, and what genuinely is understanding (Gardner, 1991). In a world characterized by the explosion of knowledge and the presentation of new problems based upon this knowledge, a new approach emphasizing thinking, and developing understanding as life-long learners, takes on even more importance. The limits of a basic skills approach is that students become literate in a literal sense, as efforts to cover curriculum with this mimetic goal, undermines more crucial thinking related goals (Gardner, 1991). Gardner exemplifies this as he considers the effects of a back to basics, phonetic approach to reading. He states that what is missing in literacy today is not decoding skills, but the capacity to read for understanding,
and the desire to read at all (Gardner, 1991). Learner-centered educational improvement focuses on this lack of deep understanding and joy of learning as major areas in need of change in the schools.

Relevance of Learning

To capitalize on the intrinsic nature of learning, and to assure that deep understanding and thinking are developed, the school experience must be viewed as relevant and useful by the student. One predictable feature of schools world wide is the "extreme disassociation" of the events in school from events in the broader context of the community and world, and the reliance on primarily decontextualized measures of learning in the form of testing (Gardner, 1991). Even the language of schooling is qualitatively different from the talk of students and adults outside of school, exacerbating its remoteness (Gardner, 1991). In school students learn to participate in and hopefully be successful with school activities. In essence, students go to school and learn to successfully "do school". Efforts, such as Hirsch's work on cultural literacy, attempt to connect schools with the broader culture. Unfortunately "quick fix" and oversimplified approaches to Hirsch's "list" of what he believes constitutes literacy, neglect the reasons why such concepts are important to society and the learner. Further the rationale for wishing to attain such knowledge and the provisions of occasions to build upon it are typically lacking (Gardner, 1991). The relevance of such learning to the world beyond school walls or the student's world remains in question in the eyes of the learner-centered movement.
The traditional notion of presenting decontextualized information with little "hands on" student involvement and application falls short of meeting learner centered goals as "no one learns solely from exposure" (Sizer, 1992 p87). Relevance of learning to the world outside of school and real lives of students increases student motivation to learn; students "especially go along when they can see that such a journey will affect their own lives in some purposeful or intriguing way" (Sizer, 1992 p88). When relevance is absent from school there is little or no motivation, thus schools need to give students opportunities to think about problems of their own world, and the whole world, along with others, (Glasser, 1969) to make learning more meaningful and connected. Schools often fail to ask learners to connect new experiences with prior learning (Gardner, 1991) to develop deeper understanding and provide opportunities for application in various situations and contexts. To impact understanding and increase motivation, learning must be relevant and connected to the learner himself and his previous understandings and experiences as well as the world around him and his future.

**Success Breeds Success, for All Learners**

Child-centered school improvement efforts focus on the experience of success as the key to success for all students. Schools are not typically structured to provide and promote success of all students in attaining high educational standards. The assessment system, focusing on standard letter grades which indicate the level of a student's failure to attain the standard, is one indicator of a system which expects at least some students to fail. Few children come to school with the notion that they are a failure; it is the school which is often the first place that such labels are pinned to children, labels which may
follow them throughout their entire school career (Glasser, 1969). Providing opportunities for all students to attain high standards and undergirding them with school structures and practices is central to the success of learner-centered school reform. An example may be found in Levin's Accelerated Schools which provide all children with educational experiences usually reserved for students who are regarded as gifted and talented (Keller, 1995). Typically we as educators tend to underestimate what students, even those who are very young, are capable of socially, cognitively, and intellectually. "Unless we can provide schools where children, through a reasonable use of their capacities, can experience success, we will do little to solve the major problems of our country" (Glasser, 1969). Creating such a school implies major shifts in current practices and the educational philosophies which undergird them, shifts which embody the inherent risks of change.

**Taking Risks to Ensure Successful Learners**

To engage in meaningful learning leading to the successful attainment of high standards, students must work in an atmosphere which promotes taking the necessary risks of meeting challenging goals. Reduction of student anxiety (Goodlad, 1966) through restructuring incentives, rewards, and punishments, and providing students opportunities to develop "the confidence to grasp the new" (Sizer, 1992) are part of designing an atmosphere which supports student risk taking, where students assume "risks for understanding" (Gardner, 1991). In the competitive, "right answer" paradigm, students and teachers may avoid risking failures that might make them both look bad (Gardner, 1991). Venturing into uncharted waters, into new role definitions, experiences and
expectations is risky business, especially as it runs counter to norms and practices firmly embedded in the structure and culture of school. To ensure growth, change, and improvement, one must address the risk that such endeavors require. Gardner (1991) writes:

"Neither teachers nor students are willing to undertake risks for understanding. Instead they content themselves with safer 'correct answer' compromises, both teachers and students consider education to be a success if students are able to provide answers that have been sanctioned as correct... the compromise is not a happy one for genuine understandings cannot come about so long as one accepts ritualized, rote, or conventionalized performances" (p150).

Learner centered schools seek to develop school cultures and learning environments that support both students and teachers in taking risks to reach new summits of learning.

**Assessment and Risk**

Risk taking demands trust and trust demands an environment which supports relationships based on mutual understanding and acceptance of the individuals involved. This is not an atmosphere free of rules, boundaries and evaluation, but one that develops these concepts collaboratively, to be mutually beneficial to students and teachers. In order to attain high standards, to demonstrate continuous growth and improvement in learners, there must be evaluative feedback and continuous goal setting. The use of standardized tests and letter grades as the primary means of assessment may serve as a hindrance to risk taking and developing understanding. Grades in a sense have become "moral equivalents" correlating with "good" and "bad" behaviors in the classroom, limiting the chances of students speaking openly, thoughtfully and critically (Glasser, 1969). Coupled with and often based on objective tests, they "discourage research, thoughtful reading, and
listening to anything but fact" (Glasser, 1969 p70), as children learn to look for the italics, emphasizing the words over their deeper meaning. Sizer (1992) speaks of "the myopic belief that mass testing is the only way to achieve accountability and thus higher standards" as dangerous, as it "clouds our thinking about those high standards themselves" (p112). He continues to argue against the use of testing to further the aims of educational improvement and the beliefs of national policy makers that the comparison of schools will cause those not measuring up to be "humiliated" into reform with threats of being taken over by higher authorities. He calls instead for a loose system of accountability and assessment that has rigor (Sizer, 1992).

Learner-centered school improvement efforts offer a range of such alternative assessment strategies which are espoused to be more authentically representative of student learning and embedded in the process of learning. Such embeddedness may support an environment which nurtures risk taking. These approaches range from Goodlad's anti-norm based standards which promote continuous progress through a non-graded approach to schools, to Sizer's "exhibitions" of "meaningful performances". Assessment should focus on understanding, rather than serving as performances of knowledge (Gardner, 1991). These "performances of understanding" should be inherent to the learning process and context, as opposed to the normative approach which utilizes decontextualized measures in a setting that is itself decontextualized from the rest of the community and world (Gardner, 1991). Meaningful projects, contextualized, public demonstrations of student learning, with clearly articulated standards focused on application and understanding may be embedded in the learning process. Portfolio
assessment, exhibiting growth over time, may be coupled with evaluation by peers and students themselves as well as teachers. Second-chance learning and alternative approaches to letter grades and report cards, are also elements of a more learner-centered approach to assessment. Such approaches seek to increase the likelihood of student risk taking and thus the goal of successful attainment of high standards. They are also part of the learning process and inform further instructional decisions on the part of students and teachers. Utilizing assessment as a means of education, rather than the ends may help schools to become a place of promise and success for all students.

All of the themes prevalent in the current student-centered reform discourse can be linked to a greater notion of education as liberating, enabling students to truly take part in a democracy, to have voice, to make decisions and to have power within the classroom. Such concepts begin within the school and are linked to the student as participants in our democratic society. An emphasis on a pedagogy which enables all students to successfully learn, to inquire and participate, through ownership and voice in the educational process is directly connected to concepts of democracy our society embraces.

Traditionally, schools have been places where students may have learned of democracy, its procedures, history, and ideology, but typically they have not been places where students engage in democracy itself. Students have been unequal partners in the process of decision making in schools and have had little voice in the process of learning (Jackson, 1968). Their lack of voice in the school improvement process is equally evident (Corbett & Wilson, 1995). New approaches to learning with students at the center of educational decisions, as active members with voice and power, liberate students from
their traditionally passive role in these processes. As students continue to develop critical thinking skills and deep understanding, they will continue to take and perhaps even demand a broader role not only within schools but within their communities and homes. Teaching and learning become processes of inquiry, fostering the concept of democracy as students probe into and take action in issues related to their own education and in their own school (Glasser, 1969). This participation of students in such a democratic education may cause concern for some.

"Americans do not see the schools as engines of both information and intellectual liberation. Indeed, they find the latter-especially when so described-to be intolerable. The schools, they insist, are to teach what is true, what is right and what is wrong. Anything beyond that is anathema" (Sizer, 1992 p127).

But issues arise related to the definition of right and wrong. Whose truth? If students are taught to think, make decisions, and take action, they will grow up to think, make decisions, and take actions as adults. Perhaps they will not so easily be swayed by the rhetoric of politics, the drama of the media, and the promises of commercial materialism. With such an approach, schools become places of debate over control, values, beliefs and morals. Such issues have no clear cut answers, no quick solutions. There are no black and white answers in a world of grays. These problems and their potential answers are not tied up in neat and tidy packages or text books; they are messy.

"The changes will be messy. Democracy is messy. Those who want an orderly solution toy with democracy...those who assert that "the people" can never be trusted with setting standards sing an arrogant, dangerous tune" (Sizer, 1992 p176).
A learner-centered approach to school improvement accepts and defines students as "the people", primary to education and learning itself. Are schools willing and equipped to do the messy work of democratic education that such an approach advocates?

Section Two: The Student Perspective

Where is the student's perspective in school change?

There is a definite lack of emphasis on the student in current work on school reform, with students' voices occupying at best a minuscule part of the literature, despite repeated calls for reform aimed at students (Corbett & Wilson, 1995). Somewhere the student's perspective is lost among structural analysis, systemic reform, and the necessary focus on teachers, administrators, parents and community in school change. This is ironic, considering "that student role redefinition is a critical linchpin between adult reform behavior and student success" (Corbett & Wilson, 1995 pl2). As educators, we tend to focus on our own perspective of school change, how will such changes impact us and our daily lives as teachers? "A switch to the pupil's perspective will prove to be very difficult since it is our natural tendency to look at problems .... on the basis of teacher assumptions" (Hargreaves, 1972 p 175).

In The New Meaning of Educational Change Fullan (1982) states that adults, "rarely think of students as participants in a process of change and organizational life" (p170) but rather as the recipients of the benefits of change. He adds a concern that there is " minimal research from the student's point view" (p170). This lack of focus on the student in current reform literature and research seems to suggest a passive, compliant view of the student in the education process. Students are typically viewed as the
recipients of the benefits of school reform, not partners in the process.

The notion that students are partners in creating knowledge, the context of learning, and directly defining the effectiveness of any instructional efforts is may be a much overlooked asset to improved learning and educational reform. Sarason (1991) states that issues of power and conformity in schools are a legitimate barriers to sustained school improvement. As part of the function of schooling is to prepare students to deal with the tough world of work, to listen, follow instructions, meet deadlines and produce, the need to conform has been one aspect of schooling throughout history. But if the new world order calls for citizens who can independently make decisions within the context of continuous change, solve problems and deal with knowledge that does not yet exist, how can a largely passive concept of the student’s role and voice in school and reform fit the philosophies and promises of school reform? Nieto (1994) suggests, "One way to begin the process of changing school policies and practices is to listen to student views about them ... student perspectives are for the most part missing in discussions concerning strategies for confronting educational problems" (p396). We must begin to listen more to the student voice in school and in educational reform efforts.

A problem may be the language of school change, as we speak of renewal, reform, restructuring and even reculturing we may be in reality still working on redoing what is already there, moving concepts around, switching some roles, shifting existing notions of power. There is discussion about the problems with current structures forms, and cultures of the educational system loosely tied to some notion of deconstructing the system. Some reformers believe in essence, we are working to fix a building whose
foundation is crumbling (Wilson, 1994). More recently there has been a call in school change literature to focus on these broad issues, to systemically redesign schools and provide a means for dissemination of this knowledge to all schools (Wilson, 1994), to move beyond the small picture, the subjective meanings of individuals, and to begin to realize the difference between how people experience change as compared to its intentions (Fullan, 1991).

In addition to this broad systemic perspective of the change process, the focus on a system of educational redesign, there must be a focus on the level at which the entire impact of school change efforts largely rests, the personal level of education. The interactional level of students and teachers in the classroom and whether or not reform changes the daily life of the student as learners, remains a vital aspect for in depth investigation. As Fullan (1991) states, what is being experienced by students, as opposed to what we intended change to accomplish with, for and by students must be examined. The systemic level, the big picture, must be addressed, but let us not assume change is impacting people in schools at a subjective personal level. Further, can this level be neglected if we acknowledge that experience, especially the social interactive experiences of learning, is subjective and personal? Fullan speaks of issues of false clarity, of the belief that change has occurred in the daily subjective reality of teachers, while it may in fact be only superficial change. He states that there may in actuality be no change in the “objective reality” in the social phenomena of school which exists outside of the individual. A social-constructivist orientation to education would question the concept of “objective reality”. Learning from this perspective, and the perspective of the students in
this study, is necessarily a subjective, socially created act, which takes on meaning and life through the discourse, interactions and understandings of the people involved, particularly the students and teachers. If learning does not subjectively impact the student, then has learning occurred?

An over emphasis on the "objective", a focus solely on the tools of instruction: time, curriculum, governance, those which seem to live outside of the individuals who live classroom life daily, may be problematic. The notion that such constructs take on meaning independent of those who enact them may lead to change which has no or little impact on the lives and perhaps learning of people in classrooms. Structures may change, but the people who give them meaning and life may not. How much substantive change can occur if the people involved continue to behave and act in the same ways in school?

The political and organizational nature of reform, the big picture, is well documented throughout reform literature. So must the inherently political, social, subjective nature of the small picture, as one cannot experience and sustain real change without the other. Wilson (1994) warns of a fallacy of school reform, the belief that it begins in the classroom. He calls for wide-spread research and redesign based change to impact schools throughout the nation. Just as surely as change cannot effectively and efficiently begin classroom by classroom, it must eventually have impact in each classroom and upon all students, if it has been worth all of the time talk and effort it usurps. One way to know if change is making a difference in the learning process is to listen to and work the student. Fullan (1991) states:
"Educational change above all is a people-related phenomena. Students, even little ones, are people too. Unless they have some role (to them) in the enterprise, most educational change, indeed most education, will fail ... What would happen if we treated the student as someone whose opinion mattered in the introduction and implementation of reform in schools?" (p 170).

It is time to bring the student to the center of school change.

**Students as Marginalized**

As previously stated, it may not be surprising that the student perspective is overlooked in the current swell of school change initiatives, for they are not only marginalized here, but in the entire decision-making structure of school and society itself.

As educators we may espouse and believe that our work is centered on the student. Many of us enter the profession hoping to help children, to make a difference in their lives, but we often get caught up in our own role as teacher and the institutional expectations of our role. This can marginalize the student perspective of and role in the learning process.

Thorne (1993) writes of the need to break away from adult assumptions that children's thoughts and concerns are sometimes trivial, if we are to work with them as part of the process of discovery and change. We must learn to put our own experiences and interpretations as adults to the side to attempt to understand where children are coming from. Hargreaves (1972) states that it is an interesting paradox that as soon as we become teachers, we tend to become so involved in teacher concerns that we forget what we felt and thought as students. We become distanced from the student perspective by time, role, the daily demands and constraints of life in schools.

Glasser (1986) speaks to the student perspective of their role and importance in the world of school. When he engaged in dialogue with students regarding how they
viewed themselves in school, simply asking them when they felt important in school, many students were dumbfounded. They did not seem able to imagine, let alone articulate how school made them feel important. Those that did respond tended to focus on friends and issues of popularity, finding nothing or little in the structure and activity of school that made them central to the experience, that made them feel important. Fullan’s (1991) work with students revealed that a minority of students think that teachers understand their point of view, with less than one fifth reporting that teachers ask for their ideas and opinions, and seventy percent of the responses indicative of the “alienation theme”. The marginalized nature of students in schools may be reflective of their marginalization in society. Schools are viewed by some as a means to keep kids busy and out of trouble in a troubling world, as day care with a twist. Schools serve the needs of current family structures, with two parents working, or single mothers struggling to make ends meet. Media images fuel the notion that the youth of today have run wild; gangs, drugs, teen pregnancy and youth crimes flourish. Schools need to contain and control these problems, and teach kids how to become productive members of society, before generation X takes on decision-making power in our society. They must learn to conform to the greater will of society while they are still relatively voiceless. All the while the connection of voicelessness to rebellion, frustration, anger and defiance is overlooked. Youth have few institutionalized means to access voice, as a collective or as individuals. They have limited opportunities to make positive contributions to society, to make decisions with positive impact, to be treated as people rather than children. Crime, gangs, pregnancy, all offer the kind of decision-making power institutions lack, especially the institution of school.
Students and the Institution of School

Phillip Jackson's book, *Life in Schools*, first published in 1968, illuminates the many institutional aspects of school and their impact on the daily lives of students and teachers. Many of these aspects still hold true today, even in the midst of educational reform. Despite the promise of many effective educational initiatives, as cited in section one of this literature review, the pillars of the educational structure may still remain firm and intact, in spite of the interior decorating and additions being made in the name of substantive change. Implicit to engaging in an examination of student perspectives on change is the student reaction to the standardized institutional nature of schooling, which is pervasive from school to school. "Schools provide a fairly constant social context standardized environments, and a bringing together of large numbers of people for extended periods of time who are required to engage in a social intimacy whose consistency is maintained through the ritualistic and cyclic quality of activities" (Jackson, 1968 p8) which they engage in on a daily basis. Jackson continues to state that the institutionalized social relations in schools "remain much the same day to day, week to week, and even in certain respects, year to year " (p 9). Even though schools may be changing different aspects of evaluation, time, schedule, grouping, and role definitions for teachers and administrators in this time of school reform, the nature of the social interaction between teachers and students in the schools and the way they jointly define learning, remains more or less constant in many ways.

The basic institutional requirements that schools have of teachers and students still remain firm and yet to be deconstructed, and the implicit values within these
institutional foundations, often unquestioned in the form of pedagogical practice. Time to reflect upon and engage in collegial dialogue to address and focus on such institutional requirements is limited if existent in the lives of many teachers. Students, as well as teachers, learn to deal with the institutional aspects of school, but with a distinct disadvantage in access to power and decision making which remains intact in the hands of the adults in schools. Efforts to include students in curricular, instructional, and evaluative procedures begin to address this issue of institutional power imbalance, but the foundational expectations of student compliance and teacher authority in schools and the behaviors these require of students and the role they in turn are permitted to play, lie at a deeper level of school change, one that is rarely the focus of school improvement efforts.

As a consequence, students find ways to adapt to life in the institution of school. Social psychologists have focused on how students adapt to survive as individuals in this standardized institution, especially in light of its required attendance by law, a quality some liken to the institution of prison. The student is forced to “develop strategies for dealing with the conflict that frequently arises between his natural desires and interests on one hand and institutional expectations on the other” (Jackson, 1968). The public evaluation, reduced intimacy, and crowded nature of schools teach children that they must wait, be patient, act in ways to gain public praise and avoid punishment, to cloak behaviors that are undesirable, to play the game of school to meet institutional expectations, in essence, to be a “good” student.
Glasser (1986) transposes the institutional qualities expectations of school with the learner's attempts to satisfy his or her own needs as a person and states that discipline problems, nonconformity with institutional expectations, arise because the structure of school does not allow the learner's needs to be met. He continues to state that school change should focus on developing a more satisfying school for students, caring places which outweigh individual expectations and needs over institutional ones. Meadows (1994) also focuses on the need for schools and teachers to consider student needs as primary to their actions. Teachers tend to focus on managing student behavior, typically without asking what such behaviors might suggest about a child's needs (Meadows, 1994). Hargreaves (1972) writes of the prescriptive and limiting nature of student behavioral expectations, which may be derived from their role position as student, rather than a focus on individual needs and differences.

Often the institutional demands of students run counter to what may be deemed as scholarly, to the nature of questioning, thinking divergently, responding creatively and making one's own decisions (Goodlad, 1984; Glasser, 1986; Gardner, 1991). Teachers may work to develop these qualities, counter to many of the expectational norms of school, yet barriers within the structure of school may impede their progress in doing so. Institutional conformity often comes into such conflict with the demands of scholarship (Jackson, 1968). Further, Jackson indicates a direct relationship between the failure of students to meet institutional expectations and academic failure.

All students negotiate the institutional expectations of schools and choose to cope with them through compliance, resistance, apathy, pleasure, relief... bell hooks (1994)
writes of her own struggles as a student dealing with institutional expectations writing, “I wanted to become a critical thinker. Yet that longing was often seen as a direct threat to authority... Non-conformity on our part was viewed with suspicion, an empty gesture of defiance aimed at masking substandard work.” The student “learns to subjugate his own desires to the will of the teacher and to subdue his own actions...to be passive... to acquiesce to the network of rules, regulations, and routines..to tolerate petty frustrations..accept the plans and policies of higher authorities ....to shrug and say ‘that’s the way the ball bounces’” (Jackson, 1968 p36). School reform movements speak to issues of student role, specifically in the form of concepts of student as worker, student-centered curriculum, and shared decision making, (Beane, 1990; Fullan, 1991; Sizer, 1992; Spady, 1994), but whether or not such strategies impact the student perception of and response to the institution of schooling, whether or not this is viewed as a relevant part of school change in the eyes of the students needs to be further explored if school reform is to impact the daily lives of kids in schools.

**Student Voice and Power**

Embedded in the institutional nature of school lies a deeper issue of power, an issue that must be directly addressed and changed if school reform is to have sustained impact on the student, and consequently on student learning. Seymore Sarason (1991) addresses the relevance of power in school change movements, as the often missing link to sustain attempts at restructuring the school. He states, "for the large majority of students... the declared aims of schooling are empty rhetoric that bares little relationship to their social experience...the failure of educational reform derives from a superficial
conception of how complicated settings are organized. Their structure their dynamics, their power relationships ... as long as we avoid confronting their existing power relationships ... (which is) precisely what educational reformers have done, the more things change, the more they will remain the same" (p4&5). Power has a direct link to the ways individuals behave and react to change, and students are no exception. They have long been accustomed to the institutionalized, inequitable, and mandated concept of power in schools and, "like prison inmates or hospital patients, students develop creative ways of coping with their relative lack of power" (Thorne, 1993 p21). Unfortunately these creative ways often run counter to goals of learning, and especially goals espoused in school reform movements, such as critical thinking and increased student motivation and active participation, as students learn to focus on "doing school" rather than on thinking. Books are opened in front of faces with words unread, the silence of daydreaming is equated with concentration, the scribbling of notes to friends passes for a composition at a distance; the goal is to complete the assignment, rather than to question why. Such behavior may be read as learning, as positive by the teacher as it poses little threat to issues of management, so often the focus in classrooms where one adult is left to be "in charge", playing the role of disciplinarian implicit to the teacher role.

Teachers need to feel that they are in control, and formality is the means to keep this control, through distance. Teachers must not allow students to get close enough to risk the loss of respect, thus student talk is kept highly task related (Hargreaves, 1972). This results in reduced intimacy, a strained and at times artificial relationship between students and teacher, which allows the ritual of doing school to replace genuine human
interaction, dialogue and generation of knowledge, all for the sake of order. Unequal power between the student and the teacher, the relatively short duration of contact with teachers, and the control-oriented nature of the classroom limits the child's sense of intimacy. The child moves from the potentially intimate relationship with adults in the home during preschool years, to a more official relationship of reduced intimacy with the teacher in school, based on the narrow definition of the student/teacher relationship in the classroom (Jackson, 1968). Students find themselves sharing the teacher's time and attention with thirty other children, where much of the interaction is based on maintaining order, waiting turns, compromising, and accomplishing tasks. Teachers necessarily act in a prescriptive nature with children, asking children to follow the teacher’s rules, expectations and wishes and to abandon their own; it is expected that the child will adapt to the teacher's authority (Jackson, 1968). From early on in school children find that they must "take orders from adults who don’t know them very well" and find that there are “personal consequences ... wielded by a relative stranger” that will be dispensed based on their compliance or lack of such (Jackson, 1968 p29). More contemporary views on schooling, such as those of current reform, must add into these social dynamics elements which may further impede the teacher from establishing intimate relationships with students such as issues of crime, poverty, violence and abuse within and outside of the school. Ironically, these factors which reduce intimacy seem to demand and require it all the more if issues of learning are to be addressed.
**Who Defines the Situation**

Yearly, even daily, students and teachers come together to define the learning situation, to define what constitutes learning, but under circumstances which promote, "great inequity of the two participants in the process of defining the situation" (Hargreaves 1972, p139). The teacher holds more power and maintains this power through discipline. Of course there are variations of the inherent theme of teacher as disciplinarian across individual teachers and classrooms, ranging along a continuum. At one end is a dominative approach, where the teacher knows best and there is pressure to conform to rules and expectations. Order is maintained primarily through the use of threats and blame. At the other end is a more integrated approach where order is maintained through teacher requests for compliance and rewards. With this approach there is a collaborative discourse of students and teacher working together to establish and maintain control of the classroom (Jackson, 1968). Such collaborative management is a concept espoused in progressive notions of current reform such as in democratic student-centered classrooms. But still the means of classroom control are largely determined by the teacher. When children move from teacher to teacher, management style to management style, it is the teacher who remains the principle creator of the environment and the children who must adapt (Hargreaves, 1972), preferably in a way to positively support learning, but sometimes in a negative one which attempts to evade the less comfortable aspects of control in the classroom.

This definition of the situation of learning is not as apparently as cut and dry as it may appear. Although the teacher possesses a greater amount of power and control
over the definition of learning, the social and relational nature of classroom life causes the
definition to be dynamic in its nature. This is where elements of order and conformity
come into play in a power game, as "once pupil power is effectively mobilized it may be
used effectively against the teacher's wishes" (Hargreaves, 1972 p166) to attack the
teacher's definition of learning and to assert their own. Glasser's Control Theory asserts
that it is possible and desirable to acknowledge the control, the power, of students in the
classroom. As stated earlier, children know how to acquiesce to the demands of the
student role and relative lack of power through "doing school", as they have little control
over what happens outside of themselves, outside of their bodies and minds in the
classroom, yet they have complete control over what happens to them internally.
Motivation to learn comes from within and without. Ultimately, it is internal and a result
of individuals seeking to satisfy their own needs (Glasser, 1986). There may be external
rewards and punishments, but the choice remains within the individual. According to
Control Theory, students come to school with pictures in their heads of what school is
like, and if this picture is self satisfying and school is congruent with this picture, then
student control becomes a non issue. Glasser sees discipline problems as a direct result of
the lack of fulfilling student needs. These problems are best addressed not through
threats, punishments, but by making schools more satisfying places for students. Glasser
urges that school become places where students are free to speak out, to become co-
evaluators and improvers of the learning process, co-definers of the learning situation.
Schools need to become more caring to enable this to occur.
Evaluation as Power

The teacher's power to control student behavior comes not only from the teacher role as disciplinarian, but also from the role of evaluator. Evaluation is embedded in the teacher role. Teachers assess thousands of times daily in formal and informal ways. These range from the traditional notion of the assessment of academic achievement, to assessing what kind of student a child is or is not, or, what kind of person they may be. Such assessments are related to the teacher's behavior expectations in the classroom, based on the degree to which students conform (Hargreaves, 1972). These expectations vary from teacher to teacher and serve as a primary source to define learning in that particular classroom. Grades become equated with dispensing of teacher approval (Hargreaves, 1972) and often embody not only student learning or academic accomplishment, but other normative aspects such as student effort, attitude or work habits. Under such circumstances the quest for approval may become a substitute for the quest for knowledge, only lessening the students power. Reform in the name of benefitting students may alter time structures, curriculum, resources and school governance. However, until a shift is made in the power relationships in the classroom, so that learning can be jointly defined and owned, it will be difficult for school reform to impact the student in a sustained and meaningful way. It is the student who constructs knowledge with and brings understanding to the instructional efforts of the teacher. The student must have the power to alter and improve understanding through meaningful self evaluation and reflection with teachers and peers and through decision making related to their own learning.
Power and Roles

The definition of the learning situation, or of what constitutes learning in the classroom, is by definition a dynamic process. Some expectations are givens and others are negotiated between teachers and students on a regular basis, however both teachers and students come into the negotiations with preconceived notions of their own role in the process, and what is expected of them as they play that role. Even if many aspects of the teacher's definition of learning run counter to the student's desires and needs; the student does not see a legitimate means to make change in that definition as a part of their role as student (Glasser, 1986). They may choose to act out, to play a more “negative” student role in response, but likely with no real hope of changing the overall situation in a negotiated sense. Most students not only accept the teacher's definition of the learning situation, but even espouse to like it (Hargreaves, 1972) seeing no problem with the imbalance of power and no reason why they should expect otherwise in their roles as students, but this expression of support and approval seems to have limits as to its depth and to be superficial in nature (Hargreaves, 1972). Cultural expectations are firmly embedded in the roles that teachers and students see themselves playing and choose to play as part of school life. The potential and necessarily dynamic nature of defining learning, can only be as fluid and changeable as the roles of the teacher and learner themselves. The teacher and students are not the root of problems related to power and control and its impact on learning, but instead it is the structure, the institution, which carries these pre-defined roles and expectations, which limits the relationships they can or can not establish (Britzman, 1994).
Roles in Conflict with People

Much can be learned about the formation of role and the tensions between role and identity through an examination of a poststructuralist view of teacher identity in the classroom. Much of the tension and many of the issues faced by teachers negotiating the sometimes rough waters between self and role can enlighten our thinking as educators on the role students must take on in the classroom and how this role as well as that of teacher, may be redefined to impact learning in a positive and profound ways. Deborah Britzman’s (1994) work on teacher identity focuses on the difficulty teachers have allowing their own beliefs, their “real selves”, to become a part of the predefined role of teacher. She ponders attempts of teachers to “disengage” their real selves “from the myriad rules and procedures teachers are expected to enforce” (Britzman, 1994 p53) and talks about the work of “carving out one’s own territory within preestablished borders, of desiring to be different while negotiating institutional mandates for conformity” (p54) of struggling to take ownership and to find voice in this place called school. Britzman (1994) continues to explain how new teachers are influenced by the classroom context, the situation of learning, speaking of a new teacher as “compelled” by this context to “take up a particular version of who she might become” (p71).

Like teachers, perhaps more so due to their lack of experience, knowledge base and power, students struggle to find their “real selves” in the predefined world of school which requires them to fit predefined roles, no matter how uncomfortable. Students learn how to “do school”, how to conform to the teacher’s expectations and definitions of learning, how to gain praise and avoid punishment, how to put off one’s own desires and
forge new relationships centering on maintaining order and compliance with other’s wishes rather than sharing and intimacy (Jackson, 1990; Glasser, 1986). They too must struggle with the conflict of finding the “real self” inside of the de-personified institutional role if student. Students may find themselves, biding their time until recess, lunch, the end of the school year, graduation. They tend to go through the motions, primarily established by the teacher, with minimal resistance. Teachers find themselves going through the motions as well, biding their time as they respond to roles often pre-determined by the nature of the institution of school (Britzman, 1994). Roles are further reinforced by their continued lived and breathed reality, as they are brought to life, negotiated, agreed upon and constructed by students and teachers daily.

There is a conflict for both students and teachers, between their selves as people, and their school roles, often dictated by school structures, but just as often dictated internally by the student and teachers themselves. School structures may be changed, freeing up students and teachers to redefine their roles. This allows them to redefine their relationship and to mutually redefine the definition of learning itself. Sometimes, school structures are changed, with minimal focus on these traditional roles. The result is merely a traditional definition of learning with all the superficial trappings of reform. Such efforts lay in wait to dissolve without the foundation of people bringing them to life and giving them significant meaning, all bring witness to the pattern of “reforming again and again” (Cuban, 1990) and “the predictable failure of school reform” (Sarason, 1991). Key means to changing these roles and the student/teacher relationship could be embedded in school change where students really are at the center, not as beneficiaries, but powerful partners.
Student role redefinition is central to school change efforts, as school reform asks students to behave and act differently in the classroom and negotiate the fit between new sets of expectations for their role and existing views of the way school is supposed to be. The issue for students is not whether or not they know how to do what they are expected to do, but whether what they are expected to do is viewed as appropriate and valuable to who they are as people (Corbett & Wilson, 1995). “If one accepts the idea that the necessity of role change admits students as legitimate participants in the process, then reform efforts tend to violate every proposition for successful change with respect to young people” (Corbett & Wilson, 1995 p14). Instead, the redefinition of student role invites us to share the change process with students, to establish new relationships, to change together.

Role as Foundation for New Relationships

The acts of teaching and learning are highly interactional, set in a social context with expectations and norms. Finding one’s self within and against the established normative roles in schools is no small task, and depends on the actions and interpretations of those around you. The self as a social concept is “a product of a person’s interaction with others...a person’s self develops in relation to the reactions of other people to that person and he tends to react to himself as he perceives other people reacting to him” (Hargreaves, 1972 p11). These perceptions of others’ reactions to the self are also influenced by the behavioral guidelines, or prescriptions associated with a position or role within the classroom, thus you see yourself through the eyes of significant others and the
roles that you perform (Hargreaves, 1972). It is difficult, if not impossible to make
significant change at the classroom level, significant changes in learning, if significant
changes in the learner do not occur (Fullan, 1991).

Such changes run in opposition to the traditional roles and relationships in the
classroom and are not easily attained. Hargreaves (1972) indicates three conditions that
are necessary for any shifts in roles or perceptions in the classroom to occur as students
clearly know what is expected of the new role of students, they are able to live up to these
expectations to the gratification of themselves and other people involved, and they feel
they are accepted for what they are without conditions and reservations. The first two can
be found again and again in change literature in regard to the language of outcomes,
student performance, and success for all learners, but the third may remain more elusive in
the world of school change. A conflict between the teacher’s role as evaluator, of sorting
children into grade categories, and the role of disciplinarian, of enforcing the norms and
rules of society’s expectations, coupled with working conditions with time constraints, and
daily interactions with and responsibility for thirty to two hundred students, provide real
challenges for teachers to form unconditionally accepting relationships with students, in
fact this notion often runs counter to what much of schooling seems to be about.

It is this intimate level of relationships, this acceptance of all children as people and
as belonging in school and capable of success and positive contributions to learning, that
may be a missing ingredient in changing the nature of the student/teacher relationship.
The key is that the student/teacher relationship that is generally characterized as one of the
quest for approval be replaced by one of acceptance, and unconditional positive regard for
the learner, which enables the learner to drop defenses and open up to possibilities (Hargreaves, 1972), to risk-taking and venturing into the uncertainties of change and growth, of real learning, as opposed to doing school. As educators we consistently espouse a belief in the good of all children, in our work as centering on meeting student needs, while in reality the system contains barriers that force us to behave differently. When structural changes begin to remove some of these barriers, we still are left to deal with the barriers within ourselves.

In essence the student and teacher need to distance themselves from role-dominated thinking and to look, at each other as humans, as individuals with different needs, desires, backgrounds, ages, experiences... coming together for a common cause, to learn together. As teachers bring their own knowledge, experience and expertise to the classroom to support student learning, so do students bring their own experiences and understandings which teachers also learn from. Students and teachers begin to work together against what Britzman (1994) calls "the normative expectations... to assimilate into a pre-determined role" (p61). Rules are set together, curriculum is created together, activities are planned together, knowledge is constructed together, through authentic discourse and ongoing negotiation. As students and teachers begin to form such relationships, as threats and negative consequences are minimized for each role, and trust and collaboration developed, then students and teachers can step out of their roles and express, with little conflict or discomfort, role distance.

Role distance is the ability to act as an “individual who at times acts in opposition to implicit expectations of a given role” (Britzman, 1994). It is the ability to let go of
traditional power structures and norms in order to negotiate new norms which acknowledge and develop the power in others and of the community. It is the finding and accepting of the person behind the role and acting upon that knowledge and understanding to solve problems and make decisions, rather than falling back on standard behaviors which relate more to the role of teacher, rather than the interactive context at hand. Teachers who are able to express role distance tend to be more personally satisfied with their jobs and view the teaching role as supporting their self-identity in the classroom rather impeding it: this in turn allows teachers to permit students to express role distance, giving them more power and voice in the classroom (Britzman, 1994). Teachers come to know students and come to be known as they "help to preserve the student's sense of a personal identity by responding to him as a person, not just a role incumbent" (Jackson, 1968 p153). Teachers begin to personify the virtue of possessing knowledge...the abstract goals of learning are given a human referent (Jackson, 1968 p153), that of the teacher. As the socially created, historically changing, ambiguous and often contradictory boundary line between adults and children (Thorne, 1993) begins to fade, the foundation for reconstructing the definition of learning in the classroom in concert with one another rather than in discord begins to emerge. This can only happen with the addition of one important ingredient, typically missing, or at best minimally represented, in current reform agendas, unconditional acceptance of learners and teachers as people, rather than settling for the interaction of role incumbents.
Much of our thinking about roles, about what should and could be in classrooms, is related to our language, our ability to understand through articulation what is available to us as we forge new ideas, new understandings and new roles. We may seek language which more closely connects with our "realselves", our identity not only as students and teachers, but as real people coming together to interact in real relationships connected to the "real" world of learning beyond schools (Britzman, 1994). The discourse through which we communicate and the symbolic nature of language and relationships, lies at the heart of redefining roles in schools.

Just as Britzman (1994) speaks of the "normative discourse" of teacher education, in which teachers engage and define themselves, there is also a normative discourse of the student, a discourse not only defined by teachers, parents, and the media, but perhaps more significantly by students themselves. Students very early on take on a role of resistant compliance to their roles as students, articulating disdain for homework, glorification of lunch, recess, and even fire drills, yet at the same time a fear of the consequences of noncompliance coupled with the desire to please and be rewarded. The expression of resistance tends to be overpowered by their actions and words which often serve to reinscribe their dominated position. An abhorred rule is clearly enforced and ascribed to when some one else breaks it. An opportunity to gain power, to redefine roles in the absence of the teacher, breaks down into a kind of "substitute war" where students engage in behavior that only furthers the discourse of their immaturity, unreliability and ability to make good decisions and be responsible. Opportunities for student input in the
classroom opened up by reform methodologies such as allowing students to select learning activities and self evaluate, may be shut down by students who say to the teacher "just tell me what you want" and ask, "is this okay?" every step of the way. The expectations of the student role are predetermined, and students typically live up to expectations. Students have access to the language of resistance, of fear, of anger, of frustration, of competition to meet the teacher's expectations, but have little access to the language of power, and perhaps even less access to the language of possibility and change, a language known only to the teacher, or at best defined by the teacher as another set of predetermined expectations and roles to be approached by students with resistant compliance.

The language of teaching and learning, concepts of metacognition, theories behind pedagogical practice, decisions, the “why” of teaching and learning, not just the “how”, is an arena of discourse too seldom used by teachers and rarely, if ever, accessed by students. Traditional role limitations and demands limit the teacher’s time and opportunity to engage in such discourse, while they call into the question the ability and need for students to engage in such talk. Students are denied access to the discourse of change to the opportunity create and own the language and thus the concepts and processes of change itself. Even in more progressive reform agendas, the language is given to the students, and perhaps to teachers as well, with predefined meaning to be embraced by students, not challenged, to be used by students, not created. Both teachers and students involved in school reform may find their own language compromised and perhaps alienated by language handed down form on high for them to inherit and embrace. This handed down language is often a language of collaboration, empowerment and ownership.
and of shared vision without substance.

If students are to become a vital part of the change process, the discourses of student and teacher role must change, and they must be changed by the students and teachers themselves, together. It is the unseen, the unexplored events that we don’t speak of which are replicated in our daily routines in the classroom, making up the events of our daily lives (Jackson, 1968). Finding and sharing a language of change that illuminates those areas left unexplored, unquestioned, in a sense deconstructing what is, with our students, so that we may, construct a new definition of learning together through the exchange of ideas, through the discourses of change, is a vital step in acknowledging the students as a real partner, the real center of school reform efforts.

Section Three: Bridging the gap with alternative pedagogies

Change and Learning as Co-construction of Theory

According to the students in this study, issues centered on power, role, and discourse are all central to an examination of how educational reform can impact students in a deep and authentic sense as people co-constructing what learning is in the classroom along with the teacher. Teachers enable students to actually bring learning to life, as learning is not merely acquisition of knowledge, but a pervasive process of change which affects how a person sees himself, the world and his relationship to the world" (Hargreaves, 1972 p206). Furthermore, if a change in power relationships, through altering student/teacher roles and discourse are to impact the definition of learning, then these issues must serve to guide the development of a pedagogy that focuses on reform to realize the greatest impact on students. New roles, new discourse, new relationships must
be used in a new way of making meaning in the classroom.

The espoused goals of school reform to affect learning in significant ways, to enable children to focus on higher-level thinking skills, on synthesis, critical analysis, problem solving or creating new knowledge for the new world of the information age, met through working with students to reconstruct a definition of learning to bring it to life. If students are to develop higher-order thinking skills, then they must engage in these as a way of life in the classroom. Finding information, analyzing and interpreting it, comparing, contrasting, hypothesizing, testing, questioning, synthesizing and creating new knowledge, are all a part of the process of theorizing. Theorizing with students is a means of developing skills and applying them to all aspects of learning from academic to social, from individual based to classroom based, from personal to organizational, all of the levels and layers of the complexity of schooling can be encompassed as part of the total learning of students in schools.

Theory can be defined as a "lived relationship" which is "grounded in the practical existence of persons and dependent on the process of interpretation and change" (Britzman, 1991 p50), the very social process of interpretation and change that makes up classroom experience on a daily basis, which embodies the issues of power, role, discourse, and relationships that have been the focus of the students in this study. Traditional notions of teacher-centered instruction, and even student-centered instruction that still uphold institutionalized roles, power and production of the language of learning cannot develop the necessary conditions for students to actively produce theory as a means of using basic knowledge and skills to develop higher-level thinking and make
change within the classroom, and perhaps even within the world. A focus on theorizing with students could in turn enable the shifts in power, role, and language, necessary to occur to permit a different definition of each of those concepts to begin to emerge within the classroom.

The production of theory can be thought of a social practice that "can liberate" and as a means to collectively engage in resistance that can transform current "reality" (hooks, 1994). It is a means of intervention, a way to question the status quo, to imagine what could be as opposed to what is. It enables people to use knowledge and skills to not only make meaning of ideas that currently exist, but to question and form new thinking and knowledge. Such a focus on theory production in the classroom allows a sense of community to be developed through the social nature of the process, and the inherent social nature of the classroom; it allows a "climate of openness and intellectual rigor" to be created (hooks, 1994 p40). It allows issues of power, role, and discourse to be a part of the ongoing discourse of the classroom, and for true negotiated and co-construction of not only knowledge but of the definitions of learning to take place among students and teachers. Even at the most primary levels, the stage can be set for theory production and student participation in school change, as a part of the creation of what school is, allowing continuous improvement, Total Quality Education, not as an abstract organizational level concept, but as part of what learning in schools is about. Learning as a process of change takes on a more significant meaning in the lives of individuals, of students, than traditional notions which see knowledge and learning as more external, as a process one goes through and a product one emits.
Change takes hard work, deep introspection, a questioning of one's philosophies, beliefs, one's definition of reality, one's paradigm of life. It can be unsettling and painful, especially when compared to merely going through the motions of “doing school”. But theory addresses these issues as part of the process of learning. Bell hooks (1994) writes in *Teaching to Transgress* “I came to theory because I was hurting... I came to theory desperate, wanting to comprehend—to grasp what was happening around and within me. Most importantly, I wanted to make the hurt go away. I saw in theory a place for healing” (p59). Children experience the hurt and pain of the world from an early age, the tensions of learning about life, the fears of uncertainty, the work of discovery and the joy of success. Children come to school ready and eager to learn about life, about what matters to them as people, hoping to see the connection between their formal education and the rest of their existence, struggling to make this connection to give education real meaning. They come to us with emotional and experiential baggage, as they deal with hard lessons of life that some of us can never fully comprehend. They know the pain and uncertainty and need to embrace learning as a tool to understand, to deal with, to master their existence. Learning as theory production provides a tool with which they can begin to build their own understanding of life, in a social process with others with whom they live, building spaces for understanding, questioning, creating and healing as they deal with the challenges of life. Theory can then serve as a means not only to deal with the concerns and struggles of students as people, but also to open up a language of possibility, an opportunity to build visions, dreams and to experience the joy of life.
Deconstruction as Change

The language of school reform, may focus on doing over what has already been done. We are to renew old practices, reform our approaches to assessment, restructure the decision-making processes and reculture our learning environments. Much is stated regarding the outdated factory run model of schools, of the obstacles of centralized authority, the dated approaches to accessing information, the lack of focus on high performance standards, often within the context of preparing students to achieve success in the new global information age, and to enable the United States to keep or regain its competitive edge. The discourse of change seems to center on this broader level of addressing the system and the organization, or it tends to center on the "how tos" of change, providing teachers with new methods, approaches, assessment tools, curricula ... but little attention is given, at least at the school and classroom level, to the "why" behind the needed change. How is this relevant to what I do daily in the classroom? What will this mean for me as a teacher? How does this enforce or attack my practices and their underlying belief systems?

A deconstructive approach to school change, would begin by addressing the "why" questions of school practitioners, with a discourse centered on what already is, to take it apart, to discuss and analyze its underlying assumptions, its masked agendas, and hidden impact on students and teachers. A deconstruction of educational practices, of the social norms and expectations of schooling, may provide a place for collegial discourse of change and provide ownership and deeper understanding of change. Such an approach may enable teachers as intellectuals to come together as professionals to make decisions...
together, and teachers as pedagogues, to include students in this deconstructive process in order to lay the foundation for reconstructing what learning is and can be in our schools.

A deconstructivist approach which focuses on the "elisions, blind spots, the loci of the unsalable" (Grosz, 1989 p184), may move us to think against the story of schooling that seems to tell itself, the daily story of school that we as educators live which seldom addresses the constructed nature of the classroom, instruction, relationships, language, roles and learning itself. The powerful resource of deconstruction is not often focused on pedagogy (Atkins & Johnson, 1985), but if it can be employed as a tool to make real change with and not for students, educational improvement efforts may be able to alter the existing structures of power, role, discourse and relationships, with a deep and sustained impact on learning.

Pedagogy as defined by Lusted (1996) as the transformation of consciousness that takes place where three agencies: the teacher, the learner, and the knowledge they together produce, intersect, offers a site within the world of school where issues focused on students as part of the change processes agents of change can begin to be realized as part of the ongoing, negotiated definition of learning.

**Deconstructive Pedagogy: People, Power and Relationships**

Deconstructive pedagogy focuses on the socially situated nature of teaching and learning and on the nature of roles and their power implications in the classroom. The goal of deconstructive pedagogy is to nurture a space "where students can come to see ambivalence and differences not as an obstacle, but as the very richness of meaning making and the hope of what ever justice we might work toward" (Lather, 1991 p10).
Such an approach emphasizes the multiplicity of meanings and understanding, of ways of learning about and knowing the world around you. It emphasizes the personal and individual nature of relationships in the classroom that are vital to moving ahead and learning with students, to addressing and negotiating issues of role and power in the classroom. Pedagogy becomes a site to help us to learn to analyze the discourses available to us, and how to explore the relation between ourselves and how we negotiate the search for meaning in an increasingly complex world of contradictory information (Lather, 1991).

**Dialogical Pedagogy: Language and Negotiation**

A primarily monological approach to pedagogy, and the typical lack of true dialogue in the classroom causes a lack of democratic participation on the part of students as, "the educational discourse in this country has historically been based on monological pedagogy in which the teacher is presumed to have the monopoly on knowledge and expertise. Student voices are often absent" (Fernandez-Balboa & Marshall, 1994 pl72). Even as school change efforts focus on methodologies to increase active learning on the part of students, such as cooperative learning and "teacher as facilitator" approaches, there is an imbalance of power and lack of significant redefined roles and relationships between student and teacher. The maintained institutional norms limit the existence of true dialogue as "an active process of serious continuing discussion which allows people's voices to be heard" (Kohl, 1984 pl1). Dialogue which is characterized as free, social, inclusive, participatory, as propositional, not descriptive ... as transformative and anticipatory benefiting students in that it reconceptualizes the individual in the classroom, recognizes and gives significance to students' lives, demystifies teachers and others in the
classroom and promotes a sense of community (Fernandez-Balboa & Marshall, 1994).

Dialogical pedagogy can be viewed as a direct means to include students in school change as it is "a means to transform social relations in the classroom and to raise awareness about relations in society at large" (Shor & Freire, 1987 p98). Hooks writes, "To engage in dialogue is one of the simplest ways we can begin as teachers, scholars and critical thinkers to cross boundaries... barriers... "(p 130). It is a means to make the learning process one of change, as student voice developed through a dialogical approach can further the aim of developing voice among those who have been silenced historically. The opportunity to speak, to question, to explore issues, is an important aspect of this process. But "the notion of voice can go far beyond the opportunity to speak, it can be about protest" (Fine, 1994 pl86), protest as a vehicle for student involvement in school change.

**Radical Pedagogy: Critical Acts of Democracy in the Classroom**

If the act of learning and its pedagogical impetus are to be regarded processes of change, a process engaged in with students, not for them, then critical and liberatory approaches have much to offer in developing students as agents of change. These can be thought of as radical pedagogies, pedagogical approaches where everyone's voice is heard, everyone's presence is genuinely valued, a dynamic process, where one another's voices are heard and everyone becomes a resource of knowledge in a learning community (hooks, 1994). It acknowledges that no education is politically neutral and foregrounds issues of the construction of the process of learning in this light. A critical perspective on pedagogy allows a transformation of the classroom to occur as systems of domination in
the classroom are no longer reinscribed and the needs of students with diverse backgrounds, experiences and ways of knowing become central rather than marginalized in the classroom.

Such approaches foreground issues of power, relationships, how language frames our thinking and how we construct our language by focusing on content and issues beyond the surface level. It allows teachers to work with children to dig deeper into underlying meanings and the why behind apparently factual information, and logical choices. Teachers can begin to foster in children critical thinking as a reconstructed definition of learning allows learning to take on the potential to liberate students as marginalized members of school and society. Students are provided with critical skills to utilize knowledge and abilities engaged in during school to become active, participatory members of society, a society that is increasingly complex, diverse, and changing. Radical pedagogy allows the ethos of democracy to become a real part of school life for students, and their lives beyond the classroom, as they carry these skills and attitudes as individuals, into the world beyond school walls. In hooks' words, such approaches allow for education to become a practice of freedom to, "create new visions...urging all of us to open our minds and hearts so we can know beyond the boundaries of what is acceptable, so that we can think and rethink, so that we can create new visions..." (1994 p12) to create a new reality in schools and beyond.

Engaged Pedagogy: Student/Teacher Relationship as Central to Learning

The practice of engaged pedagogy goes beyond traditional notions of the student/teacher relationship, beyond what is likely deemed possible given the structural
and attitudinal constraints in classrooms today. It employs concepts of progressive and holistic approaches to teaching and learning and focuses on students at a deep level of commitment to the whole child. The teacher's role becomes not merely that of information sharing, but sharing in the intellectual and spiritual growth of the child emersed in a deep and intimate concept of relationships in the classroom. The quest for knowledge is not focused solely on content knowledge, but on accessing knowledge of the world and how to live in it (hooks, 1994). Engaged pedagogy utilizes concepts of critical pedagogy, as it views education as a practice of freedom, allowing students to take responsibility for their own actions and choices and to learn from their mistakes, but it is also defined as a process of self actualization, promoting the well being and empowerment of both students and teachers, to build a community of learning, valuing student and teacher expression, sharing, and experience which embraces and creates "a climate of openness and intellectual rigor" (hooks, 1994 p40). The goal of engaged pedagogy is change, as it is transformative, based on mutual investment where the classroom becomes "a democratic setting where everyone feels a responsibility to contribute" (hooks, 1994 p39). Such commitment and responsibility to foster learning as growth and change, can come about only through an approach where students are regarded, accepted and valued as individuals who contribute significantly to learning and who define and own the process.

**Conclusion**

If we as educators are to realize the full potential of the current emphasis on educational reform, if this time the results are to have a sustained, significant impact on
learning, the centrality of the student to both the learning and change process must not be marginalized. Traditional notions of student role and their power implications can be addressed through the reconstruction of learning in the classroom, readdressed and defined with students not for them. An examination of these processes through lenses focused on role, relationships, discourse, the lenses provided by the students in this study, can then be informed by alternative pedagogies. This may serve as a starting point to begin to understand the student perspective and their necessary role in the educational change process, as well as a beginning discourse on how such involvement might look. Who better to ask about the student role and perspective on change as it relates to learning, than the learner?

So begins the story of a small group of seventh graders who have been engaged in various “reformed” approaches to learning. What matters to students in school change? What are issues that are important to them? How does change impact them as people? How do they view learning now as opposed to before? Where is their voice in school and school change? A small piece of the student picture of change begins to emerge here in their stories as learners, as people who need to be the true center of school and the school reform process, rather than passive beneficiaries, if students and teachers alike are to reap the potential benefits of change.
CHAPTER 3
Methodology

Intention of the study

The goal of this study was not only to develop a better understanding of the implications of school reform for students, but also to serve as a catalyst for further understanding and action on the part of students, using their voice as a resource to inform practitioners engaged in school reform, and teacher educators preparing teachers to enter into the field in this time of change. Teachers entering the field will need to understand and develop new student and teacher roles, within such reform initiatives.

The major focus of this study is to develop an understanding of students' perspectives on learning and school reform, what is significant to them as learners. The purpose of this study was not only to understand the impact of school reform on students' daily lives in the classroom, but also to better enable students to further develop their own questions and understandings of school reform as a result of the collaborative research structure. This study engaged students in dialogue as they mutually developed understanding of school change along with me, as co-researchers. Further, students may wish to act upon this newly developed understanding over time, as they continue to deconstruct and reconstruct their roles in both the learning and change processes.
Horizontal evaluation strategies concentrated on understanding rather than issues of power and control by the researcher related to the "researched". These horizontal strategies are concerned with, "establishing relationships where one participant doesn't dominate the question posing process or the analysis" (Gitlin, 1992 p58). Horizontal evaluation may be thought of as a collection of processes and strategies to enable questions, ideas, issues and constructs to be mutually probed and clarified throughout the research process by utilizing approaches to more deeply examine the meaning of the respondents' statements and explore alternative responses. Such an approach was vital to overcome the power relationships which already existed in the study, as I was an adult teacher working with my former students. This *educative* research was not a panacea for addressing the implicit power relationships between us, but it did provide a means by which to allow issues of power to be addressed and inform our inquiry. As this study was focused on the process of collective meaning making embedded within a school context where the participants were actively engaged, research was able to "influence practice as particular insights are gained" (Gitlin, 1992, p26). This offered legitimate possibilities of research as praxis (Lather, 1986b).

This study looked at the particular lives, contexts and meanings of the student participants involved. Our collaboration took on the challenge of representing the perceptions and life experiences of twelve seventh grade students, all of whom had participated in a year long sixth grade program, which can be described as "student-driven" learning, the Collaborative Education Program. The students had worked with me and two other teachers on our team in a "reformed" learning environment which attempted
to alter the traditional concepts of student and teacher roles by utilizing alternative assessment strategies, student directed curriculum, performance based education, and collaborative methodologies such as working with students to determine the focus of content to be studied and the learning activities, which were built on notions of collaboration and the development of community. In addition to exploration of how this context for learning affected students, this study allowed for contrasts of students' experiences before, during and after their involvement in school reform, through the use of individual histories as learners.

The findings of the study are not intended to be generalized to all contexts and individuals, but rather to provide student lenses through which to view and frameworks with which to build a deeper, richer understanding of what school reform means. In order for school reform to positively affect student learning and the attainment of desirable learning outcomes, a change in role relationships between students and teachers is often needed, coupled with a change in student thinking, motivation and understanding of the learning process (Fullan, 1991). This study focused, in particular, on how a specific school reform impacted students and their learning, through an examination of student/teacher relationships and the daily lives of kids in schools, an area for which there is "minimal research from the student's point of view" (Fullan, 1991 p170).

This study could enable teachers, teacher leaders, teacher educators and future teachers to think about how better to engage students in guiding and implementing school change, as they too encounter issues of role, relationship, discourse and student voice in the school reform process. An opportunity to incorporate students' perspectives in plans...
for school reform could increase the likelihood of significant and sustained educational benefits. As Gardner (1991) suggested, "Education that takes seriously the ideas and intuitions of the young child is far more likely to achieve success than one that ignores their views" (p248).

Significance of the study

If the aim of school reform is to realize its potential, then we as educators must not ignore the complexities and impact of these efforts beyond improved test scores, altered time schedules and new labels. We must develop a rich understanding of how reform efforts impact those who are most affected by and indeed the professed beneficiaries of school improvement, the students. Also, this study looked at the active role students might take in the school change process, often a much overlooked and perhaps missing piece of the reform puzzle. By developing opportunities for students to think about and act upon their understanding of school reform, the goal of sustained and substantive reform through continuous improvement may best be achieved, or in the words of the students in the study "made real."

Nature of the study

A focus on the socially-negotiated roles of students and teachers in the school culture and the complex relationships within this context implies the need for a research epistemology reflective of the complex and dynamic nature of making meaning based in dialogue and relationships. The very context in which relationships are developed, sustained, and altered over time is equally complex and dynamic, as "qualitative researchers assume that human behavior is influenced by the setting in which it occurs"
(Bogdan & Bilken, 1992 p30). Understanding how students and teachers define these roles, and relationships, focusing on the students' thoughts, feelings, and understandings, requires an approach to research which enables students, as active research participants, to inquire "in depth into complexities and processes" (Marshall & Rossman, 1989 p46). The use of an interpretive qualitative approach, such as educative research (Gitlin, 1992) not only allows for student stories of relationships, culture, and change to be heard, but gives them significant voice in focusing the direction of the study, analyzing data, and creating meaning and understanding with me, as co- researchers.

Learner-centered efforts, such as Sizer's Coalition of Essential Schools, Levin's accelerated schools, Comer Schools, Goodlad Schools, Success for All and Spady's Outcomes Based Education, embrace concepts and beliefs which are related to the Collaborative Education Program in which the student participants were engaged for a year as sixth graders. Within the walls of a hundred year old middle school, which sits in the older section of a mid-sized (population 25,000) predominantly white (10% minority), middle class suburb, 800 fifth and sixth grade students have been engaged in a range of pedagogical approaches. These range from traditional teacher-centered approaches to the approach of the Collaborative Education Team, which utilizes student driven curriculum, alternative performance based assessment and reporting systems, flexible scheduling, and active, cooperative learning. The program was designed to alter the fundamental ways students and teachers defined their roles and responsibilities. Teachers make all educational decisions and changes directly based on student needs and interests, with their participation and input.
To engage in research that could explore such reform goals, it was important to focus on the development of a new relationship between myself and the early adolescent students with whom I engaged in inquiry and analysis. We needed to move from a teacher/student relationship to a relationship as co-researchers. The challenge was to interact with these seventh grade students on an ongoing basis, collaboratively engaging them in many aspects of the research process, in which students have not typically been involved.

Sizer (1992) questions the feasibility and desire of early adolescents reflecting on their own learning, but adds that these students are seldom asked to engage in reflection on learning and emphasizes the need for their participation. Some studies focusing on student perspectives, such as Barrie Thorne's (1993) study on "gender play" presents an alternative perspective. She views the delineated differences between adults and children as suspect stating, "the dichotomy between 'adult' and 'child', which masks enormous variation in age and capacity itself needs close scrutiny...the division between 'adult' and 'child' is socially created, historically changing and filled with ambiguity and contradiction" (1993 p6). The often marginalized nature of students in society and roles of adults and students within this broader context, could not be ignored, but was often challenged by and incorporated into the study.

Further, limitation of student voice could have been magnified by my pre-prescribed role as their teacher. To address this issue, this study focused on "collaborating with" student participants rather than "doing research on" them (Noffke, 1990) and addressed the complexities and issues involved with conducting educative
research with middle grade students. The study design focused on continual refining and
deepening of understanding through a cycle of inquiry, reflection, and action. Students
were involved in determining the focus and direction of the inquiry and had multiple
opportunities to clarify, add, address and question our "findings" throughout the process.
Students initially participated in a pilot study which focused on determining the direction
and purpose of our later inquiry together. Students believed that the study could inform
others preparing to engage in school reform, giving them insight into the student
perspective. Student involvement in the decision making processes of the study was
critical to the nature of the study.

Impact of pre-defined role & insider status

As I struggled to tell the stories of the negotiation of changes in role, discourses
and relationships of students and teachers, I remained aware of my own impact on the
study through the research design, and my interpretations of the "findings", the story I
chose to tell. My relationship and assigned role with respect to those I "studied" was of
importance to the study (Reinharz, 1989). The fact that I had a pre-defined role as
researcher/teacher indisputably shaped my understanding and interpretation of the data.
Over time, I realized the benefits and drawbacks of my insider status.

I was keenly aware of this role in my pilot study, and later within the Jr. High
setting during the study itself. I struggled to make the familiar unfamiliar, aware of the
consequences of overlooking important data that then may have been left unexplained
(Fetterman, 1989, Jackson, 1990). I continually had the opportunity to build the students'
ideas and reflections into the study. They worked with me to identify themes and topics
and to give responses to the findings we discovered together. We worked together to establish grounded theory, theory which emerged from the findings in the data, to "be more faithful to data, rather than forcing it to fit a theory" (Glasser & Strauss, 1967). If I had not fairly or accurately represented what we had discussed, the students had multiple opportunities to clarify my interpretations and change how the findings were depicted. We continually talked and made decisions together, as we learned from one another, ensuring that I was not relying solely on my own interpretations.

The study attempted to evoke a "critique of voices" (Fine, 1994) to unpack the complexity of research which represents so many perspectives and to examine the implications of engaging in inquiry collaboratively as teachers and students. These "voices" are represented within the text construction which weaves student responses into emergent conceptual categories, and then into narratives representing how these categories are reflected in classroom practice. These categories were generated from evidence in the data (Glasser & Strauss, 1967). Student voice was also maintained as I worked with the students in the analysis phase of the study as they helped me to generate themes and construct a conceptual model to make sense of our interviews together. This enabled me to begin to translate the data "with" them rather than "for" them (Fine, 1994).

My insider status also enabled me to have a deeper understanding of my students and their role in the school reform process, based on our experiences together as teacher and learners throughout the previous school year. This permitted me to notice subtleties that only another teacher with such experience would have discerned (Miles & Huberman, 1984), or even more, subtleties that only another person invested in an ongoing
relationship with these students would realize and explore further. The very nature of educative research and the trust and open relationship it requires, made my insider status, as their former teacher and as a person with whom they were comfortable and open, a benefit to the goals of questioning, understanding and acting together. The issue of how my relationship with the students affected the study was an ongoing part of the inquiry and another lens through which to view and explain some of our findings. We decided to document relationship issues and tensions in our study as part of the inquiry. Our mutual methodological learnings, our transition from teacher and students, to co-researchers, were incorporated into our interviews and findings.

My insider status, and pre-established relationship with my students was at times problematic as well as beneficial. As teacher and adult, I possessed power and privilege associated with my position, the very power and privilege that this study in many ways explored and challenged. Our mutual inquiry became inquiry "within and against" (Lather, 1991) the very power and role structures we were seeking to deconstruct and redefine. As we took steps together to uncover and make changes in these structures, we continually addressed how working, to some degree, within the structures themselves, affected our roles and our findings.

**Design of the Study**

**Site selection**

The twelve students involved in the study were seventh graders who had participated in a learning innovation, Collaborative Education, a year long program which focused on changing the student role in the learning process to a more participatory and
decision making one. Concepts of student-driven curriculum (Beane, 1990), alternative assessments, learner outcomes (Spady, 1994), active and cooperative learning, and student responsibility for evaluation were employed by this team to enable such a role shift to occur.

The selection of the site for this study was directly related to my involvement in school reform efforts at the middle school in which I taught. Ashton Middle School is located in a predominantly white, middle-class suburb in the Mid-West. Shifts have occurred in the community's population over the last ten to fifteen years, with the community becoming more working class, with increased ethnic diversity and mobility of families. The school's reform efforts were focused on better meeting the changing and increasingly complex needs of the student population. The selection of this site gave me background information and an in depth understanding of the purposes and intents of the school reform efforts underway, providing the context for this study of school reform.

A shift in schools occurred for the students following the pilot study as the sixth grade students entered the junior high school as seventh graders the following fall. This shift influenced their perspectives as their experiences in the junior high, over six months of the study, became part of the interview processes and data. The schools within this district utilized site based management, which is not atypical of districts involved in school reform. The learning environment from one building to the next may or may not represent a continuation of philosophy or pedagogical approaches. In this case, there was little or no continuation as reported by the students. This allowed the findings to represent a
common trend of school reform effort's existence in small pockets of innovation, rather than resulting from a planned redesign system of research and broad dissemination (Wilson, 1994).

Sampling

Purposeful sampling was used to select student participants who could provide "information rich cases for study in depth" to enable the study to reveal "a great deal about issues of central importance to the research" (Patton, 1990 p169). Issues of central importance to this study were those of power, student and teacher roles, and relationships as related to school change. As grounded theory related to these issues began to emerge the sample was expanded to represent Glasser and Strauss's concept of theoretical sampling, as the sample was broadened to represent "theoretical purpose and relevance" (1967 p48). For example, I initially began talking with students who indicated an interest in the focus of the study and then worked with the other two teachers on my team, who acted as key informants, to ensure a selection of students who could articulate views on power, voice and relationships, as related to their experiences on the Collaborative Education Team. The selection was also made to provide maximum variation, so that the group would not be too homogeneous, representing the viewpoints and experiences of only one "type" of student.

Variation was sought in terms of student school achievement and differences relative to issues of power and conformity, since these surfaced as priorities in the pilot
Research Design

**Process**

- Pilot Interviews
- Group Interviews: What matters in school reform to students?
- Individual Histories as Learners: Questions of student/teacher role, power & relationships in students' lives
- Researcher synthesis of individual histories & group reform interviews
- Member Check Group Interview: Share researcher synthesis & tentative categories & Chapter 4 1st draft
- Group Interviews: School reform related to discourse & role
- Researcher development of conceptual framework
- Group Interview: member check, students add to/change conceptual framework
- Group Interview & Writing Session: Finalize concept map & develop writing related to learning & reformed pedagogy

**Results**

- Focus of study on student perspectives on school reform
- Questions to study based on emergent themes of student/teacher role, power and relationships.
- Individual data related to student/teacher role, power & relationships. Additional emergent themes
- Generation of tentative categories of findings related to student experience before/after reform
- Refined focus on issues related to discourse & role as related to reform & pedagogy
- Data related to discourse & role as school reform/pedagogical issues
- Tentative categories for conceptual framework of role & discourse & reformed pedagogy
- Development of concept map of role & discourse as affecting learning as reformed pedagogy
- Development of final concept map & vignettes of role, discourse & reformed pedagogy

Figure 3.0: Research Design
Achievement levels, based on previous school performance, grade cards, and various authentic assessment strategies used during the sixth grade year, ranged from one third at the high level, who were labeled "gifted" students", one third middle range and one third as experiencing difficulty in academic achievement, including two students labeled "at risk". Six of the twelve students in the sample were identified by the key informants, and later by the students themselves as representing a conformist approach to issues of power and control in school, while another six of the twelve were identified in the same manner as non-conformists. Eight of the students selected had been involved in the pilot study, and another four were asked to join to provide the desired variability.

Data Collection

Data were collected utilizing two primary strategies, dialogical group interviews, which emphasized two way communication and discussion among the participants, and developing individual histories as learners. As part of the pilot phase of the study, emergent issues of student perceptions of their role and importance in the learning and change processes were explored. The pilot interviews served to determine the focus of the study on student perceptions of what was significant to them as learners involved in school reform.

Interviews were conducted utilizing a dialogical and mutually informative approach, enabling me to begin with open-ended questions about the nature of learning and change the participants had undergone in their lives as students. To engage the participants in dialogue, I utilized many of Gitlin's (1992) horizontal evaluation strategies involving the use of probing questions and clarification to get at the "why" behind their
responses, the reasoning, judgements and perceptions which undergirded them. Gitlin's method of horizontal evaluation and its strategies of communication analysis, historical perspective, challenge statements and alternatives were used throughout the dialogue. The initial group interviews reflected student responses which centered on emergent themes of student and teacher roles focusing on issues of power and relationships.

The themes of student and teacher role, power and relationships were used to focus the questions for the twelve individual histories as learners. These histories provided an opportunity to identify emergent themes across students' experiences. Students walked me through their most significant memories and experiences from kindergarten to the present. My guide questions were very basic, asking "What do you remember most about the ____ grade?" and "What do you remember most about your teacher and the way he/she taught?" Follow up questions began to probe responses which typically centered on relationship and role issues. Detailed field notes were accompanied by selective transcription of the data, focusing on responses related to role, relationships and power, themes which surfaced in the initial group interviews and which continued in the student histories. Additional themes were also identified throughout the individual histories, and then transcribed. In addition to the original themes, the theme of talk within the classroom, its purposes and implications for student learning, was added. These histories began to provide a context of students' experiences with learning and school change across their lives as students.
Researcher Synthesis

Sifting through the field notes, listening to the taped histories, and analyzing transcriptions allowed for synthesis of themes and an emergent grounded theoretical framework to begin to emerge. Data on the initial issues of role, relationship and power had been the focus of the interviews, but now additional issues and apparent contradictions of initial data began to emerge across the histories. Tentative categories of findings evolved through this process, resulting in a brief analysis and first write up of these findings in a "draft chapter four". The written draft findings were shared with students so that they could get familiar with the trends and responses across their individual histories, then a group interview session was held to get feedback from the participants.

Interactive synthesis (Fischer and Wertz, 1975), the process of comparing the results of the data collected from the initial group interview focusing on reform, with each of the individual histories as learner, was used throughout the process. This process occurred as the synthesized data were shared in an interview session with the participants. This resulted in an emergent grounded theory of learning and change now focused on the interaction of two key elements in the learning environment, discourse and role. The student responses centered on how these elements interacted with each other and caused learning to be defined in different ways. This is what they indicated as either present or missing in school and "reformed" school environments. The themes and categories of role as interacting with discourse were constructed in this interview session in a tentative sense, as we were "constantly redesigning and reintegrating ...theoretical notions" (Glasser
& Strauss, 1967 p101) the emergence of the “why” behind the data, throughout the process. The next steps in the research process were a continuation of the refinement of these theoretical notions, as our grounded theory continued to emerge.

The next group interview sessions focused on further data collection, now aimed at supporting, challenging and informing the further development of our emergent theory related to role and discourse as defining learning within the classroom. The data from the personal histories were again recycled back to the initial group interviews which centered on issues of reform and student perspectives on "what matters in school reform". The theoretical framework related to role and discourse began to evolve into an emergent typology. Students began to plot their experiences in school along a continuum of teacher role in the classroom as there was much dialogue about their experiences in classrooms with different types of teachers, based on how the teachers were viewed by the participants as "real people", or just playing out a role. Much of the interview continued to focus on talk, or discourses in the classroom, as related to power and purpose of talk. The participants began to decipher from our previous work, along with me, how both elements must be significantly changed within a "reformed" environment, if learning within the environment was to be altered, beyond surface changes. Role and discourse had to change, in order for the people in classrooms, students and teachers to be changed.

After this interview session, I took the notes from our session and used them to inform our previous "findings" as I attempted to visually represent the emerging typology of role and discourse, in essence our definers of pedagogy. Themes were developed to illustrate how they impact learning, in each 'type' of classroom. I tried to represent how
reform as well as student experiences that were not quite "reform" might be mapped out along a model. I then took a rough draft of the model to another interview session. Here I provided only the headings for the typology, and they provided what might or might not fit under and into the headings. We added ideas, changed terminology, clarified concepts, and arrived at a working model of what we had been refining over our last few sessions. We then employed our new model to examine their experiences in school to see if it could represent the various ranges of their experiences, as well as explain where they stated school change should head if it was to make a difference to them as students and to their learning.

Once we agreed that the model captured all of our collective thinking on learning and the potential for school change that could significantly impact students, we began to discuss how we could develop vignettes, or classroom situated descriptions of each section of the model. These vignettes not only needed to clarify the model, but also to represent their collective experiences as learners, both before, during and after school change. The students worked in brainstorming sessions to define what life would be like in these classrooms. A few wrote poems, some tried to write up short examples or stories. We spent most of the writing session talking, and I left the sessions with their notes and their "blessings" as I went off to actually write up the vignettes. The "final" product included the concept map of pedagogy and school reform accompanied by vignettes I constructed based on the multiple data sources, and their notes from our group writing session.
Built into the research design were processes to address the collective nature of the study, collective in the sense that I wanted to build student participation and voice as much as possible into each step of the process and in the sense that the data itself was gathered, interpreted and represented in a very collective manner. The ongoing procedures served to continually build, inform, refocus and educate both myself and the students involved in the study. Research was viewed by us, not as the product of our model and vignettes, but more significantly as "a process with turning points that redirect inquiry" (Gitlin, 1992 p26). As I was a teacher working with my former students and as much of our work reflected underlying issues of power it was important that our interviews reflected attention to "power sensitive conversations" (Haraway, 1988) so that we were legitimately able to learn together and from each other, even as we addressed and worked within the power structures of our roles and the context of school. The research was designed to be both educative and catalytic in its nature in hopes of allowing our research to influence practice as insights were gained (Gitlin, 1992) especially on the part of my students and myself as we continued working in our schools, but also practitioners who might gain insight and understanding from reading this study. The study design attempted to recognize that the participants involved, including myself, were people, not only studying learning and school reform, but also living it and living the process of inquiry itself. It is through such elements of the research design that significant educational change may best be explored, as it "can only come about through a process of personal development in a social context" (Fullan, 1991 p132). The research design
attempted to realize the potential of research that was both conscious and respectful of the personal and social aspects of our mutual inquiry and collective contributions to the process.

A researcher journal was kept and analyzed to focus on my own struggles with politics, language, role and loyalties as I worked "within/against" (Lather, 1991) the very structures of school that we were attempting to challenge and change. It also enabled me to focus on the challenges, failures and success of engaging in educative research with my students. My own reflections on the research process as well as student perceptions and understandings of these issues were visited throughout the data analysis and informed the representation of our mutual findings of the study. This journal enabled the study not only to be about developing a better understanding of student perceptions of school reform, but also about learning to do collaborative research with early adolescent students, about the development of collective voice and the journey of researching with rather than on students, the often missing piece in school improvement literature.

Validity

The validity of this study is firmly grounded in its educative approach which reconceptualizes traditional notions of validity and reliability. The focus is not on finding "the truth" but rather on the development of mutual understanding between the partners in the research process, based on each party's "strongly articulated positions" (Gitlin, 1992). The study is built upon reciprocal relationships between the "researcher" and the participants and the development of a sense of community. Validity is built into this process in the form of student voice, as students developed research questions and were
involved in data analysis and text construction, to ensure that the portrayal of the study's findings were valid—to them. The cyclical, collaborative nature of the research design offers a basis for establishing descriptive validity (Kvale, 1989) as the participants in the process worked together with me to illustrate their experiences in a meaningful way to others.

In addition to the development of student voice to assure descriptive validity, the student participants also served as my peer debriefers (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) which enabled me to continually revisit my own assumptions, and beliefs and how this impacted the study. Continual dialogue with the students enabled my knowledge base, understandings, and even biases to inform and enrich the study, to raise further questions about the nature of my work as a researcher and a practitioner and how this affected the study. Student involvement in the analysis processes enabled collective reflection on our findings, illuminating their strengths, inaccuracies, and redirecting our thinking and inquiry. The co-construction of our conceptual model also provided member check opportunities. This dialogical nature of the study, combined with this debriefing and embedded member check provided the study with "communicative validity" (Kvale, 1989) as the findings of the study were continually investigated throughout the process of communication as informative dialogue. The level of accuracy, the nature of the field notes and level of engagement necessary to generate grounded theory further enhances the credibility of the study (Glasser & Strauss, 1967).

A reflective researcher journal enabled me to revisit my own interpretations and readings of the data, to keep my own impact on the study under continual investigation. It
allowed me to unpack my privileges as "teacher" and how this influenced my perceptions. This was important to engaging in work with my students, as Thorne (1993) states, "It is hard to think of oneself as a novice when studying those who are defined as learners of one's culture. To learn from children adults have to challenge the deep assumption they already know what children are "like"..."(p 12).

The study's pragmatic validity (Kvale, 1989), the usefulness of our findings, may be significant, as a gap in school reform literature is filled. Grounded theory generated from this study will hopefully be useful in practical applications. It can inform practitioners' further understanding of reform and the student's perspective related to school change. The resulting grounded theory contributes to the substantive area of school reform and is sufficiently general to inform other change related situations (Glasser & Strauss, 1967).

Beyond these more conventional notions of validity, the study also provides an opportunity for validity to be viewed as an incitement to discourse (Lather, 1986b). The study examines the concept of discourse and the socially constructed nature of life in schools (Jackson, 1990). The social construction of role (Britzman, 1994) plays into the findings as well. The acknowledgement of the social and constructed nature of the study and its findings invites others to become part of the discourse, part of the construction of their own understandings of the study, in a sense, of their own findings within the context of the study. The study engaged the participants in meaningful opportunities to question assumptions and invites the readers to likewise question or validate their own assumptions about school reform. The discourse continues.
Ethics

The political and social context of school reform and of this study brought forth ethical dilemmas at times. The nature of the relationship I had developed with the student participants often came into opposition to my relationship with my teaching colleagues. Often my peers were referenced within the interview sessions, sometimes in a positive light, sometimes not. At times I felt as if my loyalties came to bare upon the study; I found my voice in harmony with that of the students, yet at times a cacophony interrupted my voice as I heard dissonant chords in my thinking, as a teacher, loyal to her peers entered into the composition. Thorne (1993) illustrates this concept of conflicting loyalties as she writes, "I tried to avoid developing strong allegiances with the school staff and to build a loyalty to the kids...But I was tethered to adults by lines of structure and consciousness" (p 19).

Issues of trust and openness, so central to the educative nature of the study, also had ethical implications. At times I found myself relating my own experiences and feelings as a student. Was this appropriate, helpful, did it impact their responses and our findings? What would they think of me later as a person? As a teacher? They also revealed their own private thoughts, feelings, experiences. Trust was continually central to the ethics of our study.

The ethics of power were also central to this study. The development of student voice throughout the study had direct implications for the students as they explored and uncovered issues of power in their lives as students and expressed an increased desire to act upon that understanding. "By dealing in voices, we are affecting power relations. To
listen to people is to empower them" (Reinharz, 1988 p15). The empowerment of the students in the study became an ethical issue as they continued to find themselves in a context that continued to disempower them. The discomfort and strain between their role as students and their collective vision for that role surfaced throughout the study. In the end, we had little control over that fact, their "reality" as seventh grade students remained largely unchanged. They felt themselves changing in a place that would not allow them to change.

Research involving students opens up issues of their actual, desired and possible role in not only the research process, but in the school reform process as well. Whether we choose to acknowledge it or not, students do own the process of learning and change along with us, as partners in the educational process. Motivation and the decision to learn lie within the student (Glasser, 1986 & Sizer, 1992). They bring learning to life with teachers. Learning cannot occur without them, and neither can a change in learning. This study might provide a new framework by which to understand their role in school and school reform and a means for their perspectives to begin to become more prevalent in the discourse of educational improvement and research.
CHAPTER 4

Findings

Sometimes I think my opinion doesn't matter
When you say you'll change things, they don't change
You don't treat us like we're people...
We ask questions
You tell us, don't ask them
I have the right idea,
but it doesn't come out right
This is the way things are...
What about the way they should be?

When I think about the way school should be...
To ask questions and not feel dumb asking them
To be able to be trusted
To get up and move around
To be able to talk
And have the teacher talk to you,
As a person, not a human textbook
These are all things that school should be
But what can we do to change it?

—Chrissy---

Part One
Student Voice: Early Emergent Themes

From the beginning of the study I was committed to involving my students in the
work at hand, beginning with the study design and purpose. Informal conversations with
my homeroom class led me toward the idea of using this study as a vehicle to tell their
story, our collective story as teacher and students working toward something called school
reform. The class was excited about getting a chance to work on something that
acknowledged their ability to think and contribute to how teaching and learning might look in the future. They appreciated the chance to tell everyone what was really happening on our team, how it worked and why. They wanted a chance to explain it to others. They wanted to be heard.

Responses from an initial start up group of eight to ten students who gave up their lunch and recess hour to work with me led to the emergence of several themes for further study. I went into these lunch meetings, thinking I knew what they were going to focus on. I knew what they would say. After all I had spent the last four years sharing how our program worked and the concepts, research and philosophy upon which it was founded with groups of parents and educators across the state. What I heard surprised me. The students didn't focus on how we used time differently, the integrated curriculum, our alternative assessment methods, or cooperative learning opportunities, but rather on people related issues.

The initial focus of the study in terms of what mattered to these students in school reform, became increasingly more secondary to a more central question that emerged from the student responses over time. The students spoke not of what mattered to them in terms of reform, but rather in terms of what mattered to them in learning situations in general, based on the totality of their experiences as learners. The students spoke about what mattered to them as learners and how learning should and could be different in order to meet their needs. Nonetheless this work should also inform decisions and actions taken in the name of school reform.
Students reported what they deemed a significant difference over the last year on the Collaborative Education team. They reported that they felt like they really mattered, for some of them for the first time in their school careers. They felt important, listened to, and in control of their own learning and life in school. I pushed them further, always asking how can that be, why do you think so, and found out that they felt they had voice in my class.

"You really listen to us. What we think matters and we get to say our opinions and help to decide what we want to learn. What we think really counts."

The teachers on the team really listened to them, their opinions, their questions, their decisions, their experiences as people. They believed they had power, like they owned the situation of learning, that they were ultimately the ones who brought learning to life and made it real. The ongoing lunch conversations were recorded and the students were asked to brainstorm what they believed to be emerging themes. Brainstorming was a process they were familiar with using on the team. It involved a collective generation of ideas, then synthesizing and prioritizing them.

"It seems like we keep coming up with ideas about us being the ones in control of our learning, I mean the teachers teach us things, but we are the ones who do it, who learn it, who make the learning real."

"We do a lot of talking and getting to have opinions too, like our opinions matter. We can be real people and the teachers act more real, like you always tell us what you think and why. Then we have lots of discussions and debates about things."

Identifying themes and synthesizing ideas and information was a practice they had employed in the classroom over the past year. Students brainstorm ideas, categorize them into themes and similar concepts as an ongoing part of the student-driven curriculum.
aspect of the classroom, where students work together in small groups and then with the entire class and the teacher to determine the focus of learning activities throughout the school year. Ongoing research projects also require students to identify themes, synthesize, prioritize and present ideas and information. This data analysis came perhaps more easily to them than it would have if they were unfamiliar with such learning and thinking strategies.

An initial question of “what is learning?” lead to student definitions which were very personal and internal, as they defined learning as, “using new ideas to see the world in a different way.” The identified themes related to this and how it might happen focused on relationship issues, or "how the teachers treats you", role expectations," how teachers and students act", and the way this affects learning, and the "kinds of talk in the classroom" and how talk was used to "negotiate learning." After sharing with the students what I had read on talk in the classroom and the definition of discourse, we began to use this term to connotate what we meant by talk and how it was used. This included the daily give and take between students and teachers, which focused on a range of issues from what content would be the focus of studies to how it would be taught and how classroom problems which evolved would be worked out. This definition of discourse was broadened for the students over the past year to include the talk of theorizing of questioning and hypothesizing the how, why, and shoulds behind the content they were studying. Two-way talking, talking as thinking and learning, was embraced and used to guide the events in the classroom and students were at the center of this talk. We kicked these ideas around, as I was continually feeding back data as a form of member check.
We engaged in ongoing clarification and negotiation, in a sense using many of the skills we employed as teacher and student, now as co-researchers. We decided upon the themes of role and discourse to guide our further questions to look at how this affected the people and relationships in the classroom, and ultimately learning.

Another stream

The existing relationship I brought with me into this new role of researcher working with my own students had its ups and downs, mostly ups I thought. We already had established trust through a bond based on openness and interaction as students and teacher in our classroom over the past year. This was strengthened by our shared agenda, to tell our story, to make a difference in perhaps the lives of other students.

As we talked about my methodological concerns, we talked about why they were working with me in this pilot study, what was the motivation, and how the relationship we already had would affect what they said to me, and how I understood it. They reported the motivation as wanting to tell about their ideas, opinions, and knowledge from their experiences as learners to others, teachers and future teachers in particular, so they would teach more with the student perspective in mind. They also liked the opportunity to talk about issues related to learning that they typically did not have a chance to within a group setting that gave them support, and a one on one setting that gave them my individual attention.

Learning how to step out of my teacher role, how to let the study take the turns they wanted it to, while still focusing the work and impacting it, was a balancing act I knew I would play throughout the study. As I used open-ended questions, listened more
than I talked, and avoided jumping to conclusions, I began to learn to think in two streams of consciousness at once, one focusing on the content of the interviews in terms of themes and future questions, the other focusing on my impact on the work and how we were learning very new roles together as co-researchers.

**Part Two**

**Themes of the Past: Personal Histories as Learners**

The final sample of student participants was made to assure diversity in the group in terms of student "achievement" and attitudes toward conformity, since this issue was central to the relationship and role issues which surfaced in the pilot. The sample of twelve students included four students who were identified as "gifted", four who would fall into the "average" achievement range, and another four who had typically struggled with grades and other expectations related to schooling, often labeled as "at risk" by the school system and past teachers.

Near the end of our study, we decided that the students should somehow be represented by more than mere numbers, categories, or achievement levels. It took us until the final phase of our work to decide how to do this. I took a risk and wrote short descriptions of each student framed by the emerging themes of the study... issues of power, role, voice, discourse and relationships. I looked at how students viewed school and their place in it and how that place might best be changed through school reform.

Based on their individual histories as learners I attempted to frame out a description of who they "were" as students before their involvement in this school reform project in sixth grade. I used their quotes and comments to generate these descriptions, and then wrote
them as summary of their statements. My own interpretations from working with the students as their teacher for a year and throughout the year of the study impacted the descriptions as well. I was concerned about the impact of my own interpretation upon the description, so I brought the description to our last group meeting to gain their input, to let them make changes, or throw the whole thing out, as a form of member check. The students then suggested that in addition to these descriptions of who they "were" then, they would like to write who they “are” now. Those who wished to wrote up a second piece to include. The student descriptions as written by me, based on learner histories, and revisions by the students, follow. All descriptions are derived from statements made in the personal histories, and the students' exact words are included in quotation. The second sections describing the students “now” was written entirely by the individual student.

**The Kids**

**Jackie**

From her teacher’s perspective, Jackie has learned to shut down and focus on things other than the learning at hand over her years in elementary school. She sometimes finds herself talking to friends instead of listening. In elementary school she tried hard to understand what the teacher was explaining, but didn't always get a clear picture of what the teacher meant or wanted. In her early school years she felt like things went pretty well for her at school, until she had to move to another city, just as she was finally getting the teacher she always wanted to have in third grade. Sometimes Jackie found herself tuning out when what the teacher said wasn't clear to her, sometimes hearing a “song in her
head” instead. Her work may end up misplaced or forgotten, but she still cares about her
ggrades and wants to do well, especially for her parents. She has found gaps in her learning
over time, as teachers over the years have moved onto new topics before she really
understood them. She struggles sometimes with her grades in school, but has many other
talents, like singing and getting along well with others. She tries to fit what the teachers
expect, but finds her self unable to get what they mean once in a while, so her thoughts
take her to other places.

"I think things were different for one year, but now it's back to the same as it was before 6th
grade."

Jeff

Jeff would be labeled a troublemaker by most teachers. Teachers have told him so
repeatedly through their words and actions throughout his school career, with comments
like, “This used to be a good class until you moved here.” They would say he has an
attitude. Jeff simply chooses not to do what he doesn't want to do. He sees little real
value in school, since it is disconnected from what matters to him and his life. He is there
because he has to be. He will find ways to amuse himself by causing trouble, talking,
poking someone, and generally "screwing around". He is quietly defiant and finds himself
often in the office for his "behavior". Lately he's drifting toward more defiant behavior,
with greater risks. He's a lot smarter than he'll let anyone know, maybe more than he
knows. Being smart doesn't fit his non-conformist image. He's into rock and alternative
music and isn't really connected with school. Since he was in kindergarten he got the
message that he didn't belong, so he's found other ways to belong in school, a cold dull
place, where Jeff feels he doesn’t “fit” and “no one seems to care.” There is little there to offer him beyond negative messages and a chance to have some fun by causing trouble, as the rest is “boring” and “doesn't really mean anything” to him.

"This year my teachers don't try to help me. They treat me like I'm stupid. It's really depressing. I'm on anti-depressants because I'm suicidal. I get all F's. I hate my teachers. They feel the same way, except my Science teacher".

**Marie**

Marie has always been a thinker, and early on she decided that school was a place for her to capitalize on that strength. The teachers noticed her ability and maturity right away, and she found herself in gifted classes, or other leadership roles in the classroom. In elementary school she never really questioned the way school was. She liked her teachers and they liked her. She liked being successful, and kind and popular. She always tried to do what was right and that meant working quietly, getting the right answers, and doing her best. But now she is beginning to question what is and isn't right in school. She sees how things affect other students and wants to speak up for what she now can't help but notice seems problematic about school, to help others. Sometimes she feels kind of bad about being so good, like kids think she's miss perfect, and like maybe she doesn't want to be. But what other choice does she have in school?

"I think my life is a little different now. I know that I speak my feelings when they need to be heard. I have lot more confidence but I still have a "fear" of being "bad" in the teacher's eyes. I try to be the best I can."

**Alycia**

Alycia never fit school. At a very young age whether she realized it then or in retrospect she decided she wasn't going to fit and probably didn't want to. She felt like
she "questioned too much", "knew too much" and "asked too much". She got quick and
decisive messages from her teachers early in her school career that creativity and
questioning were not what was valued in the classroom. They almost resented her for
being smarter than the others. She found herself in a gifted class, maybe there she'd fit
in....or maybe she'd find more "injustices" there. She chose not to do school, to sit, to
daydream, to draw, to put up with the negative consequences of her choice, low grades,
teacher and parent disapproval, not being looked up to by her peers. She'd stay home sick
if she could. But school never went away and neither did her pain.

Robbie

Robbie is an athlete, cute, popular, full of energy. Too much energy for school.
Early in first grade the teachers decided he was trouble. They told him he couldn't sit still
and listen. He felt like teachers were "always watching", just "waiting for him to make a
mistake", to get into trouble. It took him a while to find his niche, his source of worth and
self esteem in school, his peers. At first there was conflict there too, he'd occasionally
fight or argue with kids who didn't treat him like he belonged. Once he got into fourth
grade, he grew taller and stronger and felt a sense of respect from his peers. This was
where he focused his energy in school, pulling average grades with average effort. He
wanted to please his family, to do well. But he never realized his true potential as a
thinker. Peer acceptance became his strength in school; he'd do just enough work to keep
out of trouble, always walking the line between things slipping or going okay.

"I think almost all of it has changed for me, but only one of my teachers still watches me.
Now I am considered cute and popular. I have alot of friends and I am doing better in
school."
Melissa

Melissa liked doing well in school, liked her teachers, her friends, never really questioned her place and role there until she started to get a message that she just wasn't good enough. She was bright, but not as bright as the gifted students, her friends. They'd always test her next year; there just wasn't enough room in the gifted class this year. Melissa learned to settle for being almost good enough, though she knew she was better than that. She decided to work hard, be good and get all she could out of school. She did well there and had lots of friends, friends who got to be part of the club, when she was left out.

"Now, I think I have moved up a bit, not all the way, but still some. Like one step down from the top. Things have improved some for the better."

Karen

Karen is a fighter, a free thinker, and a risk taker. She is typically labeled by her teachers as “disrespectful”, stepping over the boundaries of her rights as a student. She challenges these boundaries, sticking up for her friends, challenging seemingly trivial rules. She knows she is smart, and she knows she is right; she doesn't need school to tell her that, especially when it tells her the opposite. Grades aren't usually an issue; work comes easy to her. She'll give 110% if it seems worth it to her, if she is interested. But it 'hurts sometimes, being looked down upon for doing what you think is right". She gets support from her friends and she is looked up to for voicing her opinion by other students, even the ones who dare not speak up. She wonders how she's going to make it through another five years of the battle, when “no one seems to give, no one seems to care".
"Sixth grade seemed to help for a little while. This year (seventh grade) seemed okay too but not for long. Things seemed to take a big turn. I started to hate what some of the teachers were saying or doing. I started to let them know and I still do but I am starting to feel like it's worthless, like there's no reason to speak up. But I'm still hangin' on and I'm trying to convince myself that someday it will make a difference."

"Learning isn't or doesn't seem to be an issue. It's all do what you are told to just get through the day. I think if they made it so we wanted to come to school we would want to learn! And we would learn alot more."

Steve

Steve has been told by his teachers that he is a mature and caring person. He has found a balance between himself and the world of school. He's smart enough to know how to "play the game", to "read the teacher" and "give her what she wants". He avoids conflict, and sees little gained from it. But inside he has strong opinions, strong ideas, a wealth of real knowledge if school would tap into it and let it happen. Kids look up to him for speaking up when he does, they recognize his leadership qualities. But it seems he gets a bad rap for being too smart, or going along too easily with the rules of school; boys don't do that you know. Teachers see him as a "role model"; this is how all boys should act. Little do they know the cynicism that occasionally surfaces beneath it all. He's doing what he must to do well, but he sees it's often a "game" with some teachers, one he is good at and likes to win.

"I don't think I'm as confident as I was last year in sixth grade and maybe the students and teachers aren't like last year. That might be just because I'm in Jr. High and there's more problems in my life. But now things are going great and I'm doing awesome in school. I think last year helped me and I enjoy this year now. I like showing that I'm an A+ student and not a P student. But I did enjoy last year and maybe because of it I love this year so much. I like showing teachers I can do it on my own and I like having alot of responsibility."
Chrissy

Chrissy is sweet. She is petite, cute and “shy around teachers”, although not around her friends. She wants desperately to do well in school and will work and “work to get something right”. Often things just don’t click with her understanding the first time, especially math. She knows she needs to ask questions, but has pushed teachers to become angry when she continues to ask for help...so she “doesn’t ask as much anymore”. Just when she “gets it, the teacher moves on to something new”, so she never really feels likes she's mastered anything...at least in math. Because she is a hard worker she gets good grades, except when the time and help isn't there. Beneath the surface lies a dynamo of thinking. Just let her talk, let her think out loud and she will question, theorize and explain her ideas at a level far beyond what her school work indicates, as she has done so often in our study and on her sixth grade team. She won't usually offer it in class; she's gotten the “message” that isn't her “role”. But ask her opinion, ask her to tell why...the analogies and analysis is not that of an average student who works hard for good grades.

“I feel like seventh grade is still the same. I had a good year in 6th grade but now everything is back...but I do ask questions...sometimes.”

Robin

Robin has always “liked to do well in school”. She has confidence in her ability and even in subjects that don’t come easily or naturally to her, she will spend time to get it right and do it well. She tries to go beyond what is expected of her, running counter to the “quiet, shy”, complacent girl teachers see in class. She always “does what is expected” of her. Expect her to sit and quietly work she will...this is why the funny, creative
opinionated Robin hasn't shown up to school in a while. She's always liked school, didn't have any problems with teachers, was well liked, yet it seems like a part of her was shut down by school, as most would call her shy. Outside of school she was different. When teachers and students get a glimpse of the other Robin, they are amazed at her openness, insight and humor....

"I think I have opened up since 6th grade. I still do what I am told and try to do well, but I speak out more."

Lynn

Lynn was a "problem" for teachers even in kindergarten and first grade. She “got her work done too fast; she knew everything already”. She wasn't a behavior problem, she'd just sit when her work was done, but they “didn't know what to do with her”. She knew that the “teachers didn't think she fit in”, and “neither did the other students”. Things were “a little better in the gifted class”. But kids in her other classes couldn't relate to her, think like her; school became “dull” and "a place to feel different from everyone else", but not in a good way. She loved to think, to question, to explore ideas, but she didn't love school. She tried to” just keep out of the center of attention", maybe she wouldn't be noticed, then no one would “pick on her for being different”. She could give ideas, see and understand relationships and concepts...but that wasn't what she was supposed to do in school. School was “something to get through”, a chance to think, was too much to hope for.

"This year, (seventh grade) just as I thought that the schools and teachers thought we were real human beings with real questions and ideas, I feel like I have been reprogrammed not to ask questions or speak out or have original ideas, so I feel like a shrinking person or maybe it might just be my dream of having a more perfect school that is shrinking."
Amanda

Amanda has confidence and poise well beyond a person of her years, yet she keeps a distance between her self and others, between herself and the world of school. She is wise enough to know she “needs to do well in school to be successful”, and she is determined to be successful. In early grades she went about her business doing work, doing it well, getting good grades, “going through the motions”. Once in a while something would happen that didn't seem fair. A teacher would “go back on her word”, “put down students”, not really understand what Amanda meant in a poem or story...but mostly she plodded along through the motions, a dancer, and artist hidden behind worksheets and “easy lessons”. Then she started to shut down a bit, to “feel bored, not challenged enough”, even by the work given to her in the gifted program. Sometimes school was interesting and clicked with her, but mostly it was just routine, going through the motions. It was as if the fire she kept inside of her had to be sheltered from the torrential downpour of school, or rather the continuing drizzle. Her leadership potential, knowledge and gifts remained largely untapped, as she continued to go through the motions, or gradually began to choose not to....waiting to take a stand.

“Things really have changed since elementary school. The program(6th grade) didn't change me except to make me stronger. I still pretty much have gone with the teachers, but if something's wrong, I say so. The outcome of it outweighs the risk.”

The Interviews

I began to meet one on one with the students to hear their stories of life in the classroom, before being involved in our "restructured” learning environment. The students discussed meeting with me individually as a possible strategy in the pilot phase, as
they felt they each had so much to tell me and wanted some time for me to work
individually with each of them. Further, it gave me a basis to compare what school had
been like from their perspectives and past experiences to their experiences on our sixth
grade team, a base line for the data. After several work/group interview sessions, the
students decided that they would like to speak as much as possible with a collective voice,
 focusing on their common experiences illustrated through themes, rather than as separate
voices. As such, the students responses are not directly identified with individuals in the
sections which follow.

The guide questions (appendix) I used were intentionally open ended so that the
students were able to focus on what was significant in their own experiences as students.
As I asked what each student remembered most from each grade, two types of responses
became typical, one focusing on visceral images, a room covered with painted berries, a
pretty tanned teacher with long hair, special activities.....the essence of the learning
environment.

"There were these new little chicks and ducks in an incubator...we were learning about
animals, how to care for them and the kids got to name them."

"I remember we would color pictures and there were these bottle caps in plastic bags that
we would count with and I won this coloring contest. Oh yea and then I remember we
always had to take a nap at naptime."

"There were big tubs with pillows in them that we could sit in to take turns to read. It gave
me a sense of freedom. She (the teacher) let you do what ever you wanted to do, like sit
somewhere else, as long as you didn't goof off. There were barely any problems in that class
because everyone liked her, she made it so that everyone had something in common."
"She (the teacher) liked animals and we had lots of them in the room. When we had class pets it really made me feel happy. We could hold the hamsters and everything, but sometimes kids would squeeze them and hurt them and that really made me mad. The teacher didn't do anything, I thought she didn't even care. I thought, just another injustice of school."

Inevitably their images of the classroom and activities shifted and linked to the teacher leading to the second type of response which focused on the people aspects of the classroom. These responses centered on how the student interacted with others, primarily the teacher, and how they felt about these experiences. I asked, "What was your teacher like?" to probe this second area and to search for common themes across each student's experiences, and then in contrast with the other students' stories of school. The responses related to the teacher seemed to begin to generate tentative categories of teacher types, nice, mean, fair, fun. I began to probe what these categories meant to students and to learning and to explore the concepts they were founded upon.

Theme one: personal to impersonal

Tension between the personal and impersonal aspects of schooling came up in each student's history, although these experiences impacted students in different ways, each using certain coping strategies to define his or her own role in school based upon this tension. The majority of students found the primary years, through grade two, to be focused more on themselves as people. Teachers interacted with them warmly; they felt taken care of and nurtured. School tended to be a comfortable place where they felt like they belonged. There were students who did not experience this sense of belonging, but rather found conflict with who they were and the classroom expectations via the teacher's actions almost from the beginning of their school careers. But by grade three every
student reported some feeling of school not fitting who they were as people as the focus became content and rule centered in preparation for the grades and real world ahead of them.

The students' responses at times tended to be very dualistic, very black and white. They sometimes tended to often focus on the negative aspects of their experiences as learners, often framing problems in terms of what teachers did or did not do, seldom focusing on their own active roles in the process, perhaps because they did not see their own roles as substantial in those classrooms. As they began to discuss and uncover issues of role and power, they saw injustices as foremost, as individuals often do when they first enter into a mode of critical thinking. This phenomena may have been compounded by their developmental characteristics as adolescence, as issues of fairness, conformity, and a struggle between independence and dependence are foremost in their minds as individuals at this stage of development. But this was their perspective, how they saw issues, and this was what the study was to represent. This dualistic thinking is represented in the characteristics of the impersonal classroom brought to life by the impersonal role of teacher which the students reported in their discussion of emergent themes, variation one and two, in the paragraphs which follow. The remaining variations, three and four, which focus on the more personal classroom reflect their more positive experiences with teachers.
Variation One
Discourse in the impersonal classroom: One-way teacher talk

The primary place where the tension between student and teacher, who embodied all of the rules and expectations for learning and behavior in the classroom, existed was in the classroom discourse. Students most frequently cited the reason for punishment, for being labeled "bad" as talking. Teachers talked, student didn't. You typically were not even supposed to ask questions, as this was a sign of not listening and paying attention, or interpreted as a threat to the teacher's competence and all-knowing power in the classroom. Talk was focused on telling about content or how "to do" problems. The teacher would often "talk like a textbook" devoid of personal feelings, or personal meanings. It was used to give directions, to praise and to reprimand. It was a privilege reserved for the teacher, but on occasion accessed by students who were permitted to give the teacher the right answer, or share on certain days. At times students would secretly try to talk, to avoid being caught at doing it. But there were risks involved. A list brainstormed by the students focused on "how talk was used" most commonly in their experiences in elementary school included:

mostly teachers talk/students take turns, only talk when called on
talk must stick to the point
is boring/same thing again and again
teacher gives directions: kids listen/kids tune out
control talk, scolding, commands
kids tell the right answer/get it the first time
no socializing/can talk quietly if you are done with "work"
don't ask too many questions
teachers "set you up" to look foolish with questions
answering/explaining your actions is seen as talking back
kids have no opinions
based on the teacher's moods
silencing

In both individual and group interviews students continually focused on the silencing of the student's voice, how the talk in the classroom was a privilege reserved for teachers. The student's role in classroom discourse was centered on not talking, but listening. Students reported that this was even the case related to asking questions in class.

"You can't ask questions because they will say, I just said that, weren't you listening, it makes you feel really stupid. I mean you're afraid you are going to look dumb. Or they don't know how to explain it another way and they get all frustrated and mad that you didn't get it the first time because it makes them look like they don't know how to teach."

"She might let you ask a question and not get mad, but she'd say something like, "you know you should have been listening" first."

Students reported throughout their personal histories that they were not allowed to express their opinions on matters. They received a clear message that their opinions and ideas should match whatever the teacher was saying, and that disagreement was not an option. Expressing an opinion about how the classroom should run was also viewed as forbidden, and in rare cases where the students were asked to discuss classroom rules or expectations, students had to read the teacher to see what she wanted them to say before they gave their opinion on the matter. To speak their opinion, especially one that might run counter to the will of the teacher was not even considered an option. Those students who expressed opinions, especially ones that ran counter to presented content or teacher expectations were reprimanded and alienated from the culture of the classroom.
"If you give your opinion teachers think you are talking back. You can't disagree with what they are teaching, you can't explain when they ask what you are doing or when they yell at you. If you say anything it's automatically disrespectful, even if you are sticking up for what you think is right."

"If you say what you think about something, you pay for it."

Socializing with friends in school was reported to be taboo. "Talking" was reported by the students as the primary reason for student discipline in the classroom. If you were permitted to talk, as in a cooperative learning setting, the talk was to remain highly task related and at a "whispering" level. Often assigned seats made it nearly impossible for students to talk with their friends in the classroom, as those who were potential talkers were separated by the teachers, so that student talk would not disrupt learning. They reported that not being permitted to talk with friends and peers, unless it was "about work", for hours a day made them feel like their needs as people were not considered important in terms of classroom learning.

"When you are sitting still right next to your friends all day, how can someone expect you not to talk? I bet teachers would talk if they were sitting so close to their friends all day. It's only human to want to talk to other people. Talking is just used by teachers to get you to do what they want. Talking to your friends is a reward for getting your work done. That's all schools seem to be about, doing what the teachers want."

"There was this chatter chart and the teacher would mark your name down on it, even if she heard a peep. You couldn't ask the teacher for help, but you couldn't even ask your friends for help because you didn't understand or she'd mark you down. I was always in a panic because she'd write down names and you never knew if it was you. It made me really worried and I had trouble doing my work."

"It all started in kindergarten. I guess I couldn't sit still and be quiet, and I'd get in trouble for talking and have to put my head down or go to the corner. Everybody thought that I was being bad, so I guess I started being bad."
The students reported that this silencing of student talk, of their voices as people kept them from being acknowledged as people with their own needs to think, get help, talk with friends and make decisions about their own behavior and learning. It sent them a message that school somehow wasn't real, that there was no genuine give and take, exchange of ideas. There was little or no opportunity to share their thoughts and feelings about life and learning with their peers or the teacher. Learning wasn't about that.

"The teachers just talk like a textbook. They don't explain. It doesn't seem real, like it's not even a part of the teacher. They just go on and on and all we do is sit there and be quiet. Nobody seems like a real person. It's all about getting through stuff and getting your work done."

**control**

In addition to this silencing of student voice, control was reported to be a central theme to discourse in the classroom. Much of the teacher talk was reported as an effort to control, define and manage the learning process by controlling student behavior. This teacher talk controlled students through giving directives, which perhaps teachers viewed as helpful to moving students along through the learning process and maintaining the integrity of the learning environment. Student comments reflected teacher frustration if students tried to stray away from the desired class content, or if they moved beyond the expectations for the class. It seemed to the students that the teacher wanted to keep everyone at the same place in the learning process, all together doing the same thing, in an orderly fashion. One student spoke of "being shut down" when she wanted to change or add to the classroom content, while others spoke of the teachers' reactions when the pace of learning was challenged by students.
"I remember one day I was telling the teacher about the homeless people and that I wanted us to talk about in class because I had some really good ideas on how we could help them. And she said to me, "Now let's just leave that for grown ups to do," and wouldn't even listen to me. It's like we can't do anything or have a good idea just because we are kids."

"When I get my work done too fast she'd act really mad about it. Like she didn't know what to do with me next, so she wouldn't talk to me at all. I felt neglected, but the work was too easy, I just kept getting done."

"I was having trouble with my work and she never wanted to help me because I was smart. She thought I should be able to do it myself or I wasn't trying hard enough. I had waited in line at her desk for a long time and when it was my turn she looked at me and told me I'd be wasting her time and others needed help. She said, "Well if you don't get this, just imagine how the other kids must feel!" and told me to sit down."

Students acknowledged the need and desire for a positive learning environment, but reported that the control talk by teachers went well past this goal, unnecessarily making students feel a lack of power, a distance from belonging and owning learning and often resulting in lessening student esteem. This "control talk" was typically framed in negative reprimanding terms, with far less emphasis on rewarding positive behavior. It seemed from the students' views hinged to the teacher's general personality, or mood for the day.

"I remember when I moved in the middle of the year to this new class and the teacher knew I was a trouble maker and one of the first things she said to me was "This was a good class until you came here." It made me feel real low."

"I really tried not to get into trouble...it was mostly for talking. I'd have to go sit in a corner. It was like going to jail. I hated it. Everybody ended up sitting in that chair in the corner and if you tried to do anything about it, you'd have to stay there even longer."

"The teacher was always yelling in class. She'd scream about what ever you did if she didn't like it. She'd never compliment you about anything. And then when the parents would come, she'd act real nice and all."
The controlling aspect of talk in the classroom was reported by students as adding more distance between them as individuals and their role or sense of belonging in the classroom. Typically students talked of teacher talk as being "phony" as about keeping them in their place, rather than about the learning teachers said they cared most about.

"I think teachers tell students what to do all the time to try to keep students scared of them. Even the nice ones try to control you, just in a friendly way, like they might ask you to do something instead of tell you, or maybe they don't yell, but it still all does the same thing. It shuts students down so they won't try to take over."

Variation Two
People in the impersonal classroom: Conforming to roles

The teachers had rules to be followed, expectations to be met, and the student's job was to figure out what the teacher wanted and to do it without questioning. Students who were willing to do so tended to define themselves as "good" students, ones who wanted to be liked by the teacher and wanted to be successful in school. Six of the students in the study who identified themselves as such "good" students went along with the way school was and they were rewarded for doing so, happy to receive the well deserved rewards. They liked to be good at playing the game of school, at receiving teacher praise, good grades, respect from their peers. They did not question, but happily went along, learning to work with a variety of teachers, on the teacher's playing field, or if they did see problems, they accepted them as part of how school "just is". They mastered the skill of decoding what the teacher wanted.

"Everyone got a label, some kind of category they fit into if they turned in their work or not and if they behaved. The label I wanted was to get good grades. I felt good about it. I was doing what I was supposed to, and I would get little rewards. The teacher liked me and I liked her."
"Mr. White was nice, if you were nice to him. If you did good in school and did what you were supposed to he would be nice to you back. The kids he got mad at probably deserved it. I knew I just didn't want to get into trouble. I did what I thought was right."

Such students would find ways around barriers that may have existed for them, to continue to be a "successful student".

"The teacher would seem too busy to help you. But I really wanted to be good so I'd go home and ask my parents for help. Then I could still get a good grade on the work."

"Now I can see that some things weren't really right. I never stood up for things that I thought. I didn't even question it. At the time, I thought that was the right thing to do, that that was what being good meant. I never really had any problems with teachers. It bothers me now though, that I never even said anything. Some things they said and did were wrong. Now I see it's all about grouping, labels, competition."

Those who did not always conform to varying degrees, the remaining six in the group, had much different experiences. They did not see that they chose not to conform, but expressed a sense that they did not belong, that they weren't like everyone else, regardless if they tried to be. The teacher sent many messages to reaffirm their sense of being a misfit, ranging from writing their names on the board when they were bad, to being criticized for not making standards, to directly being told they were unwanted in the classroom.

"School was rigid and inflexible. I didn't want to fit in. I could see the difference between myself, between others. We weren't all the same. Outside of school, it's not so rigid. Everything's fuzzier in the real world. It's better outside of school. In school it hurt to be different. I didn't want to go, but I had to. I started to fake like I was sick."

Handwriting seemed to be a particular area of conflict, as the demands for following rules to the letter were embraced in the rituals of how one holds the pencil, how one's hand moves, the flow of the writing, the slant, the neatness, the conformity of each letter.
"Handwriting had to always be a certain way, and it got even worse with cursive. If you didn't do it right you'd do it over and over. You had to hold your pencil a certain way, just like everyone else. I didn't want to be like everyone else. All the letters had to have the same slant and look the same way. And if we'd make a picture it has to be a certain way, all the drawings were the same. You became angry. I cared about my grades but I didn't like it. What if you wanted to do something different? You were penalized for doing things your own way."

"All of your decisions were made for you, you had no say. You had to conform to the handwriting a certain way, perfect. You had to write on topics they gave you in a certain way from a certain outline. The due dates were a way to control what you could do. Everything had to be just so, even where you could sit."

Issues of not "being able" to sit still and be quiet were the problem for some, while others were seen as knowing too much and wanted too much from the teacher, as in the case of two students labeled "gifted" who wanted to ask questions, who worked too fast and understood too quickly, who pushed a teacher to individualize learning, when they did not wish to do so.

"You had to just sit still and listen. I couldn't sit still. I was always up, doing something. I had to repeat that grade."

"The teacher would just sit there, like a little statue, like painting just looking at you, watching for you to make a mistake. I remember we'd do math problems and I would solve them in my head; we weren't allowed to solve them in our heads. I thought it was a waste of time to write out things that didn't help me. I knew what I was doing..so I refused to.... I started to feel like school wasn't connected to life, so I didn't do it."

It seemed to students that school wasn't about thinking and learning, but about getting it done, and they were roadblocks to the teacher accomplishing that goal. They had to follow the teacher's agenda and it frustrated them.

"You're expected to care about what they care about. What you like or think doesn't matter. It's wrong if you don't go along."

"Choices are your rights, but the teacher makes it into a privilege. You have no control over your life while you're at school. You just are expected to go along with it all."
"It feels like everything is in a big hurry. We're just here to get things done and you have to be a certain way or things won't get done. That makes the teacher mad."

These students soon began to see that the didn't fit in with other students as well, a niche for them outside of the boundaries of schooling was being carved, or perhaps a rut. Early in their school experiences, the "non-conformists" began to resist, some by "playing around", some by refusing to "do work", knowing that they were only making matters worse, but feeling taking another path was impossible or futile.

"You were expected to be a good student, to do what the teacher asked like, everyone says "Good morning Mr. so and so, and do the pledge, just go through the motions. I mean if you go along with all of that you can be stupid as heck and get straight A's. There's not much of a place for brains to think. They're all crammed full of stupid stuff. It's like there's this big party going on in your head and it's so full that your thinking just can't fit through. When I get to school it feels like all of the opportunities to think are all taken up and there's not much left for you. Especially if you are different. When you're an outcast there's not much left for you. It's like you finally make it through the crowd around the candy dish, and all that's left is the crud at the bottom. I'd rather not eat any."

Somewhere in the mix of memories, stories, hopes and sadness, a more personal side of school and teachers who represented the personal side of learning emerged. The typical description of such a teacher was as being "nice", a term we attempted to take apart and explore. The students who conformed to schooling appreciated the breath of fresh air given to them by the nice teacher. They had fond memories of these teachers as people. So did the students who were not able to conform. The personal side of the emergent themes follows.

Variation Three
Discourse in the personal classroom: Personal talk on the side

In classrooms where students reported that teachers were more personal, the predominant mode of talk in the classroom was still a teacher monologue focused on
content and skills, but on the side, once in a while, the talk would become more personal. Such talk would usually occur in the coatroom, or at lunch, or maybe before or after a lesson. The teacher would personalize the monologue, telling a bit about her own life outside of the classroom, her family, pets, hobbies.

"Her (my teacher's) son was traveling in Italy and she would write to him in Italian. She'd talk to us about her letters and what he was doing. I think that kind of thing helps you to learn more. I still have the letter he wrote back to me once."

Rules which guided discourse in the impersonal classroom would not typically guide the personal classroom's talk. Talk was allowed to occur which somehow made students feel more valued, more known as a person, rather than just another student.

"I really liked in elementary school that so many teachers knew me. They'd say hi to me in the hallway and talk to me at recess. They knew about me and my family. It made me feel like they knew me as a person."

The "personal teacher" would be likely to violate the one way rule, allowing students to ask questions, although often after a gentle reprimand, "If you would have been listening, you would know" or "Who can help Tammy by repeating what I just said?" Such teachers would help the student with work they didn't understand, or repeat instructions in several different ways so the students could understand it better.

"Mrs. Davie would help you to work through problems that you had. She'd help you work through it to find the answer to the problem, or get another student to help you out. She didn't mind if you asked questions, she'd just try to explain things in another way. She'd come around to your seat when you work and do stuff on the board again when we didn't understand it."

They would allow students to help them grade papers, or clean the room at recess. The "personal teacher" would give kids her address so they could write to her after the school year. Such teachers would give out treats, or listen to the students' stories about their
lives outside of school, before class began of course. Sometimes the students' stories would focus on personal problems the children were having with friends or in the home, and the teacher would be there to help them through hard times, or just to listen.

"Mrs. Davie was more of a friend than a teacher. She spoke to us like a friend. She was more personal and would help us with things and problems that weren't just about school."

"I remember when my parents were going through their divorce and she would let me talk to her about things. It helped me feel better and I could concentrate more on school."

The "personal teacher" would, on occasion, connect with the disconnected student, offer incentives for being good or turning work in. Giving a kid a jar of marbles, maybe just because no one else would:

"I remember one teacher that I liked. Her name was Mrs. Bryan. She'd talk to me instead of always yelling at me like the other ones did. She knew that I liked to shoot marbles, so one day she just gave me a jar full of them. I'll always remember she did that."

Somehow these teachers would work around the boundaries of schooling to reach out to kids as people, within the setting of school, but not within the definition of learning. Learning remained one way talk, a quest for the truth, a recall of the right answer. The personal aspects of classroom discourse, and people's lives were not a part of what learning was about and the students sensed a struggle for themselves and their teachers at times to fit the people into the school day.

**Variation Four**

**People in the personal classroom: Roles as obligations**

The struggle to include personal talk in the classroom was matched by the struggle for the teacher and student as people also to regularly exist there. Before, after and in between "learning", the person beyond or behind the role of teacher might be glimpsed
upon occasion. The teacher still expected conformity and rule following, still doubted the place of student questions in the process unless they were connected to finding the answer, but did so in kinder and more humanistic ways. Requests might replace commands, more than one attempt may be made to explain, recess time might be offered for extra help or individualized instruction. The teacher would go beyond the role expectations, do more than, in addition to.

"You could tell that she really cared about us. They really try to help you with your work, not just say that they care. We were her top priority and she acted like it. She was never too busy for us. It made you try harder."

The personal side was an add on to what usually happened in school, never part of the learning process, but a nice and valued extra. An extra that mattered to the students. It made them feel like they mattered as people, when the learning situation typically did not.

It made them want to please the teacher, to work harder to do better.

"It matters to you what they think about you, when you get to know them as a person. They trust you, and you want to keep that trust. When you like a teacher you learn more because you try harder. You matter more to her."

**Theme two: nice teachers and good teachers**

Apparent contradictions and mixed messages revealed that this personal vs impersonal issue was more than an issue of whether teachers were liked and friendly, more than just a one dimensional model. Because of the bifurcation between teacher role and teacher as person, the students reported that the nice teacher was not always an effective one, and that there were "good" teachers who were not very nice. Sometimes a nice teacher was funny and personal, but did not know how to explain content well, still engaging in one way talk where student could not ask, could not share, could not become
a part of the learning. Students typically reported inconsistency in behavior expectations in such classrooms, sometimes it was fun and games, and others it was strictly business.

"Mr. East is nice. He's really funny and tells good stories, but it doesn't always make sense. I mean it can get kind of boring. You start thinking, "What does this have to do with what we are learning?" Then you have tests over stuff and you really don't get what it's about."

"He'll spend all this time trying to be funny and nice, but then he just doesn't know how to explain things. We get these worksheets to do and you don't know what they are about. Then he gets real frustrated if you don't get settled down right away, or if he can't explain it and you keep coming up for help."

The teacher's gender might have been a factor in how students perceived and defined these classrooms with nice teachers who were not always easy to learn from and read. Typically the teachers that students discussed who would be placed into this category were male teachers in the fourth, fifth, sixth and seventh grades.

Sometimes a teacher who was not "nice", one who they never knew beyond the label and role of teacher, would explain well, would allow students to ask questions, and would see that they received help when they needed it. The students reported that this rather rare teacher was not "nice", in a personal sense, but she was a "good" teacher, who could explain things well and help students to learn the content presented to them. Such teachers were viewed as firm but fair.

"Mrs. Griffith was kind of mean, I mean all of the kids said she was. But she was okay if you didn't make her mad. She could explain things real well and she'd help you if you needed it. I just kept on her good side and I did okay. I kind of even liked her, except when she'd get mad and yell, then she was a little bit scary."

There seemed to be a trade off, between these notions of nice and good. The teacher who was reported as both was unfortunately a rare experience for the students in this study.
The teacher as a person, the "nice" teacher, seldom seemed to be in the room at the same time as the "good" teacher, the effective instructor. It seemed as if a teacher couldn't be too friendly and personal and focus on the rigors of learning at the same time. Consequently, the student as a person could not be in the same place as the student role of "learner". Thus, the student as knowledge recipient and rule follower would typically show up instead of the real person behind the role. Students reported that they would just act they way they were supposed to in school, and try to do what the teacher expected without much questioning, or if they did question, it was read as disobedience, so they typically attempted to fit the role. The tensions between "nice" and "good" teachers appeared to be played out through the interactions of these student and teacher roles and the discourse that served as the primary means of these interactions. It was not simple and clear cut; it was dynamic, overlapping and varied. How could we tie these concepts into what, if anything, had changed and mattered in their experiences as learners in our "restructured" environment? We had much work ahead to do, together.

Another Stream

This was tough. The trust was there, as was the honesty and openness. My students let me into their lives, memories and personal feelings about being a student, about how it affected them as learners and people. I could not help but relay my own experiences as they spoke of theirs; I could not help but offer assurances, share my anger, cry their tears.

I continually found myself playing a balancing act between this affective aspect of my researcher role and the intellectual role I had to play to assure rigor in the study. I
continually employed questioning techniques to challenge student responses, to probe alternative hypotheses, to get to the "why" behind their questions and to move them into a critical mode of thinking. Balancing between this act of questioning and critique and the commitment to student voice and ownership was a constant focus of my role in the study.

This is where the continuing question of loyalties began to nag me on a regular basis. The study felt like it was taking an "us" vs "them" turn. As issues of student voice and power relationships emerged, how could it not feel that way to me? It seemed the kids considered me one of them, as opposed to a teacher. I found myself feeling like one of them. I remembered my own experiences in elementary school, the successes which masked my own fears and failures. I began to feel like we were fighting a battle to change teacher's ways of dealing with students, of viewing them, trying to find a way to make them see things from the student's side. As I moved into my group interviews, I worried that teachers may think I was engaged in some sort of conspiracy against them. As we talked, the students would bring up issues that made them think and question the current state of schooling even more. There was often talk of teachers doing what was best for them, easiest, not caring about students. I would reframe it within the nature of teaching and learning, asking them why teachers would take certain actions. The balancing act came back into play, enabling a deeper level of analysis to emerge.

As we struggled upward to another level of talking, analysis and meaning making, we began to see how school and the definition of learning within that culture dramatically affected how we interacted as people in that setting. We discussed how it opened up certain discourse and behaviors while shutting down others. We discovered how we were
all trying to find our fit within this place called school and how we were challenging that
fit at the same time. It became more than an issue of one person, personalities, or over
generalizations and stereotypes about "those teachers". We needed to see how as people
we could impact what learning could or could not be, how what we said, did and thought
made barriers or opened pathways to change.

Part Three
Themes of the New: Group Interviews as Analysis, Synthesis and Redirection

The initial group interviews in the pilot phase of the study focused on what the
students considered meaningful in the new approaches we were undertaking on our team;
the development of student voice through the differing roles we played in the classroom
and they way we talked together to negotiate learning in the classroom. Now the group
interview sessions which followed the personal histories, refocused on those topics,
expanding them, narrowing them, using them to analyze the themes from the personal
histories to contrast them with what happened on our sixth grade team. We talked about
what learning was like on our team, and what it was like in their elementary years.

Initially we brainstormed what they thought the themes from the personal histories
may be, as they talked about their experiences and ideas as a group. This work was
recycled back to them as I listed themes I had found from their interviews. We wrestled
with the themes, tried to synthesize them, and then I went back to work to try to make
sense of my field notes and the ideas they came up with in the large group interviews.
This whole idea of good teachers and nice teachers, all the talk about teachers as
impersonal, all of the controversy that centered on talking and asking questions became
the focus of our work. I tried to build a conceptual framework to share with them, one we could pick apart and change, add to or validate. There seemed to be an intersection between how teacher talked and worked with students in the classroom and how the teachers acted, thus affecting relationships and roles, and ultimately how learning was defined in the classroom.

**Another Stream**

These sessions became the true test of how mutually educative this work was, as insights into our actual roles as co-researchers emerged. What could the students' role in actual analysis and conceptualization be? How much of this needed to come from them, and where and when would I necessarily have to take the lead in this work, allowing students to only provide member checks, as opposed to analyzing data? After sessions focusing on processing our findings thus far, of getting their reaction, of adding their ideas, it seemed to be up to me to find a way to frame our work out, perhaps providing some visual schemata for them to critique, a framework that they could help me to fill in. The issue became my interpretation and how they could influence this. I knew I would need to take the lead here. I had access to all of their personal histories, I had done reading to influence my theoretical understandings. This was what I could offer to the process. I needed to make certain that this wasn't where their voice left the process. I needed to work with them, to teach them how to think conceptual thoughts, how to talk conceptual talk. Just as they had taught me how to see things from another point of view, a point of view I'd lost pieces of over my years as teacher and scholar.
Synthesis: roles and discourse as definers of learning

The nature of the discourse fostered and developed within the classroom either by teachers, or by students with teachers, impacts the nature of pedagogy and the definition of learning upon which it rests. Discourse may be viewed as ranging along a continuum from a monological teacher-centered discourse focused on the conveyance of information and directives to monitor student behavior to meet teacher expectations, to a dialogical approach were there is an exchange of ideas, information, and a negotiation of expectations. This discourse is enacted by teachers who play a role within the classroom, ranging along a continuum of personal to impersonal, from role incumbent to individual. How these two factors intersect and interact within the classroom influences the very nature of teaching and learning within the classroom, as it allows some things to occur and others not. It opens up some learning experiences and closes down others. It allows for some aspects of the nature of learning to remain constant, even intractable, or allows for change to become the definition of learning itself.

Model: learning defined by the intersection of role and discourse

Creating and critiquing a model of the interaction between teacher role and discourse and how this interaction affects student roles and discourse was the next step we took together. Ultimately the focus became how does all of this combined affect learning in the classroom. If we could construct a model to help us conceptualize learning, then we could begin to examine whether or not school reform had impacted learning, or any of the factors the students reported as being central to it.
Teachers move along a continuum between monological and dialogical discourse in the classroom, even fluctuating in their preferred mode over time. They also may be thought of as moving along a continuum between acting as a role incumbent to acting as an individual person. How these components interact provides a frame of reference by which to examine how these factors serve to define learning and impact the pedagogical choices teachers and students may or may not make. The descriptions which follow represent the anchors of the conceptual model of these interactions.

**SURVIVING the mean teacher: Role Incumbent/ Monologue**

The most typical experience of the students in this study falls into this category, with variations on the theme of "mean" with some teachers being perceived as more or less fair. The role the teacher plays in such a context is impersonal. The teacher leaves her "real self" (Britzman, 1994) outside of the classroom walls and becomes a role incumbent, whose primary responsibility is to present students with "the facts." Learning is centered on this content coverage, and as long as the teacher has presented the information, gone through the text, covered the courses of study, then learning is thought to have occurred. Learning itself is defined by content coverage, because that is how teaching is defined.
Students’ perspectives on reform indicate that their experiences in “reformed” environments largely represent a pedagogical change from a monological to a more dialogical discourse, representing horizontal movement along the model - learning shifts from content coverage to mastery.

The experience they report as most significantly changing the nature of learning is when both discourse and role are altered, moving diagonally across the model. Learning becomes defined as the construction of theory.

Figure 4.0: Pedagogy: The Intersection of Discourse and Role

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"The books know everything. It doesn't matter what people think."

"Learning is just sitting, paying attention. Sit there and do nothing, and be quiet."

"Read, study, memorize...."

One teaches by telling and students learn by listening. The student's role in this context is to figure out what the teacher wants, to memorize the information that is presented to her and to find the right answer, without needing to ask questions.

"You kind of have to fend for yourself."

"You can try to rely on your friends to help you get it after school."

"I can always ask grandpa for help if she didn't explain it right. He can help you figure it out."

"She said she was too busy to tell me again if I wasn't listening and that I should have my parents help me, she had work to do and I would hold everybody back."

Motivation is externally based upon rewards and punishments through grades, praise and reprimand. The goal is for students to learn self control, which may be equated with responsibility. There is a hit or miss philosophy which guides instruction in the classroom which is exemplified in the evaluation process, where students are sorted out as to how far they stray from finding all of the right answers and doing all of the right things.

"The teacher's job is to see if it's right. They spend most of their time grading rather than on thinking of how to teach. Lots of times they choose the lesson or activity based on how easy it is to grade. That's their job."
Little extra help is given, if any, and little intervention follows as part of the learning process. There is no real sense of agency in this classroom, no impetus for change or action. The teacher merely plays out her role, the students theirs, and if students succeed or fail, life in the classroom goes on pretty much as it always does.

"Lots of times if you don't get it or feel like doing it you can just fake it. If it's boring, too much work, you know just busy work, pretend that you are doing what they want. Just keep your mouth shut and pretend you are listening or reading. If you don't make any trouble she'll leave you alone."

"Just stay on the teacher's good side."

The student does whatever she can to survive by conforming to the rules of the game and exhibiting self control or fighting to keep from losing her "real self" by refusing to conform.

**ACCEPTANCE from the nice teacher: Personal/Monologue**

The teacher in this classroom has moved away from the traditional role of teacher and acts more personally in the classroom, sharing information about himself, his family, often using humor and gentle sarcasms to maintain student behavior. He may use anecdotes to make a point in the classroom, but somehow these stories never seem to connect back with the content-centered discourse in the classroom, leaving the students often amused, but just as often frustrated. Such teachers may be perceived as inconsistent, they are so nice, but then they have expectations that were not clearly articulated. Sometimes the expectations don't seem high enough; it's like whatever students do is okay, if they try hard and feel good about themselves, but then again the tests don't seem to say that. The teacher's primary instructional role is to present the facts
and cover the content, but he tries to soften the blow by interacting with kids on a personal level. Learning may feel disconnected from the "self" as something the teachers and students do, but the personal side doesn't seem to fit with the lessons. The students and teacher may want to talk about ideas and issues coming from the class, and they do some what, but then there is always the other "stuff" in the curriculum to be covered, the things they are required to do. Motivation is still external from the learning process, based on seemingly disconnected grades, and teacher approval.

The student responses reflecting this theme were very one sided, perhaps due to the lack of internal motivation, and a sense of mixed messages and frustrations. It seemed as if they felt helpless to impact the situation. They'd try for a while and then often give up. This seems contradictory to the espoused teacher goal for students to self actualize, to be the best person they can be. But they may not matter in this environment, since they will be loved even if they fall short of this goal. It's all part of the inconsistency.

"Everybody got to be star student. It didn't matter how good they were or if they did their work or not. Everybody got to take a turn."

"She was really nice and would compliment you all the time. But it didn't seem like the compliments mattered sometime because she would compliment everybody, even if their work wasn't any good, or if they were just rushing or scribbling. Sometimes that made you wonder if yours was really any good, or if working hard really mattered."

The teacher most likely hates giving low grades, but still cares about kids, even if they are "D" students; it's most likely not their fault, perhaps they have a bad home life, after all their just kids..... The student's job is still to figure out the right answers, which may be even harder to do with this feeling of inconsistency, sometimes the student feels like the teacher doesn't know what the right answer is.
"He'd say one thing and act all nice and we'd talk about lots of stuff and have fun, but then we still had these tests, and I wasn't sure what she wanted. I mean she didn't really explain it very well."

"He'd tell these stories and go on and on and it didn't seem to connect with what we were learning, but it didn't seem to matter. But then he'd hand us this work sheet to do, and none of it went together. It didn't all seem to make sense."

The agency for learning lies within the student, the teacher has faith in them, whatever they do will be good enough. There still seems to be a hit or miss philosophy with little intervention, and a one way monologue when it comes to learning.

"I like him. He always knew about my family, and brothers and ask about stuff like that. He'd make jokes, and we'd have fun, but we really weren't sure what we got out of the lessons. And when you'd ask him to explain he'd say it the same way again and get real frustrated. I don't know if he knew what the answer was supposed to be. We'd all get lost."

There is a real chance the student won't be able to figure out the right answer sometimes. But that's okay, if they don't do well, the teacher still likes them.

**UNDERSTANDING the Good Teacher: Role Incumbent/Dialogue**

The teacher's primary responsibility in the classroom is to present the facts, but with support and intervention that ensures that students will understand rather than just repeat them. The teacher uses student input, values student questions and bases instruction on what she learns from students through a discourse of help, support and understanding.

"Her job is to set up and lead discussions to help us to understand what we are learning. We talk things through and she uses lots of examples. She is very clear about what she expects and we know how to get there and that she and other students will help us. We don't have to figure out what she wants."

"We get to help set up the class rules, so it's fair. We all talk and give input and tell what the teacher can expect from us. But we also get to tell what we can expect from the teacher. It's like a contract. But, you're the one who has to make good choices, to help everyone learn and not to be disruptive."
She negotiates rules and expectations, within the boundaries of the teacher and student roles. She listens to students, but some things are not negotiable; her authority as teacher needs to remain unquestioned so she can do her best work. The students know little of her as a person, little about her life, her opinions, her "real self". Instead her energy is focused on learning as mastery of real world skills. The student's role is still to figure out right answers, but based on an understanding and application of those answers to be successful in the world outside of school with the help of the teacher and other students.

"We hardly ever used a text book; we'd read real books to find out information. Instead we'd use what we learn and use it like you would in the real world. We didn't just memorize, we did things. We were doing not sitting, so we wanted to do it and we learned a lot."

"We were expected to learn it and everyone could be a good student. If we needed more time or more help we'd get it. It wasn't about getting grades; it was about learning."

Motivation becomes internal, based on successful mastery of goals, of figuring out the right answers and knowing what they mean. Successful learning becomes the motivator; it feels good to really learn something and understand it thoroughly. Grades are secondary and perhaps have been replaced with new structures which embrace authentic assessment and multiple learning opportunities. Agency for learning lies within the teacher; if students aren't learning it is up to her to find new ways and approaches to assure their success. Learning is based on a philosophy of success for all students and understanding how the world is to meet its expectations. The world is a certain way: it remains unquestioned and unchanged, so students will need to be responsible to be successful within it.
QUESTIONING with the Transgressional Teacher: Personal/Dialogue

Unlike the other three definitions of learning, within the transgressional (hooks, 1994) classroom learning refutes the facts rather than seeks them, focusing on change. The purpose of teachers and students coming together is to question, to discover the why and how behind facts, to give them meaning, to move beyond application to synthesis and evaluation. Everything is up for questioning and negotiation through dialogue; it is the learning process. As rules and learning experiences are negotiated, it is based on talking through the how, the why, and evaluation of options and possible courses of action. The rules themselves can be questioned and changed to fit the changing nature of the classroom and the relationships within.

Questioning becomes the vehicle to develop thinking. Everything is based on thinking at this level. The teacher can be questioned, in fact she expects to be. Questions such as "Why are we doing this? Can we do something different? Why are you upset with me?" are not seen as rude or disrespectful, but legitimately worth exploring and responding to reach resolution. The teacher does not hold all the answers, she is fallible, and permitted to fail, as are students, as failure is used as a learning tool, a real experience in problem solving. Content serves as the foundation upon which to build, the fuel for the fire of thought. The teacher's role is to be herself, to add her viewpoints, interpretations, questions to the mix, as she encourages and facilitates others to do the same.

"You really get to know the teacher as a person. She tells her opinion, asks for yours and then you argue, and talk and think about everything together. Your opinion matters; you are thought to give your opinion, and think about where it comes from and why...you know back it up, use the facts and skills you have. You really have to listen to each other, but you know you are being listened to."
The student's role is much the same of that of the teacher, in fact they may often feel as if they are switching or sharing roles, as every one in the classroom is a teacher and a student at the same time.

"You're supposed to talk and everything the students said counted—it wasn't wrong. Everyday we'd get into some kind of debate. You didn't have to have the teacher tell you how it should be: you could have your own way of doing it. You could explain it your own way and kids could learn from you too."

"We own the learning process. The teacher helps to set it up, but we make it real. Her job is to help us think and to think with us. We may know about something she doesn't or have some kind of experience that fits in that we can learn from. We all teach each other."

The personal aspects of this classroom lend an ethos of caring, about each other and about learning, that is not typically found in the "Understanding" classroom. Teachers and students feel as if they are on a quest of never ending questions, as they move beyond reliance on facts to building theory to pushing boundaries to making meaning and adding to the knowledge base. The investment and ownership of learning by students and teachers leads to internal motivation for both parties in the process, and adds to the goals of student actualization by allowing students to see the impact of their own worth.

"We are allowed to be people. It encourages self expression and that we should appreciate everyone's differences. Everyone has something to offer."

"People are not so biased, they learn to understand why you are different."

"For the first time in school I felt like I could express myself, with some acceptance."

The classroom becomes a place of possibilities, a place of learning as change...changing what we already "know" by contributing our own thoughts to it.

"You make decisions and think if it's worth it. Can you use it to make yourself better? Then you learn to live with the choice or make a change."
"It teaches us to question, to really think, not to just accept everything because someone said so, or that's just the way it is. You use everything you know and use your skills to find out more. Maybe the way it is isn't right."

In this way, agency lies within the process of learning itself. It is within this environment that the nature of teaching and learning has truly changed. It is here that the issues and ideas that are significant to the student participants come to life. This is when learning moves beyond the classroom and into the world and lives beyond.

**Another Stream**

I entered the group sessions with my visual model in hand, knowing that I would need to show how the ideas came from them, how I tried to find a way to organize them for further analysis, and how all of this conceptual talk fit into our real world of the classroom. I talked, they questioned, I added, I changed, I explained. I saw the glimpses into the bigger scheme, the bigger concept of changing what defines teaching and learning, on how to make different things, the things they talked about happen, or at least providing that possibility. This possibility was embraced by the students description of the "questioning classroom" where students came together to transgress boundaries as thinking individuals.

Talk about levels of understanding came from them. Bloom's Taxonomy was brought up by three of the students, from a class they were taking. They were angered by the fact the teacher was teaching it and not using it. They tried to overlay the taxonomy on my schema laying another layer of knowledge and how learning is defined onto our work. They changed the terms I had brought, used their own words in places...added ideas for what might be added and how to better represent it. We got into this discussion
about knowledge and does it come from people or does it come from outside of them.

They clearly stated constructivist positions and refuted the essentialism of knowledge, though not in those terms.

"We already know something when we come into the classroom, I mean we are the ones who have to understand what we learn, we make it real. Otherwise it's just a bunch of words or worksheets. We think through it and then it starts to make sense."

"Yeah, but it makes sense to everybody in a different way, we all see things different and have different ideas and opinions. What you get out of a lesson might not be the same as I do. I might know something more about it, or maybe I've been there or done that before."

"It's not like knowledge is just sitting there and you're supposed to just put it in our brains. We can make knowledge. We can come up with new ideas and discoveries. Who knows what knowledge is going to be like in the future. We all make it together."

Who would have guessed, seventh graders? I remember thinking, whose going to believe these kids get all of this? Who will believe they helped me fill in the structure, understand it, refine it, that their talk led me that way in the first place?

As we continued to refine and define the typology resulting from the intersection of discourse and teacher role, and the kind of learning that was likely in such a space, we began to test them out through application. Group interviews began to focus on what kinds of learning were typical for them both before and during their participation as students in a restructured learning environment. We began to apply our schema to their experiences to see how the model of classrooms as ones of survival, acceptance, thinking or questioning, helped to explain their understanding of learning and change. Our work together was starting to come to life as a research tool, a guide for further discourse and new directions.
Learning: Before, During and After "Reformed Learning"

Before

The vast majority of the students' experiences before their participation on the Collaborative Education Team typically resembled the "Survival" theme of learning. Teacher roles were largely perceived by the students as that of presenting information, the facts or truths, in a monological fashion. Much of the classroom talk centered on this information giving, coupled with directives related to behavior and teacher expectations. The teacher was viewed by students as acting as a role incumbent, keeping personal distance from students, talking task related talk in order to cover information and present concepts. Occasionally they would meet a more personal teacher, one who accepted them more as people and shared more of themselves....moving down into the personal aspect of the model. On rare occasions they would find a teacher who used a more dialogical approach to instruction, who would let students ask questions within parameters to provide intervention and assistance for students to reach instructional goals. These teachers would move along the discourse continuum, nearer to the center, but not to the end of the dialogical range. Typically students spent most of their elementary years in a survival mode of learning, learning to read the teacher and play the student roles.

During

The year the students spent on the Collaborative Education Team was reported to be significantly different from their earlier years in elementary school. They noticed the differences in assessment, curricular approach and instructional style. They could identify and discuss the common philosophy toward learning articulated in each of their three team
teachers' classrooms and see the commonalities. None of the three classrooms represented
the typical survival mode they had often experienced in their elementary years. However,
they also reported in both individual histories and group interviews that there were
significant differences in the learning that occurred in each of the three classrooms. They
noticed differences in the discourse and roles their teachers embodied, and how this
impacted their own discourse and roles as well. Even on a teaching team where intense
colaboration and cooperative curriculum creation occurred with the teachers involved, the
students perceived what really happened in very different ways. The typology became a
tool which both emerged from and helped to explain these differences in learning across
their teaching team.

The following scenarios represent what the students perceived and reported in the
classrooms, what they considered to be definers and examples of how they perceived
actions of teachers as being caring, personal, interesting, and fair.

Acceptance

One teacher seemed to have progressed along the role continuum, interacting in a
more personal manner with students. There was an air of acceptance, of relaxation, of
people coming together to learn. The missing factor seemed to be the skill and agility in
using a more dialogical approach to instruction. Students felt like they had less real voice
and choice in learning in this classroom, and that the teacher would often fall back on
traditional modes of one-way instruction, using worksheets, reading information out loud,
struggling at times with students' questions, with finding alternative ways to explain
concepts and foster learning. Students often felt frustrated or out of touch with their
learning, even though they felt accepted and valued. The ideas behind the instructional approach seemed similar to the other classrooms, but the teacher’s facility with dialogical teaching, negotiation, and questioning was not clearly present, limiting the definition of learning in some traditional ways. Learning remained focused on finding right answers and information, but sometimes in a confusing environment of mixed messages.

**Understanding**

The second classroom was a place where the abilities of negotiating, questioning, and intervention were strong and clearly present. There was a constant dialogue, a give and take within clearly defined role parameters. Students received interaction, support and felt successful as learners. This classroom closely mirrors the "Understanding" section of the model. The missing piece, was reported to be the more personal aspects of teaching. The teacher seemed to the students in the study to stay well within the teacher role and expected students to stay within more traditional role expectations as well. They could question, talk and negotiate, as long as these processes worked toward the goal of mastery, and as long as students did not question beyond these role boundaries. The teacher still seemed "text book" like at times, defined by the students as dull and factual, disconnected from what is interesting and important to them as individuals. Fair, flexible, but somewhat distant from students and learning itself. A strong connection was made between students to learning, but not between learning and students' real lives as people and to the teacher herself. Learning remained focused on a mastery of what "is" rather than the possibility of what could be.
Questioning

The third classroom, the students said, was noticeably different. It was often more interesting, their favorite place to be. They felt more ownership, more enthusiasm, and learned about things that weren't in the other classes. This environment would be the closest of all described by the students, to the "Questioning" portion of the model.

Here the support, intervention and negotiation of a dialogical discourse was present, but it was coupled with a personal teacher, rather than a more role incumbent oriented one. The loosening of the parameters created by the role orientation of the "Understanding" classroom allowed for something different to occur. Here, students and teacher began questioning together, thinking together, working together toward changing what is....learning became an act of critique, and creation of theory. The acquisition of knowledge and skills took on meaning, far beyond memorization and application, meaning related directly to life. The teacher let down the role barriers and became herself, as did students. An ethos of caring about other's feelings, ideas and beliefs fostered appreciation of difference and opportunities to think and grapple with hard issues within an atmosphere of trust. Difference, controversy, and conflict were embraced as positive, a means to broaden thinking and deepen understanding. All of the cannons of learning could be opened up. Anything was possible. Students and teacher became the learning.

Another Stream

I had to learn to deal with and use the discomfort of being the focus of the student talk, of fitting into if not exemplifying the "Questioning" environment of our model, in the eyes of the students in the study. I pushed I probed, I played devil's advocate...."What is it
that I really do? Is it really so different? So what?" Perhaps more unsettling was their mapping of my two teammates, my colleagues onto our model. Did this mean they thought I was better than my teammates? Could it just be different? Is different really what we are looking for in our study? Writing up the findings brought those same feelings back to me again. Do we do injustice to our hard-working colleagues by uncovering what is not happening in school reform, do we move our knowledge ahead on the backs of others, belittle their contributions? Are the benefits of working with our students and program worth more than the difficulties of such self reflection, especially when it is a collective self? We moved ahead.

Other Reform

The students had been in other places where "new" approaches to learning were used. Analysis with our model, recycling back to their individual histories, led to the conclusion that most of those classrooms remained largely unchanged, closely hinged to the "Survival" environment. Labels changed, time schedules, texts, and some activities as well. However, these changes did little to affect what students decided really mattered, in terms of discourse and role. Most "reformed" classrooms, in their experience, seemed to move along the discourse continuum toward more dialogical teacher/student interaction. There was often more of a focus on intervention and mastery of skills and knowledge. Students were encouraged to ask questions in order to obtain understanding. But their other experiences were limited to this movement. The personal aspects which enabled the students to move into a questioning and theorizing oriented definition of learning were not present. In their perspective, learning remained in many ways the same.
According to the students in the study, most school reform measures tend to move along the discourse continuum toward a dialogical approach to instruction. There is emphasis on mastery, intervention, application..... but little emphasis on moving beyond understanding to independent thinking as people seems to be present. School still seems a place of cultural reproduction, rather than a place of change. This change, a sense of efficacy as individuals, is what the students in the study deemed most important. This is what they wanted. Learning needs to become a place of agency, a place where students and teachers come together to talk and think as people, to make the world, in school and out a little bit better because of it.
CHAPTER 5
Conclusions and Recommendations

What Matters to Students in School Reform?

A return to the initial question of this study, "What matters to students in school reform? What do they report as significantly impacting them as people and learners?" directs the focus of the implications and conclusion of this study to the concepts of dialogical pedagogy and personal relationships. If teachers are to develop the skills and expertise of a dialogical approach to learning, they must at times negotiate the tensions and barriers between teachers and students as people in the classroom. Such tensions between individuals and role expectations were reported in this study as not atypical even in a "reformed" learning environment. There are approaches and strategies which may be employed to address issues of roles which enable teachers and students to redefine their roles and to enhance learning and the daily lives of the people who bring learning to life.

Focus on the teacher

Teaching has always been espoused to be a learner-centered endeavor. If one were to ask classroom teachers and other practitioners why they became educators, somewhere in each response, if not primary to it, would be the desire to work with children, to make a difference in their lives. "Social altruism still speaks to the career considerations of many prospective teachers" (Howey & Zimpher, 1992). But some argue that the structures and underlying belief systems of schooling and the people there, namely
students and teachers, prevent learner-centered education from reaching its potential to meet the social, personal and intellectual needs as expressed by the students in this study.

Many radical educators equate traditional education with "teacher centered" education, but when conventional classrooms are closely examined, one finds that "teachers are not at the center of . . . education, but on its edge alone with the children" (Goodman, 1992 p127). Reform efforts that express the needs of students as being central to their aims perhaps must first closely examine the role of the teacher in decision making and ownership of the pedagogical process. In order for students who have been marginalized by school, such as the students in this study and perhaps others whose stories have not yet been told, there must be a competent and caring teacher to bring them along into the act of owning learning.

Competency in the area of dialogue, as defined by this study, embraces teaching that brings to bare knowledge and expertise in a variety of methodological approaches, a broad and diverse knowledge base and expertise in interpersonal communication to share and negotiate knowledge and learning experiences with students. This must be coupled, according to the students in this study, with the ability to develop strong and open relationships with students, person to person, rather than hinged only to role expectations pre-determined by the existing culture in schools, in traditional and perhaps "reformed" classrooms as well. Moving teachers into the center of educational decision making may be a first step toward moving the students into the center.

Precisely defining what teachers and teacher education should be like to make first these "teacher-centered" and then "learner-centered" transitions across structural, cultural
and internalized belief system barriers, is not an easy task. Many components of a learner centered teacher role are inherent to much of the work, skills and attitudes most teachers already display. In fact, in response to innovation rooted in a learner-centered philosophy teachers may respond, "I do that already" or "This is nothing new". Many educators do believe they are engaging in and accomplishing aims of school change and reform efforts, when in fact little more than surface change and new labels for old practices tend to be the norm. Sizer (1992) states, "The rhetoric of a different school world is widely heard, but meaningful substance is rarely achieved" (p115). So it may be said that the following role shifts required of teachers engaged in learner centered school improvement may seem on the surface to be in place in many schools. The challenge is to look and move beyond a surface level of understanding and interpretation to a significant and meaningful implementation of a learner-centered teacher role. Providing necessary professional development to sustain and support such changes is yet another challenge.

The areas of expertise described below may provide a place to start exploring how the teacher role can be further developed to move toward a teacher who is capable of exhibiting the technical expertise the study found essential to the concept of two way or "dialogical" teaching and learning, and the personal based relationships to free students and teachers up to take risks to collaboratively expand their definition and experience of learning through questioning and generation of theory.

**Teacher as Learner-Centered Expert**

To enact a philosophy of learner centeredness, teachers must have a firm knowledge base upon which to build interpersonal relationships, educational decisions and
strategies as a foundation of such a philosophy. Teachers have traditionally had
background in cognitive development, and perhaps child psychology as part of their initial
preparation, but an in-depth and well rounded focus on the nature of students is typically
lacking as part of the teachers ongoing professional development, limiting the impact of
such knowledge on daily instructional decisions. Learner-centered school improvement
efforts require an understanding of and focus on the individual and the social relations in
the classroom. The dynamic interplay between students and students, and students and
teachers serve as the context for developing learning goals and activities, a context which
profoundly impacts not only the nature of learning but also whether or not students
internalize, understand and retain learning. Issues of student motivation, self worth, and
the willingness to take the risks inherent to learning in an unconventional mode are all
impacted by the social psychology of the classroom interacting with the individual
psychology of the student. An operationalized understanding of both psychologies is
implicit to a learner-centered education.

To forge the kinds of relationships which are central to such a philosophy and
approach, to attain the kinds of negotiations implicit to the new definition classroom
context, bonds between students and teachers must be developed and strengthened. The
key to promoting risk taking is an atmosphere of inquiry, open discussion and debate, and
fairness, all grounded in acceptance of the individuals involved in the process. The
relationship of such acceptance to student success has long been examined, such as in the
notion of self-fulfilling prophecy. Teachers make legitimate efforts to accept their
students and appreciate their differences, yet the structures of school and their impact on
teachers' actions send many messages in conflict with these efforts. Normative behaviors are rewarded, many of which run counter to intellectual rigor and inquiry (Jackson, 1968). Certain forms of intelligence are rewarded while others are ignored or discouraged (Gardner, 1991) sending clear messages of acceptance to some and rejection to others. Assessment systems are in place which require the sorting of students, and imply the accepted and expected failure of at least some. Standards and expectations, perhaps put in place in an attempt to combat these notions, often expect too little of students, sending questionable messages of acceptance, mixed with the message, "We don't think too much of what you can accomplish or contribute to your own learning." Students are typically underestimated in their capabilities and frustrated by the messages of school structures which tend to say "You can not make it" to some and "School is too easy for you" to others. An understanding of students as individuals involved in a complex dynamic social process and the types of learning this permits to transpire is vital to the knowledge and skill base of learner-centered educators.

**Teacher as Evaluation Expert**

The evaluative nature of the role of teacher is central to much of what occurs in classrooms (Hargreaves, 1972) and also central to the concept of acceptance of students. Much of the teacher's work time focuses on evaluation of students, both formal and informal, yet wider acceptance of the teacher as expert evaluator remains in question. Often standardized and state-wide measures are viewed as a more accurate, or more note worthy means by which to evaluate student performance and ability. The benchmarks they provide are more widely accepted measures of student and school effectiveness as
opposed to teacher evaluation. Teacher made tests and assessment tools may be viewed as too subjective, not generalizable, and in the case of more qualitative assessments, not as reliable as the numbered scores produced by wide scale testing. Unlike the diagnosis and recommendations of other professionals such as lawyers and doctors, a teacher's evaluations are often easily and openly questioned and criticized by students, parents, administrators and schools boards. Teachers' evaluations are left open to debate by parties far more removed from the educational processes and context under which they were made, often leaving teachers in a defensive and protective mind set when further evaluations are carried out.

Systems of evaluative communication often exacerbate this phenomena, as they typically rely on letter grades with limited comments on student learning, sent home four to six times a year. Such reports may be coupled with conferences but not with all parents. Typically those whose children are struggling, are contacted and such opportunities to meet come as seldom as once or twice a year. There may be limited written communication in the form of a progress report or teacher note in between times. Parents often have little knowledge of their child's learning beyond these communications, and little substantive knowledge, such as what their child is learning about, how they are learning it, and why. They primarily receive information on their child's deficits, with little information on goals and intervention. Often, it is up to the parent to call or visit school to find out such information, an action not all parents take and not all teachers have the time
to accommodate in the current structure of school. Such issues may result in frustration on the part of students, teachers and parents and an atmosphere of limited understanding and mistrust, especially mistrust of the teacher as evaluative expert.

Many other issues come to bare upon the mistrust of teacher as evaluative expert, including those which focus on the professional status of the field of education as a whole, but much groundwork can and must be made within the school and school community through a learner centered approach to assessment. The kinds of information-rich, goal-related, student involved assessment embedded in learner-centered schools provide the knowledge often lacking in a traditional approach to assessment, to students, parents, and others in the learning community. It serves as concrete evidence of learning, no longer masked behind letter grades, and focuses on setting and attaining learning goals. The strategies of utilizing portfolios, learning demonstrations, second-chance learning, alternative narrative reporting systems, and ongoing parental involvement lend more credibility to a teacher's observations and judgements, and demonstrate the teacher's expertise in engaging in evaluation beyond its pedestrian definition. Simultaneously, this approach to evaluation increases student success through intervention, while it diffuses the punitive and deficit orientation of traditional assessment systems. It focuses instead on allowing all students to take risks, grow as learners and to be successful in school.

**Teacher as Interpersonal Relations Expert**

The interpersonal relations involved in the act of teaching can not be denied. Teaching is a continual process of relating to others, specifically students, in communicating directions, expectations, feedback, and support of students in the learning
process. Even in a didactic mode, teachers are attempting to communicate and relate to students, to gain information about their level of understanding and comprehension and to detect obvious and subtle indicators from students as they receive and interpret information that is presented. A more heuristic and interactive approach to learning implies even more exchange and feedback between teachers and students and the further development of relationships to allow an atmosphere of participation and exchange to occur. Beyond the classroom exchange, an understanding pat on the shoulder, a patiently tied shoe, an empathetically placed Band Aid, and a non-judgmental ear are all part and parcel to daily relations between caring teachers and their students.

A truly learner-centered approach requires even further development of interpersonal relations and new or further refined skills to develop them. Beyond sharing information with, planning activities for, and guiding instruction of students, beyond caring and listening to their problems with friends or family, comes the act of negotiating learning with students. This does not merely imply letting them vote on class rules, choosing a class color, or getting input for topics or activities. It is about actually treating students as partners, giving them voice in deciding issues traditionally left solely to teacher discretion. Such issues may include determining the curriculum, conducting assessment, setting learning goals, and determining the expectations for what constitutes learning in their classrooms. Working with students in the give and take of making such decisions jointly and allowing them to see the reason and thought, the why behind educational decisions which affect them is not easy work. It implies giving up some control to gain a community of learners working together on common, jointly owned goals. This is not an
easy risk to take, and one which runs counter to traditional notions of what teachers do with kids. The relationships forged and how to negotiate them should not be underestimated in their complexity, difficulty and fortunately, their merit.

Beyond the need to develop new notions of interpersonal relations with students come the necessary relations which must be developed with other partners in the learning community. If students are to have a part in curricular decisions, that perhaps they are not typically involved in, then the relationship between teachers and administrators must also be renegotiated. Administrators, especially at the building level, must be partners with teachers and students in these processes of change. They must be informed, involved, supportive and provide critical feedback with mutually defined goals and the support to attain them. There must be the same give and take between teachers and administrators as there is between teachers and students, often with the new power and role structures of the classroom serving as a model for other interpersonal relations. Teachers must develop skills to relate to and work with their peers to negotiate and create curriculum together, to jointly assess, to embed activities and make connections across disciplines, a sharp contrast to the isolated nature of teaching still present to a large degree in most schools. Teachers must forge new ground with parents, including them in the decision-making process and informing them as partners. They must come together to work in proactive ways to support student learning and school improvement, rather than dealing with parents primarily as adversaries at times of crisis. These interpersonal relations need to extend into the community to connect the schools with the "real world" beyond school walls, addressing the disjuncture between scholastic and non-scholastic (Gardner, 1991).
Further, teachers need to serve a public relations function, so that communities are aware, involved in and supportive of the school improvement processes of a learner-centered education. Marketing our programs, seeking "buy in" and support of what we do in schools is a whole new arena for educators. But if we don't serve as the communication source for the community, we leave it up to others who may be less informed, less supportive and less learner centered.

Teacher as Decision Maker

The myriad of decisions that teachers make can not be denied. Hundreds, if not thousands of decisions are made daily ranging from what activities to plan and questions to ask to what actions to take in response to small disruptions such as gum chewing and whispering, to major disruptions such as physical violence, drug problems and weapons in schools. Whether or not teachers view themselves as decision makers, they are in a real sense of the word, but often these decisions are made within parameters set by higher authorities, typically school administrators, school boards and state departments of education. There are curricular options, as long as they conform to the district course of study. Teachers can choose in what order to approach topics in the curriculum, which ones to stress and which ones to merely "cover". They can plan activities to connect to the list of skills and content provided and the board approved text. They may be permitted to decide whether or not to use a text. These options give the teacher some control over how the curriculum is to be addressed in the classroom. Teacher freedom to make curricular decisions ranges from school to school, district to district, but rarely is the teacher thought of as the professional who should ultimately make such decisions and
even more rarely is the student viewed to have a role in this process. As a result, often those who are in decision making roles only pay lip service to the development of understanding and deep knowledge, crucial goals of learner centered teachers. They may write off teacher efforts to attain these goals as "hopelessly idealistic" or "unrealistic" (Gardner, 1991) making the attainment of such goals less likely when decisions are not left up to the teacher.

A truly learner-centered approach to education requires teachers to be primary decision makers in many if not all educational decisions that affect classroom instruction and student learning, a decision maker who has learned to interact and negotiate with her students as partners to make the best decisions to meet the needs of learners. As teachers diagnose the needs of the class and the individual students who comprise it, they find themselves in the role of not only curricular decision maker, but the creator of the curriculum. A broad framework of learner outcomes, items dictated on proficiency tests, or sequential curricular skills, may still be in place, but teachers will need to have the power to make decisions to tailor curriculum to meet student needs, to address student interests and questions and to allow students to have an active role in curricular focus as well. The teacher designs curriculum which weaves in the needs of students across other curricular demands such as those of proficiency testing. The teacher not only decides what curricular content to emphasize, but which to address in depth to facilitate the development of thinking skills and deep understanding, and which to lessen or even remove from the learning process entirely. All decisions are determined as appropriate to students' needs and meeting thinking oriented goals, as opposed to goals of coverage.
Teachers working collaboratively on teaching teams, through co-teaching or school improvement projects, discuss such curricular issues and find ways to look at curriculum from a new paradigm, one less dictated, repetitive, and sequential. This curriculum revisits and builds upon previous learning through application related to real world issues and situations and student developmental, social, and ownership needs.

Beyond making curricular decisions, learner-centered teachers may venture into further decisions traditionally left to others. Learner-centered teachers are involved in the financial aspects of the school, helping to determine the allocation of funds to fit curricular, instructional and professional development needs of a student-centered approach to learning. Teachers need to determine what materials are best suited to meeting students' needs, perhaps abandoning the concept of a required text in lieu of using resources within the community, via technology, and through the use of books related to the curricular selections teachers and students make. Teachers need to make decisions regarding assessment, beyond control over teacher made tests in the classroom, to developing team or school wide reporting systems, which more closely match the agenda of a learner-centered education. Such assessment may include a redesign of "report cards" and letter grades, perhaps emphasizing a non-graded, success for all approach, with narratives which reflect more integrated, thinking goals. Perhaps they abandon the concept of report cards entirely and design new approaches along with students, parents and other community members. Teachers decide how to continually incorporate parents, community, and colleges of education within their learning experiences and within decision-making processes to develop a sense of a learning community and ownership by all parties.
involved. Teacher decision making branches out far beyond the conventional notion of making decisions within the confines of the classroom into the broader scope of the educational mission.

**Means to Share the Focus**

In order to shift to a truly student-centered classroom, expansion of teacher expertise and competence in these areas must be coupled with strategies to begin to bring the learner into the center of learning and its decision making processes. The learner needs to begin to be an owner in these processes if the concept of "learning community" is to become more than a packaged and canned approach which still views students as beneficiaries of school and school improvement, rather than partners in the process.

According to the students' viewpoints articulated in this study, there may be some main areas in which to begin the inclusion of student voice, focusing on what they deem important, while employing the expertise and skills of the teacher to enable their concerns to be addressed. Students need to become central to learning, first along with the teacher, and then perhaps independent of the teacher, a concept beyond our current paradigm of school reform.

Dialogue, as defined in this study, may provide a vehicle by which to address the power issues underlying many of the student responses. It may also provide a means to address curricular issues in a more student-centered manner. Most centrally, coupling such a dialogical approach with the kinds of personal relationships the students valued, will enable a new kind of discourse related to school and reform to occur, one of possibility and forward thinking rather than one of power struggles and blame. This
discourse may enable the students involved in the study and others like them to redirect their energies on becoming more of a legitimate participant in the learning and change processes. This can only occur when their voice is legitimately heard and valued, allowing them to move beyond a sense of powerlessness, or at least power imbalance, to a sense of ownership and legitimate contribution.

Students, discipline and the power struggle: a connectionist approach

One of the primary struggles in moving learning into a position of increased student ownership centers on issues of power and authority. Challenging the legitimacy of the teacher's authority was one of the major goals of the most radical alternative schools which mushroomed in the 1960s and early 1970s (Goodman, 1992). An idealist notion that if left to their own will and thinking students will ultimately choose courses of action that are best for themselves and the well being of the world around them is challenged by the difficulty individuals have, especially children, with placing the common good before their own desires and needs (Goodman, 1992). This may be further complicated by the view espoused by the students in this study, that they have often been forced to subjugate their own desires, thoughts, and selves as individuals throughout a large part of their lives in school. Lifting all boundaries for students who consider themselves oppressed could lead to an overemphasis on student individual needs as opposed to the broader goals of learning which encompass these needs. Teacher intervention and support to enable students to learn to access and effectively and positively use their power is necessary. Children's true individuality...can only grow within a community" (Goodman, 1992 p102).
Stepping out of a mode of teacher thinking about power and control, which is typically focused on managing students, is not an easy shift. Learning to give up traditional notions of power embedded in traditional structures and roles of schooling, in order to develop a new concept of power, power sharing with students, will take knowledge and skill to develop. Student behavior is typically controlled through bureaucratic or technical structures in schools, such as rules, role expectations and procedures. Rather than relying on such bureaucratic rewards and punishments, discipline may be developed within a more democratic framework where students become more aware of the impact of their actions on others in the learning community and upon their own learning.

Through the use of dialogue students may begin to talk about, process and internalize these understandings. Students must also through such an approach feel free to express themselves regarding disciplinary matters and other important activities in the classroom concerning them. Perhaps the most oppressive aspect of a non-democratic, monological approach to power and discipline is the silencing of students in these matters (Goodman, 1992), the silencing reported by the students in this study. The opportunity to talk about and process learning and thinking, as reported by the students in this study, is a first step toward allowing students to own both power and responsibility related to learning in the classroom. Goodman (1992) calls such an approach to sharing power and opening up issues of discipline and behavior expectations in the classroom a "connectionist perspective". Parallelling the findings of this study, such a perspective is based largely on the ethics of caring, in which the teacher expresses greater concern for finding ways to
interact with students which promote feelings of mutual affection, respect and comfort, rather than on issues of "just treatment". Affirmation must accompany the guidance and sometimes restriction of student behavior which does not promote the good of the community and the individuals within it. Sarason (1991) suggests that students are almost never involved in disciplinary decisions in schools, but such a dialogical approach to talking about, negotiating and working through disciplinary and other issues related to power and control requires that students be involved in the process. This involvement, coupled with acceptance of individuals, if not their actions, lays the foundation for students to begin to own responsibility for their actions. It also, perhaps more importantly, promotes understanding and ownership of an important decision-making process in the classroom, an area of decision making which the students in the study reported as a negative aspect of their school experience and a barrier to their true participation in and ownership of their learning.

**Students and curriculum: students as decision makers**

"Although 'children's interests' is an often expressed ideal in establishing ...curriculum, its benefits are problematic. On the surface the notion of children taking control over their own learning appeals to many of our most cherished notions of freedom and liberty, but it can, in fact, be a paralyzing form of pedagogy that has oppressive rather than liberating consequences for teachers and students" (Goodman, 1992 p129).

According the findings of this study, although students spoke often of feeling oppressed by teachers' actions, and the "way school is", students still focused most of their responses and data analysis on the role of the teacher. Students did not only report problems with teachers' actions in the classroom, but also the promise of these. It was within the classrooms where the expertise of a dialogical teacher was coupled with the caring of a
personal one, that they found the kind of support necessary to maximize their potential as learners and people in the classroom. A liaise faire, hands off approach, as described in the above quote, was not the type they reported, as best meeting their needs as learners and people, but rather they focused on wanting a teacher and a classroom where they could question, think and negotiate what learning could and should be. The area of curriculum is one vital place where students can begin to own the act of learning through such negotiation with a caring teacher who views them as people with personal and social needs, beyond the role of student.

Once the focus on teacher has been developed, as discussed earlier in this chapter, the teacher uses her autonomy to promote students' collective sense of efficacy and control over the educational experiences in the classroom (Goodman, 1992). The negotiation of curriculum and learning experiences with children can allow a focus on student ownership and interests, coupled with the knowledge and expertise the teacher brings to learning. To move this process beyond a perfunctory level, teachers and students must employ dialogical techniques such as active listening, processing ideas, and negotiating decision making and power. This can only occur in an environment of trust and openness, one embedded in the personal aspects of the teacher/student relationship.

**Students and dialogue: the discourse of possibility**

Another strategy that can be used to make progress in movement towards a truly student centered approach to education lies within the discourses we choose to talk about and make sense of learning and our collective roles within it. The roots of school reform discourse, such as the discourse represented in the responses and perspectives of the
students in the study, often lie within language of critique. The language of critique has provided educators with numerous insights, uncovering typically unquestioned myths of schooling and providing a departure from the mechanistic and administrative language which has dominated traditional educational discourse in our society. It has allowed for the questioning of epistemological and social values that are expressed in the classroom (Goodman, 1992).

Critique is the language of the students in this study, one focused on uncovering power structures, intents, and the hidden aspects of a seemingly neutral educational system. It seemed a natural beginning point for students who for the first time were beginning to question and examine the implicit structures of schooling and their place within these structures. Working through, accepting, listening, valuing, and learning from such a discourse of critique with students may be an important part of the process of bringing students to the center of educational change.

Moving beyond this language of critique to a language of possibility is the next step teachers can begin to take together with students, to move beyond defining problems, issues and concerns, to strategizing with students how to make a difference together. "Focusing on the critique of schooling and society while ignoring alternative visions and realities has resulted in a series of self alienating options", further "unintentionally a language of critique that is not rooted in visions of actual practice can potentially slip into dogma" (Goodman, 1992 p169). Moving beyond the language of critique may be a key to true collaboration with students, moving beyond, rather than stopping short at the "student as beneficiary" model of reform.
The students in this study found themselves firmly rooted in the language of critique, perhaps so much so that such responses overshadowed the language of possibility which undergirded them. It was because these students had been exposed to what they reported as legitimate power, voice, input and caring that they began to see where such tenets were lacking in their other school experiences. It might well be that because they valued teachers that embraced a dialogical approach to learning and a true commitment to working with students as people, beyond traditional teacher and student roles, that they expressed such strong and perhaps at times seemingly negative opinions on schooling. A glimpse of the vision, a temporary lived experience within at least part of it, caused them to miss it when it was no longer there, leaving them with a reported feeling of loss and sometimes disenfranchisement. This vision can be worked toward through a language of possibility which first is accessible to all, including students, and then provides a vision of hope and promise grounded in principles of empowerment, equality and democracy (Goodman, 1992). The notion of students being able to envision possibility and engage in this discourse may be challenged by the statement that students cannot know what they do not know, but this same statement can be said of teachers and other adults as well. Possibility is opened up when knowledge is expanded so that new concepts, ideas and issues can be raised that were not before. Teachers can bring their students into the discourse of possibility by helping them to broadened their knowledge of the teaching and learning process, so that they can begin to envision with the teacher what might be possible. In turn the teacher can broaden her own knowledge and vision with insights into teaching and learning which may best be provided from the student perspective and
missing from other sources. As teachers begin to bring themselves and their students into this discourse of possibility, change can begin to occur in a manner which is more reflective of student concerns and issues and their inclusion in the process as joint owners with educators.

From critique to possibility: closing the gap

A focus on the whole child as an individual, and the principles of human learning and development which undergird such a philosophy, "conflict sharply with the customary practices of school" (Gardner, 1991). Many teachers adhere to, or espouse to adhere to, fundamental precepts of a learner-centered education and principles of human learning and development, such as treating students as individuals, emphasizing thinking, understanding, and relevance of learning and success for all students. Problems arise in enacting practice to support such goals when the structures of the system and pressures from administration, parents, media, community and even colleagues run counter to these beliefs. Often teachers are so consumed in meeting the daily demands of their traditional role, which stretches them in so many different directions, that there is little or no time to reflect on the beliefs and philosophies which undergird the practices they engage in on a daily basis, practices which have been part of schooling over decades, if not centuries. These have become the norm, so much part of the accepted and unarticulated structure of schooling, that they are not even questioned and given the limited opportunities for teachers to engage in reflective, collegial, professional dialogue, it is no wonder they remain largely unquestioned even in the midst of school reform. Such dialogue may occur in isolated bits, at a one day workshop, in a professional journal, through university
coursework, but seldom if ever are they addressed in a sustained fashion as part of the
teacher's role with the intent to make change and improvement in existing structures.

Viewing the teacher role as one of inquiry, of challenging the obvious way one
views education and learning, carries with it a shift from a pedestrian concept of teacher to
the concept of teacher as an intellectual, a thinker with the insight and power to
investigate practice and to make change. When teachers have the opportunity to work,
talk and think together, to exchange varying points of view, to share research and draw
upon a much neglected knowledge base, gaps between philosophy and practice begin to
emerge. It is then that the opportunity for substantive and sustained change unfolds. An
opportunity to put one's philosophy into practice, to understand, support, create and own
the process of change is a powerful source of motivation. The learning gap which needs
to be closed may not be a gap between the United States' and other systems of education,
but between what good teachers know and can know about best practice and what occurs
in classrooms and schools across the nation on a daily basis.

A research base exists that substantiates the existence of such a body of knowledge
related to teaching and learning. Cognitive mediational models of learning including the
use of instructional modeling, linking ideas and knowledge to previous knowledge and
student experience, scaffolding dialogue, an awareness of social context, and the larger
social environment and its relationship to motivation, are all aspects of teacher knowledge
and expertise that may link the focus of this study with teacher education research
(Anderson, 1989). Teacher education research also includes a focus on knowledge
necessary to bring the student more centrally into the learning process through a student
self instructional model which teaches students cognitive instructional strategies to help them gain ownership and understanding of the learning process (Wang, 1989). Effective change may best be realized when the gap between knowledge available and knowledge applied in the classroom is closed.

There must be a belief on the part of teachers that such change is possible, that the gap once identified can be closed. The attitude that it is next to impossible to change the status quo is still present in schools and only exacerbated in an atmosphere of fear, competition, and blame (Glasser, 1969). An atmosphere which supports risk taking and inquiry must be fostered and teachers must be prepared to see such activity as part of their daily role and life as an educator. "The gap is not closed not only because principals and teachers do not have the time to meet and discuss their educational problems in an atmosphere full of honest inquiry and free from pressure, but also because they have only vague ideas of what to do" (Glasser, 1969). Developing time for collegial interaction built on a knowledge base as an approach to embedded professional development is central to the success of redefining the role of teacher and successful school improvement which focuses on the learner.

Reconstructing learning

Within a context where learning is a place of change, school restructuring becomes legitimately focused on change, on the transgression of the traditional boundaries of schooling. The conceptual work of the study focused on deconstructing what school is and has been, on questioning the seemingly obvious, on looking at the why behind the surface of learning and meanings and purposes undergirding them. We then began to do
the same to the school restructuring movement, to our own experiences with school change. We took the changed, the "new", definition of school and took it apart as well.

Restructuring was not enough. It seemed to change little of what was significant to students, to learning through their eyes. New structures, strategies, methods and names were put into place, but often the core factors of the model we developed, the discourse and roles which defined what learning was or could be, were not affected by these changes. The "essence" of learning, as reported by students, was rarely, if ever, changed in their experience of school reform. They had seen glimpses of the transgressive learning environment, a place with a personalized ethos of caring and the discourse of questioning and theorizing. This, it seemed, to them was what was truly different in their experience. The rest was reported to be only surface change, or at best a movement toward the understanding theme in the classroom. Reform had made some movement toward a more dialogical discourse, but the personal aspects, the ethos of caring which enabled real changes in learning to occur, was typically lacking. This is what they reported mattered most of all. It took movement toward both a dialogical approach and a transgressing of traditional roles into the personal, to let a new definition of learning emerge.

After we took the pieces of learning apart, it didn't seem to make sense to just put them back the same way, to just move a few of them around. The same pieces were still there. School was still school. Learning still learning. Nothing had typically changed
beyond a little remodeling. We started to think of building it over from the ground up, based on what we had learned from tearing it down. Not improving, reforming, or restructuring the same things, but reconstructing a whole new place called school.

Alternative pedagogies may provide a means to move beyond "remodeling" to building this new place, through the language of possibility. The language of possibility has provided visions of educational reality that have been largely absent from traditional educational discourse and the language of critique. However, much of such visions remains at an overly abstract level of educational discourse, one seldom used by teachers and even less often by the students.

"What is needed is to build upon the language of possibility by developing an educational language of democratic imagery, that is, a theoretical language which is informed by and rooted in images of real (or hypothesized) people involved in tangible actions that take place in actual settings" (Goodman, 1992 p173).

A movement toward such imagery was the attempt of the students' and our depiction of the findings of the study. Further, a movement toward such imagery and theory generation are core components of the varied alternative pedagogies referenced in the literature review. Alternative radical pedagogies such as liberatory pedagogy, democratic pedagogy and engaged pedagogy, enable the classroom to become places where the language of possibility can become directly tied to what happens in the daily lives of students and teachers, and perhaps ultimately the society which our students will one day create. Moving learning and interactions with students toward the generation of theory can enable a deconstruction of what learning is, with students, to move toward defining and bringing to life what could be, in school and within our society.
A democratic intellectual culture of learning

Enabling students and teachers to come together, to interact in dialogical and personal ways leads to a classroom culture of intellect and democracy. Intellect may be developed with students through engaging them in the processes of metacognition, evaluation, questioning the "obvious" and generating theory about both content knowledge and their own learning. They not only learn knowledge, but as intellects, create new knowledge with the teacher and each other. Students are thinking people with something to bring to the process of learning, in addition to gaining from it. The dialogical focus enables intellectual rigor, exchange of ideas, and construction of theory to become foundational to an intellectual culture of learning. The personalized nature of the interaction between partners in the learning process allows for the developing of an ethos of caring which allows for a democratic learning culture based on embracing differences, controversy, voice and ownership of learning by all.

The combination of the intellectual and democratic cultures leads to a redefinition, not only of students and teacher roles founded in the concepts and practices of these cultures, but also the nature of learning itself. The notion of a fixed, stagnant body of knowledge becomes questioned, opening up opportunities for new knowledge to be created, as learning becomes the construction of theory. The new knowledge itself is under continual assessment, evaluation, critique...as thinking becomes the crux of learning, rather than the mere acquisition of knowledge. The context of silence is broken as all voices enter the discourse, as all become partners in and owners of learning. Educational change, growth and improvement begins to supplant education as cultural reproduction.
The potential to alter the status quo of schooling leads to the possibility of challenging the status quo of society. Learning becomes a place of efficacy and agency for all involved in the process. This is what the students' voices had to say within this collaborative study. This is what they deem as significant and real change.

**What Can be Learned About Collaborative Research with Students?**

Two main issues surfaced as learnings related to conducting collaborative research with students, rather than conducting one way research on them. One issue centers on the potential challenges of engaging in a collaborative approach to research with students. If one might question the feasibility of engaging in research with teachers as co-researchers, imagine the questions related to conducting such research with students, children. The issue doesn't center so much on the notion that educators and researchers don't value students and their opinions, as much as questioning the ability of students to engage in research and the validity of their views which are necessarily colored by their experiences and realities as students.

**Underestimating the potential of students as researchers**

When, in the name of collaboration and critical research, students are involved in determining the focus and questions of the study, the framing of the literature review, and the analysis of the data, such issues may be further confounded. The collaborative nature of the work mandates that the students' views and perspectives be represented in the entire study, not just the findings. This seemingly colors all of the work. But this is necessary when the study is committed to giving the students voice, to validating their perspectives, sifting through the literature, the data, and the process of representing their beliefs and
experiences to allow what they say to be heard. The study needs to focus on what matters to them, what they find as significant. If it is what matters to them, if they are truly to be the center of our educational efforts, then by definition it is significant. We must begin to ask, "what can we learn from this?" It is a challenge to find strategies which enable us to shift past our own barriers of thinking traditionally about students and their role and potential to engage in research to viewing them as partners in the process, with experiences and opinions, different from ours, but as valid as our own.

What we don't expect to hear

A second set of issues surfaces when the nature of the research begins to shift to what we do not expect, or perhaps do not want to hear. It could be thought of as desirable when the research begins to feel like those that it seeks to represent in their terms, but when the research "feels" like students, like children, there may be other concerns. What about the issues of, dualism, and individualistic thinking that surfaced in this study? These are terms which may be applied to several aspects of the findings and framing of this study. On the surface it seems apparent that there is a negative dualistic tone to the study, an over emphasis on power struggles, limitations and barriers. The students may be viewed as defining themselves in passive, hopeless roles, certainly not reflecting the victory narrative of many aspects of the current "student centered" reform movement. Is it all that bleak? Was this a poorly representative site and sample? Can this be generalized to other student experiences and should it? What happens when a commitment to giving students voice in the research process, in fact a commitment to the development of this voice as a central purpose of the study, leads to such dissonance? What happens when the
victory narrative one expected as teacher and researcher does not come forth?

The initial temptation is to intervene, to help students refocus the study, to let them see the errors in their thinking as the researcher enlightens them to different perspective. It is because of the very power imbalance and embedded beliefs about students and roles we all play in the educational process that the research itself was often problematic and unsettling in this way. At the same time the collaborative nature of the study required that I intervened to not only clarify and challenge student responses and assumptions, but also to allow us to mutually create new meaning and understandings that we separately could not create. A fine balancing act was an ongoing part of the study to allow me to probe in depth their responses while at the same time retaining their voice and ownership in the study.

The nature of the student responses can be examined and explained with several possible alternatives. Three aspects of students and their lives in school may provide frames by which to address these concerns, namely the personal nature of education for students, the nature of engaging in critical research with students and the development of voice through a critical approach, such as Gitlin's *educative* research.

**Learning is personal to students**

The individualistic nature of our society, coupled with a focus on individualism in schools, even within school communities (Goodman, 1992) may have impacted the students' responses. Even the rhetoric of school reform continually centers on meetings students' needs. The students, perhaps due to all of these factors, indicated that they believed that the goal of education was to meet these needs. When this was viewed as
only talk and not always reality for the students in this study, there was a sense of
disenfranchisement and being failed. Students sometimes reacted in ways which denied
their own responsibility and potential power to impact the learning situation. As they
reported, they did not see another role to do otherwise. Their attempts to do so were
labeled as disrespectful or inappropriate in at least one instance for each of them. They
reported that one instance caused the conformity oriented students to stop, and the non-
conformity oriented ones to take more drastic action to be heard.

It was not until their experience in a learning community where real power and
decision making were shared that students spoke of their role as active, reflecting
ownership and responsibility. Here the students reported learning to value and embrace
the marriage of the concepts of personal freedom and social responsibility. As they left
such a community approach, a sense of frustration was reported, often more
overwhelming to the participants now that they had experience in a different role and
learning environment. Often the student participants talked about teachers stating that
students were what mattered most in the classroom and then acting in ways that appeared
to them to say the opposite. Students saw education as personal to their daily lives and
existence and took such actions personally, whether that was the intent of the teacher or
not.

Since students spend so much of their lives within schools, it is not surprising that
the student responses reflected a personal perspective. Issues of fitting in, belonging,
owning the process of learning, being liked and valued are of central importance to
students. These very fundamental needs come before the need to learn. Whether or not

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these needs were being met were central to the student responses, and perhaps the lack of such needs being met lead to the "negative" focus of student responses. Moving beyond labeling student responses as "negative" or "dualistic" to viewing them as real issues that we need to address may enable the student responses to inform further inquiry with students and decisions related to educational reform as well.

Critical research and students

A question of whether students gave into the voices and opinions of the most outspoken as they engaged in group interviews should be explored given the collective nature of such research and the responses of this study. As students are not typically involved in research and perhaps even less typically engaged in dialogue and thinking of a critical nature, it may not be surprising that students tend to focus on issues of power and role from what adults may label a "dichotomous" perspective. The desire of students to speak in a collective voice and for their responses to support each others' and the emergent findings of the study are also an outcome of this research process. What is positive is that they are beginning to question, to ask, to doubt, to see beyond the obvious and that they see enough that they are discomforted by what they see. Students have perhaps always engaged in this "us" versus "them" talk about schools and teachers. Negativity toward schools and adult authority figures is pervasive in television shows and commercials aimed at students. This apparent dualism may be emphasized by the imbalance of power in schools; when one feels relatively powerless and voiceless and suddenly an opportunity arises to exert some sense of power and voice, an initial reaction which perhaps overemphasizes inequities and injustices would not be atypical. If students
feel they have no or little real power or role in school, then the tendency to blame teachers and to lessen an emphasis on one's own responsibility in learning may be heightened. As students began to craft new roles for student and definitions of learning, to talk in the language of possibility, there was an indication that they may begin to move beyond the language of critique prevalent in the study. Before this can happen they must have a legitimate voice in schools and the research process, so that they can work through the critical aspects of their perspectives to work with teachers to develop a new vision. As long as this is missing from the world of school and research, as long as it is the expectation rather than the norm, students such as those in this study may find themselves and their thinking confined by the current structures of school and educational research.

A second compounding feature of engaging in critical research with students are the developmental characteristics of the students themselves, in this case of early adolescents. Within the sample there was a range of such characteristics, each student bringing into the study different cognitive abilities, conceptualization skills, and experiences. There are limitations, as there are with all research participants no matter what the age, but an awareness of these limitations comes to the fore when working with students. Early adolescents also are dealing with social and personal issues of identity, attachment and detachment, which served to frame the emphasis on the socially-constructed nature of school and the personal focus of the respondents. Further issues of power, fairness, justice and their role in school and society are central issues for students of this age. All of these factors influenced the focus and findings of the study and the representation of who the students are as people, the people I interact with daily in school.
Whose voice?

Studies which have been conducted with students may or may not reflect the types of responses of the students in this study. Two factors could be responsible for differences that may occur between the findings of this study and other studies which focus on students and learning, both of which are closely tied to the commitment of this study to serve as a vehicle to develop student voice. One issue is that of trust. The existing relationship I had with these students may have enabled the students to be more open and honest than they would have been with outside researchers. They were perhaps able to take more risks and be more honest in what they said, with less fear of negative consequences, without trying to sound "grownup" or represent what their teachers or schools would like for them to say. It may be that students' involved in other studies and schools, when given a part of the lime light, tend to sing the victory narrative along with the educators they work with, because they lack such a relationship with those conducting the research. It may be that these students experiences were just different from others. Or it may be relative to the specific issues of this study and a perhaps unique feature since the students actually determined the focus of the study, the questions, the data gathering strategies, the focus of the literature review, the analysis and write up of the data. When a study attempts to be directed by students, perhaps the study itself will be significantly impacted by this decision.

It was our hope that our work together, our collaborative research, would be significantly impacted, would belong to the students along with me as much as possible,
although we still had much to learn along the way. We knew the risks involved. We talked about the lack of research from a student perspective, the lack of students "doing" such research. We knew this was unexplored territory, unprecedented murky waters, perhaps full of unseen holes, that we would navigate together. But our mutual commitment to trying it anyway, to learning all we could about what the students thought about school reform and how to do research together, moved us ahead. The next steps await perhaps us, perhaps others. This is one story, our collective one of research and reform. Does it represent other's stories? Does it hold true in other settings, with other age groups, with other research methodologies? The questions remain for now unanswered. What can be answered is what do these students, and perhaps others like them, dream of what school could be like.

"Now is the time to reassert our dream about how schooling can help young people develop their intellectual and creative talents, moral character and civic courage, which will be needed to face the difficult tasks of defining and creating the 'good life' for the many species of plants and animals that share this small planet, as it moves into the next century" (Goodman, 1992 p182).

Our hope is that this study in some small way begins to reassert the students' dream, moving it into the vision and reality of our dream together as teachers and students, as people learning together.

**Recommendations for conducting research with students**

Several recommendations for engaging young students in collaborative research can be generated from the findings of this study. Issues of purpose, roles, power and
voice, the very issues students focused on in their reflections on learning and school reform, are also central to engaging in the research process with students. The guiding principle in such research is grounded in the purpose of the study, to respect and promote the students' voice in an arena where it tends to be limited, if existent. To this aim, decisions must reflect the commitment to voice through student ownership and participation in every aspect of the research design, to the maximum degree feasible. From the onset of the study the researcher needs to begin by asking students and listening to their responses. This questioning occurs as students determine the focus and research questions along with the researcher and continues throughout not only data collection, but also in the analysis of data and representation of the findings. Their input is central to the concepts of collaborative research and voice.

In order to legitimately listen to and honor student voice, the act of conducting research becomes a continual balancing act of negotiating roles and responsibilities, which may change throughout the process. At times the students will take the lead, and at times the researcher must lead the way through uncharted waters for students who have not been a part of the research process. Part of this negotiation involves helping students to learn about the process of research itself, its terminology, its purpose, its politics, its visions and its shortcomings. Research in this sense becomes an act of teaching and learning. As the students learn from the researcher, the researcher in turn learns much about conducting such research and how students can contribute and become a part of the process. Allowing students to determine the focus of the study, decide upon key
questions and work to make sense of the data, is continually balanced by the intervention, guidance and challenging of student thoughts and responses to help students learn to dig deeper into their assumptions and understandings.

The best way to walk this tightrope of empowerment and support is by talking openly and honestly with students about the process and the very issues such research raises for all involved. Building a research design which is iterative in its nature, continually recycling, questioning, and validating tentative findings, helps issues to be addressed and further questioned. Much of the skill the researcher needs to employ is grounded in classroom instructional techniques, such as cognitive mediational models and reflective learning strategies. Again, paralleling the findings related to teaching and learning, a dialogical approach within an atmosphere of caring and trust may facilitate the development of a truly collaborative research process with students. Students must know that the researcher values and cares about what they say and their lives as people, if students are to open up and work with the researcher. This is a much different role for students than traditional studies require.

Because the student is not only giving responses to questions, but also asking questions, processing responses, synthesizing and interpreting data and dealing with ethical, moral, and political issues of research, there is a necessary role shift for students and the researcher alike. Moving beyond the normative adult/child relationships and in this case also beyond student/teacher roles was perhaps one of the most challenging aspects of this research. Questions of loyalties come to bare as the researcher needs to reach out to and identify with students in a sense, as she is still an adult and an educator.
If the research is of a critical nature, as this was, when issues of power, dominance, and inequity come forward, is difficult not to "side" with the students, not to become angry or frustrated at times with their pain and the failure in so many cases of education, one's own profession and identity, to meet their needs. "Siding" with the teacher's perspective, automatically frames their responses in a manner which limits understanding their perspective and prohibits moving beyond the traditional research of studying student responses, rather than studying concepts with students.

Further, as the roles shift to more of a concept of parity, as power is shared with the students in the study, there is still a need, much as there is in a classroom situation, for the researcher to direct and facilitate meetings and the research process, especially in group interviews or sessions. Learning how to step back while still guiding the process requires that the researcher learn and employ many of the techniques teachers utilize in classrooms to promote active cooperative learning. Again fore grounding these issues and steps, letting them become part of the learning process and dialogue with the student participants enables the study and the development of understanding rather than limits it. In many ways strategies which need be employed to work effectively and collaboratively with students in the research process are the same as those employed in classrooms committed to developing student voice and ownership in the learning process.

**The process of collaborative research with students: Research as pedagogy**

In order to achieve the above aims in the research process, specific strategies may be employed, strategies which are common to pedagogical approaches which seek to build student participation, ownership and voice into learning experiences in the classroom. In
essence, research in this respect becomes an act of pedagogy, of students and researcher coming together, each bringing their unique contributions of knowledge and expertise to the process, as learning occurs and new knowledge is mutually created. Strategies employed throughout various stages of the research include the use of collaborative learning processes such as brainstorming, synthesizing, and evaluating. Students also engaged in reflection on thoughts and feelings, problem solving to determine next steps in the process, cognitive mediation to process thinking and actions taken in the study, the development of tentative categories and themes, generating and evaluating alternative hypotheses, and application of the findings and theories which emerged relative to their life experiences in the classroom (Figure 5.0). The cyclical nature of the study enabled the tentative categories and emergent hypotheses and theories to be recycled back to individual histories and the other group interview sessions to add to the validity and deeper understanding of the findings. Journaling as well as cooperative learning strategies was used to help the students explore their ideas and responses throughout the process.

The role of researcher takes on a pedagogical focus. Interviews become in essence work sessions where participants engage in various dialogical approaches, such as those above, to generate knowledge and understanding. Throughout the research process, the researcher is not only engaging in research with the students, but also teaching them about the research process itself, how to engage in it, the terminology, its purposes, goals, and implications, so that students may become more fully engaged in the process. The researcher also utilizes the skills employed in classrooms where the teacher acts as a facilitator of the development of knowledge. The researcher questions, guides, provides
Throughout the Research Process

**PILOT**— cooperative learning, teach about research, facilitation, community

**DATA COLLECTION**

*group interviews*— teach about research, cooperative learning, facilitation, cognitive mediation, Gitlin, journaling, evaluation

*individual histories*— Gitlin, recycling, reflection

**DATA ANALYSIS**

*generating themes*— teach research process, cooperative learning, facilitation, recycling, tentative categories

*synthesis*— teach research process, cooperative learning, facilitation, tentative categories

*generating theory*— facilitation, generating hypotheses, application, community, cognitive mediation, evaluation, reflection

**REPRESENTATION**

*conceptualizing*— teach research process, problem solving, cooperative learning, application, generating hypotheses, journaling, recycling

*writing*— cooperative learning, reflection, evaluation, application, journaling

Figure 5.0: Throughout the Research Process
resources, probes and challenges to help the students clarify their understandings and move toward the goals of the study. At the same time the researcher must allow students to legitimately determine the focus and progress of the study, as well as remain committed to the development of student voice. This allows the study to speak not only for the students, but also for the researcher to enable students to learn and develop their own understanding of research and the findings throughout the process.

Collaborative research, such as Gitlin's (1992) eductive research, is the coming together of the voices and experiences of the participants and the researcher. They become co-researchers, and the resulting study is a collective representation of their combined thinking and understanding. The results could not come about without the active participation of both, or in this case all, parties and the influence which they have upon each other and the study itself. The findings of the study represent the interaction of the parties involved, and their collective thinking and new understandings which could only come about through this interaction. Gitlin's (1992) horizontal evaluation strategies provide another vehicle and additional strategies by which to develop this interaction and new understanding. Communication analysis provides a lens to examine how responses are made and the dynamics of the communication which occurs in the study. A focus on historical perspective provides a contextual and experiential lens by which to examine responses. Challenge statements, provide for rigor and allow the student to defend, articulate and clarify a given response. The exploration of alternative solutions, allows for the student and the researcher to explore other potential explanations for a given response.
or assumption. All of Gitlin's (1992) techniques provide approaches by which to strengthen the interaction between participants in the process and deepen the level of interpretation and understanding developed in the study.

**Collaborative research: A balancing act**

Engaging in collaborative research with students is a continual balancing act for the researcher. A fine line must be walked between maintaining a responsive affective manner with students, which is necessary to develop the kind of relationship vital to sustaining the study, and the intellectual nature of the work, which provides rigor and merit in the study (Figure 5.1). The affective concerns in conducting the study need to be attended to in order to develop new roles for participants which alter existing power structures to move toward a more collaborative pattern of interaction. It is further necessary for the development of trust and to addresses issues of loyalties and alliance which surface throughout the process. The development of dialogue, negotiation, and student ownership in the process are also part of the affective aspects of the research, as is the commitment to embracing difference and developing multiple voices within the collective findings.

The intellectual nature of the research process includes the necessary leadership that the researcher must take on at times to move the study into the realm of conceptualization, evaluation, synthesis and application. It includes the knowledge and expertise that the researcher brings to the study which allow this to happen. It also includes interpretations and alternative hypotheses that the researcher may bring to the process, such as the knowledge of developmental characteristics of the students and how
Collaborative Research with Students: A balancing act

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Strategies to Work Toward Balance

- teaching about the research process
- cooperative learning techniques: brainstorm, synthesize, prioritize
- reflection: on thoughts, feelings, experience
- problem solving: what to do, who, how, next steps
- recycling/interactive synthesis
- cognitive mediation: processing
- developing tentative categories
- community: common purpose, ownership
- facilitation
- generating hypothesizes
- application: to life experiences
- evaluation
- journaling

Figure 5.1: Collaborative Research with Students: A Balancing Act
this impacts the study. The researcher must challenge and question assumptions and move with students at times into an evaluative mode. The balance between the affective and intellectual aspects of the study varies to fit the needs at specific times. Moving too far to one side or the other, causes one aspect to be shut down, and the necessary balance to maintain the collaborative nature of the research to be lost.

Further study with students

Recommendations may also be made for further study of the process of engaging in collaborative research with students. A study may be conducted with students who are older or younger than those in this study, or of a multi-aged group. Working with students with whom the researcher has no previous relationship would provide new challenges and opportunities to learn about the development of the kind of trust and relationships central to such work. Coupling interviews with observations which would provide an opportunity for reflection on action and learning could be yet another component built into the study. A comparison using such a research approach with students who have not been exposed to reform experiences or who have not had experiences with alternative roles in the classroom would provide yet other insights. Student perspectives on other innovations which are designed to affect students such as D.A.R.E. (drug abuse resistance education), pregnancy prevention programs, anti-violence initiatives, and peer mediation may be explored. The door has been opened to begin to learn about the further challenges and rewards of engaging in educational research with students.
Conclusion

In response to the initial two questions of the study:
What matters to students in school reform?
What can be learned about doing collaborative research with early adolescent students?

the following may be summarized. First, students in this study reported two major components that resulted in redefining learning so that they felt they had more ownership of the process and were better able to develop their own thinking and knowledge base.

The first component focused on the dialogical nature of what they found to be effective teaching, a component that was represented in their positive experiences in "reformed" learning environments. This concept is beyond talking to process information with students, as it also embodies negotiation of learning experiences, rules, expectations and serves as a primary vehicle by which teachers bring their expertise, viewpoints and understandings into the process of learning, as all students are brought into the process and valued. The second component focuses on the movement of teachers, along with students beyond traditional role expectations and limitations. Stepping out of these boundaries was reported by students to promote an environment of caring and trust where all voices are legitimated and heard. It also allows for the risk taking necessary to broaden the concept of learning to an act of questioning and theorizing within an ethos of caring in a community of learners. People coming together, acceptance, tolerance, understanding, give and take to develop relationships are all a part of this concept. This is the component students reported as typically missing from their school experience, even within various "reformed" settings. The students in the study saw the coming together of these two
components, among a myriad of elements, interactions and relationships that make up the learning environment, as the two most significant elements in their experience of school.

In working with adolescent students, as co-researchers, there are both challenges and benefits. Working with the typically voiceless partner in educational decision making and research provides the challenge of overcoming the barriers and obstacles that have kept these voices largely silent, namely attitudes toward children and their role in society, limitations of students' life experiences and developmental characteristics. But if these barriers can be overcome and perhaps even challenged by beginning to listen to and further value student perspectives and experiences, then the door may begin to open to make educational and reform decisions, the decisions of student centered reform, truly more student centered.
REFERENCES


Appendix : Individual History as Learner

Guide Questions

1. What do you remember most about the ____ grade? (for each grade k-5)

2. What was school like for you?(k-5)

3. What was your teacher like? What kind of relationship did he/she have with you and the other students?(k-5)

4. What was the best thing about your elementary experience?

5. What was the worst thing?

6. When did you feel important in elementary school?

7. Finish the sentence, to be successful in elementary school as a student you need to ......

8. What type of student were you in elementary school?

9. Were things pretty much the same for you as a student in sixth grade as they were in elementary school? How was it alike or different?

10. Were you the same type of student, or did you change?

11. What was he best thing about sixth grade?

12. What was the worst thing about sixth grade?

(appendix)
13. To be successful on your sixth grade team a student needed to .......

14. When did you feel important in the sixth grade?

15. What was your relationship like with your sixth grade teachers?

16. Did you feel like you were a part of the changes made on your sixth grade team?

(appendix cont.)