DROP OUT OR PUSH OUT?

THE DYNAMICS OF BLACK STUDENTS' DISENGAGEMENT FROM SCHOOL

A Report Prepared

by

George J. Sefa Dei

with

Leilani Holmes, Josephine Mazzuca, Elizabeth McIsaac and Rachel Campbell

Department of Sociology in Education
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ABSTRACT

This is the final report of a three-year study that examined the dilemma of Black/African Canadian student disengagement and "dropping out" of school. The project investigated what students' narratives of their school and out of school experiences can tell us about the dropout problem, and particularly about the influence of race/ethnicity, class, gender, power, and social structures on the decision to drop out of school.

The Principal Investigator, with assistance from O.I.S.E graduate students, interviewed the various stakeholders involved in the phenomenon of dropping out of school: 150 Black students selected from four Toronto high schools; over two dozen students randomly selected from Metropolitan Toronto schools; 21 school "dropouts", some of whom have since returned to school; seven students designated "at risk"; 55 Black parents, caregivers and community workers; 41 school teachers, including some administrators; and 59 non-Black students (mainly White students). Parents, community workers, teachers and non-Black students were interviewed, in part to cross-reference African-Canadian students' narratives about the school system. Apart from the individual interviews, there were focus group discussions held with the study participants, which included students involved in a provincially funded youth program, summer jobs program, and programs for "at-risk" youth. The "dropouts", students and "at risk" youth all self-identify as Black/African-Canadian and were contacted through our community connections.

The analysis of the research data suggests that students view dropping out as both a response and a solution to lived experience and to social structural contradictions. This report particularly highlights Black/African-Canadian students' concerns regarding the issues of race, representation and identity in schooling and education. While acknowledging some responsibility, Black parents also raise questions about the disengaging aspects of schooling. They call for a restructuring of public education to make schools responsive to the needs and aspirations of youth. Teachers and administrators concede that there is still room for school improvement. However, they want the family to take more responsibility for the education of youth. They also want to see the government and the school boards provide appropriate tools for teachers to work in an inclusive school environment. This report concludes with recommendations for the education of youth in Ontario.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

As the Principal Investigator of the project I would like to acknowledge the assistance of the many graduate students at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education (OISE) who worked on various aspects of this longitudinal study. I would like to mention in particular Deborah Elva, Gabrielle Hezekiah, Leilani Holmes, Elizabeth McIsaac, Josephine Mazzuca, Thato Bereng, Bobby Blanford, Farah Shroff, Les Tager, Anita Sheth, Nigel Moses, Jennifer Pierce, Handel Wright, Rinaldo Walcott, Sandra Anthony, Camille Logan, Lianne Carley and Jasmin Zine. I also recognize the untiring efforts of Rachel Campbell during the period of data analysis and the invaluable services provided by Bethlehem Kidane and Shea Sanderson. I sincerely thank Irwin Elman of the Pape Adolescent Resource Centre for getting Bethlehem, Rachel and Shea to assist on the project. Special thanks to Olga Williams of the Department of Sociology, OISE, and Adrienne Churchill for transcribing some of the taped interviews. I am grateful to Olga Williams for typing and proofreading the entire document. Many Canadian educators and researchers have been helpful throughout various phases of this project. There are so many names, but I should be permitted to mention a few here: Sonja Forstner, Paulette Plummer, Harold Wright, Lynn Tidd, Oscar Brathwaite, Charis Newton, Bill Dolly, Bernard Moitt, Suzanne Ziegler, Robert Brown, Maisy Cheng, Robert Brown, Christopher Beserve, Patricia Hayes, Madge Logan, Christopher Spence, Muriel Clarke, Keren Brathwaite, and Agnes Calliste. I am especially grateful to the Ontario Ministry of Education and Training, and the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada (SSHRC) for the funds provided for various aspects of this study.

George J. Sefa Dei
Toronto, October 1995

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1.0 INTRODUCTION

As the Principal Investigator (PI) I would like to begin with a brief note about my personal location and how I came to see the complex issue of Black youth education and the dilemma of students' disengagement from school. I believe it is important that every social researcher, and particularly the educational researcher, identifies her or his personal and subjective location; for example, how race, ethnicity, gender, social class, culture and history provide a specific vantage point for the understanding and interpretation of research data. Such personal location provides readers with a context within which to critically examine and make sense of the study. Knowledge, after all, can only be understood in relation to one's subject location and interest.

I am an African-Canadian educator who has had the privilege of being educated in Africa and Canada and is now employed as a tenured Professor in an internationally renowned Canadian university. I share, with many other racial minorities, common historical experiences of colonialism and the subjugation, particularly in conventional Euro-American texts, of the rich cultural knowledge, scholarship and social achievements of all colonized peoples. I know very well how the colonial education that I received in my birthplace, Ghana, and my postgraduate studies in Canada, deprivileged the ancestral histories and cultural heritage of African peoples. I am also aware how the issues of race identity, representation and social difference continue to play significant roles in the processes of delivering education in Euro-American contexts.

One may ask why this is important for readers to know. It is not my intention to claim "authority of experience". My claim to knowledge and understanding is not based on birth or common cultural or historical experiences with the students. I do believe, however, that our personal and collective journeys reflect and influence how we read and interpret the world around us.

Along the course of the study I witnessed the laughter, joy, and the emotional satisfaction, as well as the pain, suffering, anger and anguish of many Canadian students, parents, guardians, community workers, teachers and school administrators, in the struggle to secure education for themselves or to provide it to others. Having listened to many of the youth, one cannot miss the deep sense of frustration and alienation which some of them feel in society and school.

In fact, I cannot look at the crisis plaguing African-Canadian youth today, with respect to education and achievement, and simply accept the status quo. This report then, is a call for linking research knowledge, social commitment and political action for educational change in Ontario. While there are many people in various capacities of the educational system who are doing their utmost for the cause of education in this province, the learning objective of this study is to provide a space for reciprocal dialogue and for critical self- and group-reflection about the school system and what Ontarians can do collectively to address the dilemma of some students disengaging and fading out of school.

Where criticisms are offered they must be seen as directed for the most part toward the educational system and societal practices and not to the purposeful intent of specific individuals.

The objectives of this study are, therefore, neither to blame nor preach, but rather to achieve a holistic understanding of the "dropout" dilemma through the perspectives of those who participated in the study. It is with this more informed understanding that we must convey our discomfort with using the term "dropout", insomuch as it embodies socially constructed notions of individual failure. This research has clearly demonstrated that we can no longer base our understanding of dropouts on such ill-perceived notions and that we must be prepared to re-conceptualize the process of student disengagement based on lived realities rather than social stigma.

2.0 AIMS AND OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The initial proposal submitted by the PI for the 1992-93 Transfer Grant competitions indicated that the project would be using the narratives of Black students and school dropouts as they discuss their experiences in the Ontario public school system, and in some cases their reasons for leaving school. At this stage, the main research objective was the investigation of what student narratives of their lived experiences could tell us about the dropout problem, and particularly about the influence of race/ethnicity, class, gender, power, and social structures on dropping out from school. This research, therefore, sought to examine all of the possible factors related to student disengagement, with the focus on what can be done to solve these problems and make schools work for all youth.

In subsequent Transfer Grant applications (1993-94 and 1994-95), other research objectives were added to the initial project. These included in-depth interviews with school teachers, administrators and a sample of non-Black students to cross-reference Black youth narratives about their school experiences and the issue of dropping out. An additional research objective was to conduct in-depth interviews with Black/African-Canadian parents, guardians, care-givers and community groups, again to cross-reference student narratives but also to gain the adults' views and perspectives on public schooling in Ontario. The award of a Social Sciences and Humanities Research (SSHRC) grant allowed for an expansion of the research sample and some emphasis to be placed on the theoretical implications of the study.

The significance of the project was seen as the development of an approach to understanding minority student concerns through the study of their individual lived experiences, these being the basis upon which to build strategies of action. It was hoped that the study would be useful to relevant branches of the Ministry of Education and Training (e.g., Curriculum and Policy Development, Community and Education Outreach, Anti-Racism) and school boards in Ontario. It was also felt that the study would provide schools and boards of education with alternative ways for reaching students who have fallen through the cracks, and to provide appropriate incentives for students to remain in school.

While the major research objectives have been met, there was, however, a proposal to work with one or two teachers from each of the four selected schools to develop an African-centred curriculum for integration into the schools instructional practices. The PI had proposed to work

with the identified teachers in two of the selected schools to examine the precise connection between African-centred pedagogy and anti-racist education, and to address the implications of African-centred pedagogy for non-Black students. Although this was not possible from the point of *action research*, the PI has written papers in scholarly refereed journals on the topic, informed primarily by the research findings of this project (see Dei, 1995a; 1995f; 1995g).

In recent years, Canadians have increasingly voiced their concerns about the public school system, and in particular, about the ability of schools to educate and to prepare youth to assume the responsibilities of national and global citizenship. It is generally acknowledged that one of the most crucial issues facing Canadian education is the problem of school dropouts (see Conference Board of Canada, 1991; Cadieux, 1991; Employment and Immigration Canada, 1990). Currently, it is estimated that between 20 and 30 percent of students do not finish school, and that at the present dropout level, as many as one million under-educated and untrained youths will have entered the Canadian labour market by the year 2000 (University Affairs, 1991:5; Statistics Canada, 1991; Youth Affairs Branch of Employment and Immigration, 1990; Stay in School Supplement, 1991). This is at a time when more than 60 percent of new jobs being created in Canada need at least a high-school education (Cadieux 1991:1). Therefore, school dropouts exact a huge social and economic cost to Canadians.

In fact, an article in *The Toronto Star* quotes a Conference Board of Canada study which estimates a $4 billion lifetime loss in earning power for the 137,000 students who failed to graduate with the class of 1979 (see Crawford, 1993). The same news publication also mentions a January 1993 report of the Liberal Party's Senate and House of Commons Committee on Youth which points out that school dropouts are a great cost to Canadian taxpayers in terms of their weak earning power, the lower taxes these individuals pay, and the additional cost of unemployment, welfare, health and policing. The Province of Ontario has a $14 billion public school system, $10 billion in provincial spending and another $4 billion collected in local property taxes for the running of the schools. The nation, as a whole, has a $55 billion education system. Given such information, many Canadians are understandably concerned that they are not getting their money's worth or the full value for such educational spending.

In this final report to the Ontario Ministry of Education and Training, (with the assistance of graduate students from the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education), I provide the findings of an in-depth analysis of Black/African-Canadian student narratives of their school experiences, cross-referenced with teachers' and Black parents' views about schooling and education. The students' assistance on this project has been invaluable.

Many textual accounts, dealing with the practices of public schooling, offer only disconcerting generalizations of minority youth in the school system and have failed to deal with the specific social, cultural and economic contexts which connect the difficulties faced by these students to broader social issues. As such, student and parent concerns about the nature and processes of schooling in multi-ethnic communities are usually presented outside the very context in which these concerns arise. In order to better understand the disjunctures between social reality and

school policy, it is therefore necessary to focus on the daily experiences and actual lived realities of those who find themselves within the margins of mainstream society and academic discourse. In this way, we can better understand the dynamics of social difference as they operate on an interpersonal as well as institutional level.

The specific context of the problem of student disengagement and fading out of school has been of intense interest and the subject of discussion among and within academic and public circles. While definitely not a recent concern, it appears that the 1980s and 1990s have seen a resurgence of local community dissatisfaction with the low academic placement and performance of their students. In the 1990s, Black/African-Canadian parents, guardians, caregivers, community workers, students and educators continue to ask fundamental questions about the ability of public schools to equip Black youth with the requisite tools and skills essential to take advantage of the opportunities available to youth. Therefore, local community fears, anxieties and frustrations with the school system are predicated on the inefficacy of the current educational system to address the problems of Black youth.

For example, in a 1991 high-school survey by one board of education in Toronto, it was revealed that African-Canadian youth were not achieving as well as other students in terms of credit accumulation. It was shown that 36% of Black students were "at risk" of dropping out because of failure to accumulate sufficient credits to graduate within six years. This compared with 26% for Whites and 18% for Asians (see Yau, Cheng and Ziegler, 1993; Cheng, 1995). This survey also confirmed "...that 45% of Black high-school students were enrolled in the Basic and General levels, as compared to 28% of the entire student body placed in those two lower streams" (Cheng, 1995:2; see also Cheng, Yau and Ziegler, 1993:15; Brown, Cheng, Yau and Ziegler 1992:13). In the most revealing statistics, the board of education's study of high-school students who enrolled in 1987 showed that by 1991, 42% of Black students (compared to the overall student population of 33%) dropped out of school (see Brown, 1993:5). Given the fact that this particular board of education had been in the forefront of addressing educational equity issues in the province, it is not inconceivable to suggest that the situation may in fact be worse in other boards of education.

Indeed, the report of the Ontario Royal Commission on Learning, released early this year, highlighted the alarming dropout rate in discussions about "a crisis among Black youth" with respect to "education and achievement" (RCOL, 1994). Reading the Commission's report should give all Ontarians, and Black/African-Canadians in particular, a reason to reflect critically on the provincial educational system. Among many important messages for Ontario education, there is one that cannot easily be lost -- stakeholders in the provincial education system who take credit for student success should also find it incumbent upon themselves to accept responsibility for any failures.

In order to properly articulate the issues and concerns about student disengagement it is important to examine the problem of dropping out from school as it is discussed in the literature on schooling and education for minority youth in Euro-Canadian/American contexts.

3.0 REVIEW OF LITERATURE ON MINORITY EDUCATION

The literature on minority education is vast. A number of studies on minorities in the educational system in various countries in the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) discuss variables which affect the educational progress of racial and ethno-cultural minority youths. Migration stress, cultural differences, family disorganization, domestic responsibility, dialect interference, low self-esteem, disadvantage, culturally biased tests, low teacher expectations, unsuitable curricula, low socioeconomic class and racial hostility are among the variables mentioned (see Cummins, 1984, 1986, 1989a; Appel, 1988; CERI, 1987a, 1987b; Ogbu, 1978; Ogbu and Matute-Bianchi, 1986; Verma, 1987, 1989).

Cummins (1986) has argued that early explanations of academic underachievement of some minorities were presented in terms of "*bicultural ambivalence*", that is, the lack of cultural identification of students to both home and school cultures. Other explanations refer to the "*caste*" status of involuntary minorities (Ogbu, 1978). It has been argued that given the economic and social discrimination and marginalization faced by minorities, they themselves have internalized the inferior status ascribed to them by the dominant culture. Feuerstein (1979) refers to the "*disruption of intergenerational transmission processes*" caused by the "alienation of a group from its own culture" (Cummins, 1986:22). While many of these early ideas have since been refined by their proponents, it is important to note that they continue to bear some degree of relevance in confronting the challenges of minority education in Euro-American contexts. Current discourses about culturally contextualized education recognize the importance of critically interrogating students' home and school cultures for the sources of empowering minority youth to succeed in school.

Unfortunately, in the public arena, critical debates along these lines have been sidetracked by other powerful political interests and agendas. Dehli (1994:8) argues that the 1980s and 1990s have seen public debates about schooling in North America and Europe shift from "...concerns about equality in educational opportunity to arguments about quality, performance, standards, efficiency, accountability and parental choice." She refers readers to the critical works of Calvert and Kuehn (1993), Claudfield (1993), Apple (1993), Cookson (1992), Woods (1992), Vincent (1992a, 1992b), and Seddon (1990) in pointing out how in public debates about education, the language of the "market" has replaced concerns about educational equity and social justice. In some social circles there has been a lack of understanding of how issues of equity are inextricably linked with academic excellence and quality education.

Conservative dogmas which see schools as apolitical and unaffected by the larger social milieux are now being confronted by oppositional discourses. In articulating concerns about minority education in Euro-American contexts, there are many critical educational researchers and practitioners who see schools as "contested public spheres" (Fine, 1993:682), as political sites for the reproduction of power and social inequality (see also Apple and Weis, 1983). They see structural poverty, racism, sexism, and social and cultural differences as significant factors in the schooling outcomes of minority youth in particular. It is argued that the structural processes of

schooling and education provide unequal opportunities and create differential outcomes particularly for racial minority students and students from low socio-economic family backgrounds (see Willis, 1977; 1983).

Critical educationists (Giroux, 1983a; Apple, 1986; McCarthy, 1990) have drawn attention to how schools function to reproduce dominant ideologies of society. Focus on the examination of differential power relations within society, and how they implicate the processes of delivering education, has provided us with an understanding of how the ideology of public schooling works to maintain the status quo and to serve the needs and dictates of capital. This is a radical departure from early views that focused on family-school relations, conceptualizing schools and homes as sites and sources of student educational problems and pathologies.

While dropouts may be seen as part of the culture of schooling, the factors which affect student disengagement still need to be articulated. Literature on the specific problem of school dropouts is particularly extensive. Many factors have been suggested as influencing dropping out: streaming in the schools, poverty, Eurocentrism, and discrimination (Ministry of Citizenship 1989; Pollard 1989). However, until the 1990s, much of the analyses tended to over-generalize without delving into the specifics concerning various social groups in the educational system. Earlier efforts to understand the issue of school dropouts also concentrated on statistical reports of dropout rates without in-depth analysis of student perspectives as to why they stay in or leave school. In fact, studies of school dropouts have generally been structural accounts that offer little insight into the students' points of view (see also Trueba, Spindler and Spindler, 1989; Weis, Farrar and Petrie, 1989; Fine, 1991). The lack of such insight into the experiential aspect of student disengagement, therefore, renders these studies superficial and speculative.

Lawton (1994:2), in his latest examination of the dropout literature, argues that current studies on the topic reveal that "the generalizations characterizing earlier research rarely apply to specific subgroups. Males differ from females, francophones differ from anglophones; rural from urban, etc. As well, careful analyses of the process of dropping out... indicate that the kind of impact particular events have on the likelihood of one's completing school are usually contingent on other events and conditions." There is an emerging awareness of the need to attend to racial, ethnic and gender differences and specificities, as well as an exploration of the exact relationship between employability and dropping out.

In the Canadian context, much of the research data and scholarly writing that exists focuses on the "problems" and issues of youth education in general. A general survey of environmental, social, attitudinal, personal and economic factors that contribute to the early departure of students from school in Canada (see Statistics Canada, 1991) confirmed the most common reasons cited by students: a preference to work, boredom, problems with school work, financial reasons, problems with teachers, pregnancy and marriage (see also King, Warren, Michalski, and Peart, 1988; and Ministry of Education, Quebec, 1991).

Hartnagel and Krahn's (1989) study in Edmonton looked at "how the labour market may be related to criminal behaviour among school dropouts." The study also found that a third of the dropouts surveyed had been questioned by police and that free time and boredom characterizes the lives of dropouts. These, "... combine[d] to increase opportunities for and temptations to engage in deviant behaviour" (Hartnagel and Krahn, 1989:440). It was revealed that the use and sale of drugs was as common among students as dropouts (see also Fagan and Pabon, 1990).

In Ontario, a few studies have highlighted the specific problem of minority youth disengagement from school, with an eye to strategies for intervention (Cummins, 1989b; Natriello, McDill and Pallas 1985; Wright, 1985; Cheng, Tsuji, Yau and Ziegler, 1989). Radwanski's (1987) study, focusing on the problem of streaming in Ontario and its effects on Black/African-Canadian students, also identified school-related and economic and personal factors as contributing to a student's decision to drop out. This influential report called for the elimination of streaming. In their critique of the study, Allison and Paquettte (1991), Black (1988) and Townsend (1988) argued that Radwanski had "confused correlation with cause and effect" (Lawton, 1994:3). Mackay and Myles (1989), in their study, also highlighted family background (e.g., economic and educational status), personal characteristics and attitudes (e.g., age, gender, psycho-socio characteristics), academic achievement (marks, grade retention), and school climate (e.g., culture and ecology) as significant variables in the explanation of why First Nations' students dropped out of Ontario schools (see also Mackay and Myles, 1995).

Lawton, Leithwood, Batcher, Donaldson, and Stewart (1988) explored how the school system and other social and maturation themes work to place some students in a marginal position and eventually lead to their dropping out. Questions of relevance of school courses, school attendance and disengagement from classes to "drop-out behaviour" have also been examined to varying degrees in surveys by Karp (1988); King, Warren, Michalski and Peart, (1988), and Sullivan (1989). The specific issues about "transition" through grades have been explored by Hargreaves and Earl (1990) and Hargreaves, Leithwood, et al. (1993). Finally, Quirouette, Saint-Denis and Hout (1989, 1990) utilized a questionnaire to identify students at risk of dropping out, by asking about family characteristics, feelings of isolation, school work, future plans for school, school interest and the need for help from teachers. In particular, Quirouette, Saint-Denis and Hout (1989) discussed intervention programs, including individual and group counselling measures, mentoring and peer counselling for dropouts and "at-risk" students in French language schools. Desnoyers and Pauker (1988) also surveyed some of the methods and programs being implemented by schools and boards of education to increase school attendance and deal with the dropout problem.

These studies generally highlight the need to address the genuine problems faced by students in the Canadian educational system. But, while many of the authors provide recommendations for reforms in the schools, they fail to adequately explore the questions of class, gender, race/ethnicity, power and history in the discussion of dropping out, and particularly, how students' lived experiences and social reality have contributed to compounding the problems of racial minority education and school disengagement. We take the position that addressing

questions of power, equity and social difference is significant to ensure student engagement and retention in schools, leading eventually to enhanced learning outcomes.

Daenzer and Dei (1994) point out that research by race is still largely an unsettling issue for many Canadians. Yet, much of the available research data do point to significant differences that Black and other minority youths experience in the Ontario school system (see Brathwaite 1989; James, 1990; Solomon, 1992; Henry, 1992, 1994; Dei, 1993e). These critical educators and researchers draw attention to the need to examine the institutional processes of schooling (see also Lee, 1985, 1995), bringing to the fore how racism, discrimination, exclusion and economic inequality contribute to schooling outcomes for Black youth. To varying degrees, the works of Brathwaite (1989), James (1990), Solomon (1992), Sium (1987), Little (1992), Dei (1993e), (1994d), (1995e); Dei and Razack (1995), Working Group (1992), CABE (1992), and BEWG (1993) draw attention to Eurocentric curricular practices, the lack of Black representation in teaching and top administrative positions, ineffective and biased assessment and placement procedures, tensions between dominant and oppositional minority cultures in the schools and conflicts between diverse learning and teaching styles and techniques (see also Cheng, 1995). Many of the research findings, documenting Black students' alienation in Ontario schools, correspond with literature on minority education in other Euro-American contexts (see Carby, 1986; Oliver, 1986; Jacob and Jordan, 1993; Garibaldi, 1992; Comer, 1988; Amos and Parmar, 1987; Fuller, 1986; Fine, 1991; Ford and Harris, 1994; Alladin, 1995). In fact, US research is focusing strongly on alternative visions of schooling informed by the success stories in minority settings and a critique of conventional schools (see Ernst, Statzner and Trueba, 1994).

Since the early 1980s, the voices of many Black parents and educators have intensified about the problem of student disengagement from school and have acknowledged a "crisis" within their communities (see Board of Education, Toronto, 1988; Sharpe, 1991). Some of the educational concerns that specifically affect Black youth were articulated in the Stephen Lewis report (see Lewis, 1992) and also in the report of the Ontario Royal Commission on Learning (RCOL, 1994). In the 1990s, state-sponsored or community-initiated research studies on Ontario education have affirmed minority student voices and questioned the absence of an inclusive school environment. Community groups such as the Organization of Parents of Black Children (OPBC) (see Board of Education, 1988), Black Educators Working Group (BEWG) (1993), the Working Group (1992) and the Canadian Alliance of Black Educators (CABE) (1992) have pointed out that the absence of an inclusive school environment makes it difficult for some youths to connect to or identify with the school. The provincial government, partly in recognition of expressed concerns and community pressure, has undertaken a number of policy initiatives in the last two years (see Wright and Allingham, 1994). Four of the most recent and notable government policy documents dealing with Ontario education are The Common Curriculum (MET, 1993a); Violence-Free Schools, Guidelines for Policy Development and Implementation Relating to Antiracism and Ethnocultural Equity in School Boards (MET, 1993b); and Changing Perspectives: A Resource Guide for Race and Ethnocultural Equity, K-13 (MET, 1992). These documents, for the most part, provide general frameworks within which school boards and schools can act. Also, the provincial Ministry of Citizenship (through the Ontario

Anti-Racism Secretariat and in conjunction with some school boards) has initiated specific programs directed at minority youths who are not succeeding academically and are considered at risk of dropping out of school (see, for example, Ministry of Citizenship, 1994). While in theory, many of the provincial documents aim to meet the challenge of inclusiveness in schools, the difficult task of implementing policy statements into concrete and practical action remains. More disturbing is that the fate of some of these documents in the new provincial government of Ontario is not clear.

4.0 THEORETICAL APPROACHES TO UNDERSTANDING SCHOOL "DROPOUTS"

Lawton (1992, 1994) has synthesized the various theoretical positions, models and frameworks explaining "dropping out". The fact that the dropout literature is theoretically inadequate and impoverished is generally acknowledged. Lawton (1992, 1994) points out that Finn's (1989) "frustration/self-esteem" model views dropping out as a developmental process beginning in the earliest grades. The model argues that students who do not do well become frustrated early in school. With time, their frustration can result in a lower self-image, which eventually leads them to drop out. Our critique of this model is that it does not adequately explain why some students do not do well in school in the first place. The notion of "low self-esteem" could be used to blame the student and thereby mask the structural and institutional inequities and contradictions these students have to deal with that engender the phenomenon of dropping out. Therefore, "self-esteem" may not be a useful concept for understanding the phenomenon of school dropouts when it fails to acknowledge racial, ethnic and cultural differences as well as issues of social class and gender.

The "Participation-Identification" model, explaining dropping out, (Finn, 1989) postulates that involvement in school activities usually results in identification and social attraction to a group. Conversely, the lack of participation results in a lack of identification. It is argued that the likelihood of a youth successfully completing high school is maximized if the student "....maintains multiple, expanding forms of participation in school-relevant activities" (Lawton, 1992:20). Marginalized students can become isolated from the mainstream student body. They may feel alienated from the school system as a whole and consequently drop out (Finn, 1987, 1989). This model has some utility for understanding the impact of marginalization of racial and ethnic minorities in Eurocentric educational institutions, but it does not adequately address how and why visible minority students, for example, become marginalized. It does not account for why even those students who identify with the school system could still fade out because of the way external structural conditions are mediated within the school system.

Similarly, the "deviance theory" of dropping out (see LeCompte and Dworkin, 1991) argues that by failing to support and respect the existing institutional norms, values, ethos and rules of the school, students run the risk of being branded deviants. Consequently, these students may be denied privileges and rewards that the institution accords to well-behaved students. With time, the "deviants" internalize such institutional labels by redefining themselves in terms of their deviant behaviour. They drift towards behaviours that offer their own rewards rather than the

institutional sanctions of the school. Students' oppositional behaviour acquires some legitimacy of its own. Because the school system does not tolerate such behaviour as frequent absenteeism, poor academic performance and truancy, their perpetrators are eventually "pushed out" of school.

The deviance model is particularly relevant for steering attention to institutional structures and processes that rationalize school decisions to "push out" students who are non-conformists. However, it does not problematize how "deviance" is constructed in society. This is important if we are to make the connection between the school and its policies and the wider social setting in accounting for school dropouts. This connection is essential for understanding the school experiences of Black students. The policies of the school towards "non-conformists" and those who act and look different from the mainstream are a reflection of the social forces of society. Society expects the school to legitimize certain hegemonic and ideological practices, while delegitimizing others.

Schools can be seen then, as a microcosm of society and the primary site of social reproduction. This refers to the fact that schools create the ideological conditions necessary to replicate the extant social class and power relations which maintain social order. However, for minority students, this entails replicating a position of marginality where issues of equal access to opportunities and success are constrained by the same social and ideological factors which operate in the broader social context and serve to legitimize their subordinate status. These factors include, racism, classism, discrimination, language barriers, Eurocentrism, alienation and, in general, a perceived deviance from the status quo.

Other theories explaining school dropouts include those that hypothesize a link between structural strain on institutions and the behaviour and attitudes of their employees and clients. LeCompte and Dworkin's (1991) "structural strain and alienation" model argues that if societal changes reduce the fit between school and society, then teachers and students are likely to perceive their efforts and participation as purposeless. The outcome of such a situation is burnout for teachers, and alienation and dropping out for students. The relevance of this model lies in the introduction of key concepts such as "alienation", "powerlessness", "meaninglessness", "normlessness", and "isolation" to explain why students give up on school when their lived realities do not match the expectations society and schooling have promised (Lawton, 1992:21). Others studies, such as Manski (1989), Stage (1989) and Bickel and Papagiannis (1988), have utilized economic models of cost-benefit analysis to try and explain the causes of dropping out. Stage (1989) and Bickel and Papagiannis (1988) focused on local economic conditions, arguing that high-school students will more likely stay in school and graduate if there is a good chance of gaining employment and improving their incomes with completed education. On the other hand, if students feel local conditions make employment unlikely regardless of education level, then there is a good chance of students leaving school prematurely.

These theories provide additional insights into students' decisions to stay or leave school with reference to the rational calculations students make when considering whether to stay in school in light of their social circumstances. There are students who leave school when they realize they

could be better off economically by doing something else. But even here, the narratives of the lived experiences of these students reveal the complex web of social structural, cultural and institutional factors that come into play.

For Black/African-Canadian youth in an inner, multi-ethnic city, a grounded theory for understanding the causes of dropping out builds upon the insights provided by earlier theoretical approaches. Understanding the causes of dropping out must also include the concept of resistance as a factor related to student disengagement. Building a theory of resistance for students begins with an adequate definition of "resistance". We understand resistance to involve the attitudes, behaviours and actions which challenge dominant institutional norms and practices, as a means to effect social and institutional change.

There is no one specific context for discussing the issue of resistance in this report, since it is manifest in many forms. Dropping out and the behaviours associated with "fading out" of school (e.g., truancy, lack of interest and participation in school etc.) can be seen as forms of resistance, however increased student participation within school structures (e.g., establishing clubs, participating on student council etc.), when done as a means to effect institutional and social change can also be regarded as means of resistance. Even though engaging the system in order to change it runs the risk of being coopted by the same institution it challenges, the vision for an alternative structure qualifies these actions as acts of resistance.

Some expressions of resistance can be identified in terms of "ideological resistance", or oppositional attitudes influenced by counter-hegemonic ideologies. As well, oppositional behaviours such as, "acting out", adopting styles of dress which conflict with dominant cultural norms, use of language, and sometimes violence may be interpreted as practices of resistance when they are intended to assert the marginalized perspective and attempt to subvert dominant norms and values.

Education itself is also a means of resistance, particularly in terms of Black-focused schools or other sorts of private religious/cultural schools where the introduction of otherwise repressed knowledge bases (i.e Afrocentric knowledge) challenge and decentre dominant paradigms.

Establishing a grounded theory for understanding the causes of dropping out is facilitated by analyzing the narratives of students. In this way, we begin to uncover how social difference, based on such dynamics as race, ethnicity, socio-economic class and gender, restricts the educational and life opportunities of some students. We also learn how public schooling privileges and engages certain groups, whilst disengaging and disempowering others. In this report, while we focus on individual student and focus group narratives of lived personal and collective experiences at school, we do not lose sight of the larger, macro-systems, and particularly the out-of-school political and economic forces that structure these individual lives.

Though educational and social researchers and practitioners continue to scramble for solutions to the dropout dilemma, the voices and critiques of students and actual dropouts, as we have

stated earlier, have barely received attention. Their knowledge has remained, and continues to remain, silent or, at the very least, under-expressed in educational literature. As Sheth and Dei (1994) have argued, mainstream educational research has deemed it acceptable to study lived realities through textually transmitted documents without the need for actual subjects. We choose, on the other hand, to include the views of the people we are interested in and are funded to study. Instead of starting with statistical information and prior theoretical constructs of acceptable social behaviour, we proceed by way of collecting material from those who have been labelled "dropouts", "at risk" or those who are still in school and are both satisfied and/or dissatisfied with schools. We recognize that the school system is at the same time intent on resolving the dilemma of dropouts, and also incapable of making the necessary changes without dismantling the very structures that allow schools to function. Starting from here and recognizing this double bind, we build a theoretical framework for understanding from the standpoint of those who are involved.

5.0 OUR RESEARCH FRAMEWORK

This research has employed an anti-racism framework to understand and report on the issues of Black/African-Canadian students' disengagement from school in the Canadian context. The anti-racism perspective interrogates the institutional structures of teaching, learning and administration of education and how local communities (e.g., parents, families, community groups) interact with these structures. This framework acknowledges the role of the educational system in producing and reproducing racial, gender, and class-based inequalities in society. It also acknowledges the pedagogical need to confront the challenge of diversity and difference in Canadian society and the urgency for an educational system that is more inclusive and capable of responding to minority concerns about public schooling. It also critiques the marginalization of certain voices in society, and particularly the failure to take serious account of the rich knowledge and experiences of subordinate groups in the educational system. The anti-racism framework sees schools not only as agencies of cultural, political, economic reproduction, but also as sites of contestation between groups differentially situated in terms of power relations. A critical ethnography of the school that uses the anti-racism framework reveals instances of resistance, from both students and educators which challenge the prevailing culture of dominance.

Anti-racism sees the task of achieving genuine inclusion as involving school administrators and educators to develop a demonstrated commitment to power-sharing in the schools. Students, teachers, parents and local communities are given effective joint responsibilities over the processes of delivering education. Within the Euro-Canadian/American educational system, inclusiveness means dealing foremost with equity: that is, dealing with the qualitative value of justice. Inclusion also means addressing the question of representation: that is, having a multiplicity of perspectives entrenched as part of the mainstream academic knowledge. Furthermore, inclusion means that school and classroom teaching and instructional materials must respond to the challenges of diversity and difference: that is, the socially constructed intersections of race, gender, class, sexuality, language, culture and religion in the school system.

6.0 ON THE CATEGORY OF "BLACK"

In this study, "Black" has been defined as referring to those students of African descent who identify themselves as such. When the project began, two questions were often asked: Why is the study focusing on Black students, and whether this research sees Black students as a homogenous group. One can interpret these questions as being contradictory. Firstly, there is an implicit and mistaken assumption that the dropout issue and the accounting factors may be uniform for all students. There is a substantial body of literature that emphasizes a palpable difference between the educational experiences of Black and non-Black students (see Goodlad 1984; Jaynes and Williams 1989; Fine 1991, Garibaldi 1988; Kozol 1991).

Secondly, while Black students are not a homogenous group, we believe that there are some commonalities in the educational experiences of students born in Africa, the Diaspora and those of mixed parenthood (Black and non-Black). A good share of the educational problems that these students have to contend with may stem from the exigencies of being Black in a white-dominated society. A significant development that impressed those of us who had the privilege to talk to the students of this study is how the students opened up after appearing distant and related some of their deep feelings to us. No doubt, the fact that the interviewers were Black/African-Canadian facilitated this study as the students identified with the interviewers and were able to take us into their confidence.

Nevertheless, as this study revealed, Black/African-Canadian student concerns vary to some extent. For example, Continental African students have concerns about the broad issues of language, religion, and culture. Students who have been schooled in the Caribbean complain about the "social labelling" of Black students as "trouble-makers." There are also complaints about the attempts by schools to place them in English Skills Development (ESD) classes. Questions of identity are raised by students born here in Canada and, particularly, to mixed parents. Students who speak with distinctly different accents and dialects point to intra-group discrimination and prejudices among their peers. By and large, however, certain themes and concerns do emerge from the analysis of the Black students' narratives which allow us to speak about issues in the collective and consequently the term "Black" is also used collectively in reference to African-Canadians.

7.0 RESEARCH ACTIVITIES

7.1 RESEARCH ACTIVITIES: 1992-93

The initial research objective (1992-93) was to interview individually a total of 40 male and female Black students, from Grades 10 and 12, in each of four selected Toronto schools. We also planned to conduct focus-group interviews with students, and to carry out detailed ethnographic observations of the school and classroom interactions.

By the end of the first year we were able to reach the target of forty students in two of the schools, and over twenty students each in the other two schools. Deborah Elva, Gabrielle Hezekiah and the PI were the main interviewers. We also conducted three focus group interviews with students. Additionally, over two dozen students from other Metropolitan Toronto schools were contacted through our community ties, as well as 21 actual school dropouts, and students designated "at risk", some of whom have since returned to school. The PI, with the assistance of Rinaldo Walcott, also conducted separate focus group interviews with "at-risk" students in a provincially funded program run by a board of education, students in a summer job program, as well as students in a youth program in Toronto.

Bobby Blanford and the PI also collected board-level data on student retention and graduation rates to assist in the compilation of statistical data on school leavers in the 1992-93 and 1993-94 academic years (see appendix I). An additional school board document review included the examination of the racial, ethnic, and gender composition of the staff and student population (where available), as well as the breakdown of Canadian-born and immigrant children and the latter's countries of origin. The PI also conducted ethnographic studies of the four selected schools, including observations of classroom interactions, peer group interactions, school cultures, and other aspects concerning the organizational life of schools. There were initial transcriptions of interviews by Caralee Price, Adrienne Churchill, Jennifer Pierce and Olga Williams. Anita Sheth devoted time to writing a working document on the re-conceptualization of the "dropout" phenomenon from a preliminary analysis of the data.

7.2 RESEARCH ACTIVITIES: 1993-94

In the second year of the project (1993-94), we continued to interview Black students from the four high schools involved in the project. By the end of the year, a total of 150 Black students had been interviewed from the selected schools for the project, as well as four focus group meetings of ten students in each of these schools. In the second year we carried out three basic research objectives: First, the PI, Deborah Elva and Thato Bereng interviewed 55 Black/African-Canadian parents, caregivers, and community workers for their views on public schooling in Ontario, and specifically for their solutions to the school dropout dilemma; second, the PI interviewed 41 teachers, including some school administrators, about their views on the education of youth, the problem of Black student disengagement and "dropping" out of school, and the solutions to the problem; and third, Josephine Mazzuca interviewed more than 59 non-Black students in each of the four high schools to cross-reference the narratives of the Black/African-Canadian students. She also conducted four focus group interviews at the high schools. The principal investigator conducted further ethnographic observations of school/work roles, gender roles, division of labour, as well as student-peer and student-teacher interactions. Tape transcriptions were done by Elizabeth McIsaac, Adrienne Churchill, Josephine Mazzuca, Olga Williams, Les Tager, and Kristine Pearson.

7.3 RESEARCH ACTIVITIES: 1994-95

In the third and final year of the project we looked at four research objectives. First, we completed all individual and focus group interviews outstanding from the earlier phases of the project, including re-interviews of recent dropouts and school returnees. Secondly, the PI conducted separate focus-group interviews with school teachers, Black parents and community groups. Thirdly, we developed our initial policy recommendations and offered practical strategies for educators, school administrators, and parent organizations to encourage students to stay in school. Fourthly, the PI consulted with officials of the MET working on anti-racism initiatives to improve schooling for all youth. The PI and Leilani Holmes have been on a MET committee evaluating research proposals on Anti-racism Initiatives in Teacher Education: Pre-service, Upgrading, Orientation and Outreach Programs. The PI has also provided assistance to a community group (Davenport-Perth Neighbourhood) developing an African-centred curriculum for an alternative school for youth who have left the Ontario public school system prematurely. Much of the year, however, has been devoted to comprehensive data analysis by Leilani Holmes, Josephine Mazzuca, Elizabeth McIsaac, and Rachel Campbell with some assistance from Sandra Anthony and Camille Logan. The PI has also engaged in some preliminary dissemination of research findings at a few international scholarly conferences as well as some invited addresses.

8.0 GAINING ENTRY AND THE EMOTIONS OF DOING RESEARCH

We look back on this study with satisfaction and some dismay. There is joy and satisfaction because we have heard the voices of students, parents and teachers and have sought to represent their concerns, dreams and aspirations. But we are also fully aware of the hurdles we had to go through just to begin the study. In our respective roles as interviewers, ethnographers, document reviewers, data analysts, we all have something to tell.

Three events/developments stick out in the mind of the PI. First, the intense emotions seen in the faces of the youth as they spoke about the challenges of going to school. Second, the repeated comments of students at the end of focus group discussions when they expressed the wish that such events were more frequent in their schools. And third, at a scholarly conference on school dropouts a fellow participant expressed surprise about how articulate the students and "dropouts" were in discussing their concerns.

In fact, this whole study has not been without countless memorable moments. The PI remembers very well being asked to defend the project before the Research Committees of some boards of education wondering when the project would get under way. When one school board refused permission for access to their schools, the reason cited was that the school board was doing a similar study. The PI was dismayed to learn that the actual reason for being denied access was not the one given.

The PI remembers very well the students, school "dropouts", parents and guardians who took time to come to his office at OISE for an interview. On more than three occasions a mother and

her whole family came to OISE. In fact, one mother came with prepared notes for the interview and pointing to the PI said, "Son, I don't want you to miss a word." Then, there were the students involved in the provincially-funded summer jobs programs, including those from "Goals for Youth" who came to OISE for many interviews and kept asking when would they be invited back. There was one school principal who, having missed an appointment at his school with the PI, graciously came down to OISE to meet with him. There were also those parents who called the PI (when the youth took home the informed consent form for parents' signatures) to find out more about the study. Some of these parents would commend the researcher for initiating the study. At one point, a group of Black students interviewed for the project were invited to share their thoughts and ideas with OISE faculty, students and staff at a public forum. The PI remembers a female student who initially was apprehensive about appearing before a university audience. At the end of the forum she remarked, "this place is not all that they make it out to be." We will surely be seeing this student enrolled in the university in the future.

Within the schools selected for the study, there were the usual frustrations associated with beginning research. For example, interviewers would wait for some students to show up for the interview. Quite a few times a student would arrive for an interview bringing a friend who had heard of the study and wondered why she/he had not been called for an interview. A few students were at first cold and would offer brief responses to questions. It took a little bit of ice-breaking for them to open up to the researchers. It was all part of the feeling-out process. Students wanted to know much about the "politics" of the researcher. Some students asked if the study was going to be of any benefit to them, knowing full well that they have in the past expressed their concerns and in their minds no meaningful action has been taken to address these concerns. At one point a student wanted some assurance from the PI that students' voices will be heard this time around. Other students wanted to know the practical benefits of the study in terms of improving their schooling and education.

Interviews with some students were very painful and at times emotionally charged. The PI remembers times when students broke down as they recounted some of their experiences. The study also took an emotional toll on the researchers. The PI harbours a fear that one of the graduate assistants may in fact still be dealing with some of the emotional scars of being involved in the study. There was a particular moment when, in a focus group interview, a student identified a mate in the group as her role model and idol. The expression of surprise and the tears on the face of the individual who was identified was not lost on the PI. On another occasion, a student refused to identify the person she looked up to in society. This was because, as she put it, this person was in the focus group and she did not want her to feel "too proud." The student then broke down and cried when telling us how much she admired this particular individual.

9.0 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

9.1 AREAS OF DATA COLLECTION

Appendices II-XII list the interview and survey guides and other research instruments used to solicit information from the various study participants.

The initial research approach began in May 1992, spending the latter part of the month visiting the schools to collect basic data on activities, programs, enrolment and retention rates for the last five years. Part of this body of data was obtained at the school-board level to demonstrate the nature of the overall problem of dropping out. As already noted, the summer of 1992 was spent contacting "dropouts", "at-risk" students, and other students in Ontario public high schools for interviews.

The research focus on the four selected high schools began in October 1992. Each of the schools had a project coordinator/contact person with whom we worked. These individuals were responsible for identifying students we were interested in interviewing and arranging the meeting place and the schedules. In each school, students were selected to provide a representation of male and female, as well as Grades 10 and 12. The criteria for selecting Grade 10 students at "high risk" of dropping out included below-average marks, poor attendance or inadequate accumulation of credits (see Ziegler 1989; Waterhouse 1990). Grade 12 students provided information as to why they stayed in school and how the system has worked for them. The difficulty of getting students from these two grades led us to include students from other grades (i.e., Grades 9 and 11) (see Appendix XIII). But we have generally focused on the total credits accumulated as an important criterion in the grade selection of students.

Teachers were selected to provide a representation of individuals from diverse racial, ethnic and gender backgrounds. Among the teachers chosen were those teaching history, English as a second language, science and mathematics, sports and athletics. School administrators, including principals and some vice-principals, heads of departments, guidance counsellors and school psychologists were interviewed. It was ensured that the pool consisted of both young staff and those with extensive working experience in the schools.

Apart from the interviews with students, the project also included an ethnography of the school. There were field observations of school culture, work roles, gender roles, as well as student-peer and student-teacher interactions, and classroom activities. The PI attended many classroom discussions, and located himself in school compounds and hallways in order to observe the varied interactions that take place in the daily life of a school. He was around for opening days of the school term to witness all the action and excitement and was permitted to observe a few staff meetings. In two schools he was invited to talk to teachers during their staff meetings. He also attended graduation events and Parent-Teacher Association meetings. As well, he attended some sessions with invited speakers to schools.

The study sample of Black parents, guardians and community workers was chosen to reflect gender and family differences, as well as socio-economic backgrounds. Canadian-born and non-Canadian-born parents were interviewed. Parents and community groups with a long history of contact with the school system were also interviewed.

9.2 DATA ANALYSIS

Research data from students, teachers, school administrators, parents and community workers have been cross-referenced. Focus group meetings were used to cross-check our interpretations of individual and group narratives with the study participants. Research data have been analyzed qualitatively and quantitatively to reflect general trends, and particularly the impact of gender and social difference on the issue of student disengagement and the process of fading out of school. Through triangulation we have been able to compare individual narratives and show both general and distinctive trends.

Analysis of the narratives collected from students (Black and non-Black), dropouts, teachers, administrators and parents involved a two-step reading process. Using *The Ethnograph*, a software programme designed to sort qualitative data, transcripts were coded and re-coded according to interview structure and emergent themes. Four research assistants participated in the analysis, allowing for different readers of each file and overall familiarity with the data collected.

The preliminary reading of the transcripts involved coding the files according to the questions asked. Students interviewed were asked a series of questions pertaining to their perceptions of dropouts, school experiences, and their overall vantage point of society. The responses to these questions were coded according to the particular framing so that the context for any segment is immediately discernable.

The in-depth analysis of narratives followed a much less structured framework, allowing the words of the students, parents and teachers to direct the coding. Particular themes emerged which informed the development of a theme code set. The content of the narratives can be contrasted with the context in which it occurs, and therefore strengthen or weaken the power of particular responses. For example, if students were to speak consistently about racism when asked about their experiences of gender in the schools, the claim that gender and race intersect would be strengthened in that the connections are made by students, unsolicited by the interviewer.

Theme Codes Used in In-Depth Analysis:

Black-Focused School	Gender	Racism (Incident)
Black Identity	History	Religion
Boredom	Language	Representation
Clubs	Nationality	Respect
Culture	Notable Quote	Role Model
Curriculum	Police	Society
Differential Treatment	Power	Sports
Dropout	Pregnancy	Stereotypes
Economics	Pressure	Teaching Style
Family	Racism (Systemic)	Violence

The Ethnograph

Once codes are entered on *The Ethnograph* programme, searches for particular combinations of codes by variables can be conducted. Variables attached to student files included gender, age, grade, stream, and place of birth. Searching the files was completed primarily by looking for "Notable Quotes" in combination with each of the question frames. In this way, a generalized understanding of students' responses to each question was established and themes highlighted. From this, a broader synthesis of themes brought out in the narratives and the way in which the process of disengagement was constructed by students was established in focus meetings of the analysis team.

Additional Tracking

The process of theme coding was accompanied by additional tracking of student responses to some of the questions. This quantitative summary has allowed numeric values to be attached to some of the issues addressed in the analysis to follow in Section 15.0.

As part of the process of data collection and preliminary dissemination of research findings, the PI has undertaken a number of speaking engagements at community meetings, conducted workshops for students, teachers and parents, participated in radio call-in programs, and attended scholarly conferences. Some of these engagements have provided opportunities for the PI to cross-check, cross-reference and validate our interpretations of individual and group narratives with the study participants (e.g., presentations before local parent and community groups; meetings with students, teachers and administrators in the selected four schools research findings).

10.0 RESEARCH OUTPUT

On the basis of the literature review and the initial analysis of research findings, the PI has written some papers for publication in scholarly refereed and non-refereed journals, as well as

making presentations at international conferences and at invited sessions (see Dei, 1992a; 1992b; 1993a; 1993b; 1993c; 1993d; 1993e; 1993f; 1994a; 1994b; 1994c; 1994d; 1995a; 1995b; 1995c; 1995d; 1995e; 1995f; 1995g; and Dei and Walcott, 1993).

11.0 SURVEY RESPONSES

11.1 BLACK STUDENTS

Before discussing the research findings from student, parent and teacher narratives, it is important to have some sense of the backgrounds of the students interviewed. Among the Black youth interviewed, 145 also completed a survey which sought firm responses to certain questions. For the most part, student responses were obtained prior to beginning in-depth, individual interviews. Out of the 145 completed surveys, 80 (55%) students said they were born outside of Canada. Among them, 64 (80%) were born in the Caribbean, 11 (14%) in Africa, and 5 (6%) elsewhere. Of the students born outside Canada, 71 (89%) came to the country after 1980. In total, 97 (67%) of the students speak English only, while 48 (33%) speak additional languages. 65 (45%) students took advanced level courses. The majority of the students, 93 (64%), did not live at home with both parents. 76 (52%) students also said that their parents do not help them in their school work. Asked about their school experiences, 71 (49%) students said they had no input in the decision-making processes affecting their lives in the school. 78 (54%) students suggested that the school had not done enough to make attending school a worthwhile experience for them. 79 (54%) students also felt they were not treated fairly by school authorities. 97 (67%) students indicated that the school does not discuss with students the consequences of dropping out. The majority of the students in the survey, 95 (66%), said they knew someone who had dropped out of school. Finally, 47 (33%) students admitted they had considered leaving high school.

11.2 NON-BLACK STUDENTS

Among the total of 59 non-Black (predominantly White) students (27 males and 32 females) interviewed, only 8 (13.6%) were born outside Canada, six of whom immigrated here with their parents between 1980-89. The remaining two students came to Canada after 1990. 17 (28.9%) students speak an additional language. None of the students indicated that they are taking basic level courses, and only 11 (18.7%) students are in general level classes. In fact, 5 (8.5%) are in enriched or "gifted" programs. Only 8 (13.6%) students do not live at home with both parents. 17 (28.9%) students said that their parents do not help them in their school work. 29 (49.2%) students answered in the affirmative that the school has done enough to make attending school a worthwhile experience for them. 22 (37.3%) students asserted that the school discusses with them the consequences of "dropping out" of school. 27 (45.8%) students said they have no input in decision-making processes affecting students' lives at school. 35 (59.3%) students said that they knew of someone who had dropped out of school. 37 (62.7%) students answered in the affirmative that they were treated fairly at school by the authorities and only 12 (20.3%) students had ever considered leaving school.

In presenting the above figures, it should be noted that these are self-reporting responses and that further probing of some of the questions through in-depth interviewing provides a deeper understanding of some of the responses offered here.

12.0 STATISTICAL INFORMATION ON DROPOUTS

Appendix I provides a summary of the characteristics of early school leavers from information provided by selected schools/school boards involved in the project. This summary addresses some of the difficulties involved in gathering quantitative data dealing with high school dropout rates.

13.0 EXAMINING THE NARRATIVES

The following section is an examination of the narratives of Black students, school dropouts, non-Black students, teachers, parents and community workers. Responses were gathered on a variety of issues related to schooling and society as a means to gaining a more holistic understanding of the dropout phenomenon. It should also be noted that the responses of specific groups were included only when they were germane to the topic being addressed.

13.1 CONCEPTUALIZING "DROPOUT"

Respondents used their own frames of reference to give meaning to the term "dropout." The collective vision which emerges is a composite of behavioral traits, attitudes and socially constructed notions which are often at odds with one another. They speak to the fact that the term "dropout" represents different things to different people and can therefore not be regarded as static. The various perspectives which emerge emanate from specific ideologies and world views; some which challenge the "conventional wisdom" regarding dropouts and others which reinforce standard misconceptions. Employing race as a factor, we can also see how the stereotype and stigma of dropping out of school takes on a different meaning.

13.1.1 Meanings and Interpretations

Black Students:

There was general agreement among both Black and non-Black students interviewed that a dropout may be defined as someone who stops coming to school. Some students, however, also included in their definitions of dropout, students who are still officially "at" school, but who are involved in a process of "fading out" or disengagement. These students were identified as skipping classes, hanging out, 'acting up' and not being involved in the formal aspects of the school. These behaviours often represent the first stage toward complete disengagement or dropping out, yet many of these warning signs are ignored by school agents.

The question of definition was probed further, inquiring whether students who changed schools could be considered dropouts. The implication of this question was whether students defined failing in a particular environment as "dropping out." The answers to this question were unanimously "no" -- a dropout is somebody who completely disengages from the system. Students who transfer to different schools were generally understood to have had problems at the previous school -- conflicts with administration, teachers, or students, and failure -- and were seeking an alternative environment where they could succeed.

The ways students framed their understanding of why some students drop out of school can be related to certain ideological positions. Some responses conceptualize dropouts as "push outs", implicating outside forces such as adverse economic or social structural conditions and personal problems, which conspire to force individuals out of school:

> Dropouts are...students who have some kind of personal problems or anything socially that doesn't allow them to actually continue school or even work. They can't, whatever the problem may be, they can't actually continue school. *They have no other choice.* (File W01: Lines 24-32)

Other responses are examples of individualism and a meritocratic world view, where the individual is implicated as the sole architect of their success or failure. This can be said to form the basis of popular notions or what is known as the 'conventional wisdom' regarding dropouts:

> ...it's, like, if...you drop out, it means that you don't want to come to school or you choose not to come to school. And *it's up to you*, it's your decision. Nobody won't force you to go. (File B04: Lines 22-28)

There were also responses which isolated factors related to the notion of a "hidden curriculum": that is, the attitudes and behaviours of teachers and other school agents that may affect a student's decision to leave school:

> I understand that lots of people dropped out because some of them are saying how much a teacher don't like them and stuff like that. (File D27: Lines 11-14)

This points to the powerful effect of the interpersonal relationship between teachers and students and the repercussions which can occur if this relationship is perceived to be negative.

Coupled with ideological factors, we can see, therefore, how "dropout" is a loaded term. It embodies an etiology, in that it is a phenomenon conceptualized through various perceived causes. Where these causes are connected to individual shortcomings, they contribute to negative stereotypes and the stigmatization of leaving school, rather than implicating the school as part

of the problem. Specifically, when race is a factor, these stereotypes essentialize the low expectations for Black students:

> I feel so angry; I get so bitter inside for them because it's like this is what people expect of some Black people, that they can't accomplish nothing. They can't be a doctor or a lawyer...they're not capable. They're ignorant, as "they" put it. They always say we're ignorant, and it just, it makes us look so low. (File W17: Lines 100-120)

The anger expressed here is empathetic and directed not toward the dropouts, but rather to their predicament. This quote, then, not only relates to the negative stereotypes associated with dropping out, but highlights how those stereotypes are connected with racial and cultural biases. In other words, a White student's dropping out may carry the stigma of perceived failure but it is not automatically ascribed to racial or cultural factors, which is what occurs when the student is Black. The preceding quote is evidence of how the stigma associated with Black students who drop out affects even those students who remain in school, since it legitimizes perceived notions of the inferiority of all Black people. Therefore, the negative stereotypes and social stigmas carried by Black students who drop out affect not only themselves, but, in fact, affect the status and perception of all Blacks in society.

Students expressed a range of feelings from sadness to empathy to anger. In response to why students drop out of school, frequently students began with statements of "It's too bad, I feel sorry for them." Many students spoke in terms which did not blame dropouts, but rather empathized with the reality:

> I don't scorn them, because I feel my friends...would be considered dropouts. But because I know them, I understand that there's politics involved when they say you are a dropout or when you decide to. Some people, they're bored, and you say that's not a valid reason, but after being bored for two years and you haven't gotten let's say eight credits, and...you're like, "I'll be in school longer and longer and it'll get more boring and more frustrating"....a lot of friends have left because of that. Some people leave because they just can't, they can't find themselves in school... (File O03: Lines 73-95)

In the preceding quote, the student talks about the issue of understanding the reality that students face, and the importance which that understanding has for legitimizing their experiences. The reference to feelings of not being able to "find themselves in school", and the sense of "frustration", and "boredom" reveal the emotional and psychological conditions which are seen as contributing to the process of disengagement. These feelings are said to be the result of the

"politics" of schooling, where students who are unable to conform to the demands of their education are left to fall through the cracks.

Other students spoke of different problems facing students, such as financial problems, family problems, pregnancy, problems in the school related to racism and relationships with teachers, lack of academic success, and how some students simply cannot cope. This reveals an identification with the phenomenon of dropping out, whether it be through personal experience or association. Factors attributed to dropping out will be looked at more closely in Section 13.1.3.

When students talk about what dropouts do, it is often associated with negative activities like dealing drugs, hanging out, collecting welfare, etc. Yet, sometimes students mention the positive outcome of getting work, despite not having finished school. In this way, practical ways of seeing how dropouts manage at the moment are expressed:

> They don't think after high school they're going to have anything else so they want to go pursue something that will give them some economic benefit right now. (File B19: Lines 24-28)

Despondency over future employment prospects is the end result of a weak national economy which can force students to question the practical benefits of education in a limited and fluctuating labour market. What seems to develop is a negative and somewhat fatalistic attitude about future options where the exploitation of short-term gains at the expense of long-term goals such as continued education may appear as a more pragmatic solution.

Other students are critical of this move, arguing, "they're stupid for not seeing ...." the connection between work and school, and are therefore short-sighted in their planning. Some students empathized with wanting to leave school but felt that it was not practical. For example, the comment, "Even to be a garbage-man you need Grade 12," was common among students still in school, who despite being dissatisfied, were aware that you had to "play the game" in order to succeed. Education then, is seen as simply the means to an end rather than an end in itself.

Students are generally sympathetic toward dropouts, empathizing with the disadvantage they feel dropouts have in society, due to a lack of education. As the following quote shows, these difficulties are compounded by the issue of race:

> I think it's sad and I think that [Black students] can do better. It's hard enough being the most obvious minority and having to live with that, but the lack of education will only hurt them more. (File D24: Lines 139-145)

The discrimination and difficulty experienced by being Black is clearly described by this student as being intensified when a Black student drops out of school. Dropping out, therefore, creates a double impediment: racial discrimination compounded by a lack of education. As this quote

has shown, Black students who drop out are regarded by some of their peers as following a course of action which further subordinates their position in society.

Profile of a Dropout

Students found it difficult to describe a likely high-school dropout. A number of them responded with words to the effect of, "You can't stereotype." Those students who did give a profile talked about a series of factors which could be categorized as symptoms of disengagement, such as skipping classes, sitting in the back of class, failing, giving the impression that they don't care, hanging out in certain places, and "acting up" in class.

Black students seemed to talk about symptoms of disengaging rather than specific student characteristics. They expressed a deep identification with the experience of not feeling as though they "belonged". The following quote relates to the feelings of alienation felt by students who eventually drop out:

> Mostly it's just the person who's, like, being stretched out, stretching him or herself out, and saying that they don't feel like they belong. They don't feel like they belong in the school... (File B07: Lines 356-362)

The notion of "stretching him or herself out" implies a certain incongruence of the reality of the student with that of the school. It would seem to put into question then, the centrality of White middle-class norms, values and curriculum as the basis of a multi-ethnic school system. Marginalizing the culture and realities of minority students in effect marginalizes the students themselves. Therefore, where the interests of these students remain peripheral to mainstream education, the students will feel themselves similarly situated outside the boundaries of social acceptance. This, then, engenders a school culture and climate that is perceived as being unresponsive and exclusionary.

Dropping Out - Personal Experiences

There were a few students who had dropped out or had come close to dropping out. These students shared anecdotes and insights into their experiences. The following quote deals with the feelings of dissonance and anomie experienced by a particular student who could not relate to other Black students after starting a new school:

> After I moved up here, I didn't really like the area. I thought that I didn't really fit in because nobody was really the same as me. Even the Black students were different from me....they were a bit more White to me than what I was used to and I just didn't really like the school. I didn't fit in....I didn't feel like going because to

> me there was no reason to go. I had nothing to look forward to going there. (File R02: Lines 1476-1490)

This student clearly articulates a sense of detachment from members of his or her own race and ethnic background who acted "a bit more White". This deals with the paradox of cultural conformity, when, as people become more culturally and socially integrated into the mainstream, they are often distancing members of their own ethno-cultural group. In this instance, the student feels a sense of double alienation, from mainstream society and from members of his/her own community who have conformed to the status quo. The importance of school culture and the social aspects of schooling can, therefore, not be underestimated in their impact upon students' disengagement.

Students who had not given serious consideration to dropping out cited family influences as the main reason for not doing so. Responses such as,"Oh yeah, I've thought about it, but my Mom would kill me", were prevalent when the students discussed their own situations. This suggests that parents and the values that they hold are powerful deterrents to leaving school. People within the school (teachers, counsellors, administrators, etc.), however, are not mentioned as persons students could or would approach. In fact, students did not relate to them as people whom they felt would care or try to intervene in a positive way. This in itself is very telling of the perception students have of school agents, and of the inefficacy of some of these agents in providing the kind of support their students require.

The topic of disengagement elicited discussions of parental relationships, values, and responsibilities. Students talk about their connection to a parent, the desire to make that parent (and others in the family) proud, and for many males, to provide for mothers in the future. Students also talk about limited opportunities experienced by their parents and how this affects their own motivation to stay in school:

> ...I'm just kind of holding back because of my dad, ...he had a chance to get his education but he didn't really do that. He was supporting his younger brothers and sisters and stuff. And now today he's got a good job and everything but he could have done better....So, I'm kind of, you know, just staying on. (File O30: Lines 133-144)

Many students said they would not even discuss the idea of dropping out with their parents. Rather, siblings and peers, if anyone, were indicated as people they would confide in if they were thinking about dropping out. In fact, for all students, the people whom they indicated would most likely serve as confidants were friends.

Dropouts:

When those who have been through the process of disengagement from school conceptualize, interpret and give meaning to the term "dropout," they invariably do so from a radically different vantage point than do the students. Students still in the system, whether "at risk" or not, talked hypothetically about what dropping out might mean, yet years (or months) of experience after dropping out put a different "spin" on the meanings and interpretations given to the term "dropout."

Dropouts tended to discuss dropping out as a personal loss -- as a decision made which results in lost time, lost chances, and/or lost status in the society. In this way their narratives do coincide with many student interpretations. Yet dropouts tended not to blame themselves for dropping out and still maintained that their decision made sense at the time. They defined the process of dropping out as one of gradual disengagement from school, a process which for some, began as early as Grade two. Dropouts were able to reach back into their early memories of schooling to locate experiences that related to their eventual disengagement. The following quote shows how, in one instance, racial discrimination and isolation laid the groundwork for dropping out:

> ...it was in Grade 4,...I had a teacher, she blatantly did not want to teach me anything. And I was the only Black kid there in the school, in the neighbourhood, in the whole area...yeah, she was something else. (File F03: Lines 254-261)

This comment also makes connections to the broader impact of the local community and social relations, and the alienation which permeated this student's experiences. Later in the same interview, we can see how these early negative experiences had a constraining effect on this student's future aspirations:

> ... by the time I got to high school, I didn't think I was smart for anything so university was never, ever, ever in my dreams... (File F03: Lines 315-318)

This shows how low expectations and the negative stigma associated with dropping out are internalized and can place limits on self-esteem and ultimately, life chances.

Students tended to say that dropouts do not feel that school is "for them". Dropouts also echo this sentiment, as they talk about a dropout as someone for whom the school is an unfriendly, uncomfortable and unwelcoming place:

> They're not comfortable, you know, the environment that they're in is not really for them, and they're feeling sort of, like

> discouragement about not going to school anymore. (File F10: Lines 60-64)

This exemplifies the personal and academic constraints that result from a negative school environment. The social aspects of schooling are, therefore, important to a student's level of satisfaction with their educational experience and can ultimately influence their decision of whether or not to remain in school.

Finally, dropouts tended to relate dropping out as a failure on the part of the school rather than as a failure on the part of the dropout:

> I don't see them as people who failed. I see them as people that the system failed... (File F13: Lines 2594-2598)

Lack of confidence in the system, and having once been marginalized within its structure may account for the dropouts' concerns that their voices would not be heard. They, more than any other group interviewed in this study, questioned whether anyone would listen or truly react to their narratives.

Non-Black Students:

Non-Black students did not have a clear image or stereotype regarding dropouts: anyone can and does drop out. These students spoke of dropping out as a process also, and mentioned factors which they believed lead to dropping out, such as negative attitudes toward schooling. As such, their views regarded an individual's inclination toward their education as a primary factor of student disengagement:

> People who don't want to learn, just don't want to be in school, they just decide to take a hike and leave. (File CG05: Lines 10-12)

This type of response, which attributes responsibility for dropping out to the individual, was common. The idea that a student who dropped out was someone who "did not want to learn" or who did not like school was prevalent in their responses. The responses of non-Black students versus Black students vary then in this regard. Where Black students were able to acknowledge certain outside forces which impact negatively on a students' ability to remain in school, non-Black students were less cognizant of some of the factors, such as racism, and viewed it as a matter of individual choice. Their vantage point did not appear, therefore, to equip them with a clear understanding of how systemic barriers may hinder the progress of those who are less privileged on the basis of their racial or ethnic group affiliation.

Teachers:

Teachers' understanding and opinions about the meanings and interpretations associated with dropping out of school and other related issues can be said to reflect different locations in an ideological spectrum. These views may be characterized as ranging from "conservative" to "progressive". Generally speaking, older, white males, who described themselves as having life experiences which did not include close relationships with Black/African-Canadians would be defined as being conservative. Conversely, younger, female, and non-white teachers, or white males who had had life experiences involving Black/African-Canadians had what we defined as more progressive attitudes.

Conservative responses were consistent with a belief in meritocracy and denied the saliency of race as the basis for differential treatment within educational institutions. They were similarly disinclined to support anti-racism and multicultural initiatives in education. More progressive opinions, however, usually reflected a deeper understanding or appreciation of Black students' experiences and therefore acknowledged the need for more inclusive schools.

Teachers with more conservative views tended to conceptualize dropping out as a choice, made solely by students who chose not to be focused. They provided several other contributory factors such as becoming pregnant, acting out, generalized adolescent alienation, frustration as the result of not being taught the basics earlier on in school, lacking motivation, lacking a belief in the possibility of success, lacking stable family homes, and lacking certain attitudes needed in order to succeed. In particular, these teachers saw dropping out as related to a societal attitude of "taking the easy way out" or "not taking responsibility." The absence of a "work ethic" in students was often expressed; the idea that students don't realize that one has to work to get things, but want instant gratification. These teachers recognized that dropouts might "blame the institution" for their lack of success but saw this blame as misplaced:

> You don't have to be responsible. And so I think they end up here, many of them without having thought anything out, without putting any effort into anything. And when they find that seven different teachers treat them seven different ways and there doesn't seem to be any consistency in that, then they look at the institution and they say, "The institution sucks. It doesn't know what it's doing. Why should I be here? Why should I do what they say? They don't even know what they're doing." And so they sort of give up. It's almost as if they come wanting to give up before they even start. (File T01: Lines 472-487)

This quote relates to the teacher's perception that dropouts seem to be somehow predisposed to having negative attitudes about schooling. This interpretation does not, however, take into account why these students have negative attitudes in the first place. It therefore holds the

student accountable without first subjecting other factors related to schooling to the same critical examination.

Other teachers saw the dropout dilemma as the result of inappropriate placement. They argued that students with a history of failure are frustrated when they come up against the reality of their failure. Some teachers suggested that certain students cannot function in the rigidity of the school system and will do better in co-op programs. This explanation once again reduces the issue to an individual's failure to meet the demands of the system. It does not, however, interrogate the issue of whether the system is in fact meeting the needs of the student. Thus, where individual ability or academic aptitude are of concern, this should be a demonstrated concern rather than a foregone conclusion.

The family was frequently noted as the key to dropping out by some teachers. The single parent household, in particular, was seen as problematic: parents have less time and often a lack of education, so that children are seen as taking advantage of parents' ignorance of the school system. However, it was the dysfunctional nature of such families that was seen as fundamental by these teachers, rather than lack of advocacy by families on behalf of students in the schools.

A number of teachers discussed the dropout as someone lacking the requisite work ethic needed for academic success. They saw this as an individual for whom school is unimportant, and socializing is of primary importance. For most teachers, the absence of discipline and respect in the school system is seen as problematic. Yet the feeling was prevalent among those teachers defined as conservative that there are plenty of support services which students may choose to take advantage of if they are experiencing difficulty -- it is the student's choice. Disengagement is, therefore, related to a lack of motivation and desire on the part of students.

These attitudes contrast sharply with the views of dropouts themselves who felt encumbered by the system and by the low expectations of teachers, rather than their own sense of failure. This explanation also does not correspond to the depth of emotion many dropouts exhibited when discussing their decision to leave school. It seems clear from this that it was not a decision taken lightly as some teachers may believe. The teachers' views also do not address what students may see as deterrents to accessing the support services provided by the schools.

A decided minority of teachers, who were more progressive in their understanding of the difficulties facing Black youth, viewed possible reasons for disengagement as lodged in the school system. In this way, they conceptualized dropping out as process, as opposed to an isolated decision based on individualized notions of failure. Although these teachers also tended to see dropping out as a specific choice, they cited reasons which included not only personal and family variables but school variables as well. Some of these teachers also noted that the schools are not adequately addressing the needs of students who feel that school is meaningless and boring. They felt that the problems students have outside the school are intensified by the lack of support within the institution.

Black Parents/Community Workers:

Parents see the dropout problem as a major issue for the Black/African-Canadian community. They are concerned about their children "making the grade", and particularly about youth who no longer see education as a tool to achieve their life ambitions and dreams.

When asked to describe students who have dropped out, parents described images which appear to reflect both systemic difficulties in the school system as well as individual issues with students. One mother responds to the phrase "school dropout" with the following:

> It means to me that they're kids who the system has failed and it has turned them off of school....because...when you look at the kids who are dropouts and they turn around and do something and then succeed at it, it means that they had the capability but it was not tapped....If the system had provided the necessary nurturing for those kids, they would have made it. (File P04: Lines 6-27)

This parent argues that a re-structuring of the educational system would lead to corresponding changes in the level of achievement for Black students.

The idea that more could have been done to ensure that students would complete high school is prevalent throughout the parent narratives. Another adult who works with youth on a regular basis interprets the term "dropout" as students who have somehow "lost their way":

> When I think about that person I think about someone who is...alienated,...disillusioned, ...frustrated. Somebody who has just basically given up in believing the school system can work for them or that it can make a difference. Yeah, when I hear that term, I put it in that context right away, in terms of issues....I see it as something that is prevalent within our community...as a matter of fact, some of the kids that I've come in contact with are some kids who are finished Grade 11, Grade 12 and who are not even aware that they can go on beyond that, or that there's assistance for them to go on beyond that. It just boggles my mind that they feel, "This is as far as I'm going to get." (November 8, 1993 "Amma") (File: Lines)

Students who leave school early are seen by parents to be those who have lost interest in the school system for a variety of reasons. These students are seen, through a combination of their school experiences and personal lives, as having become disconnected with the educational system which does not strive to engage them.

A contrast exists between the views of conservative teachers and non-Black students and those of Black students, dropouts and Black parents/community workers, which also represents a clear dichotomy in the way dropouts are conceptualized by these groups. For example, conservative teachers and non-Black students had the greatest tendency to individualize reasons for dropping out and to point to factors such as negative attitudes toward schooling, lack of work ethic and low scholastic achievement; responses which are absent from the other categories of respondents. Also, their responses do not implicate schools or the educational system for contributing to the dropout problem, except for a decided minority who cited some culpability on the part of schools and educators. Interestingly, the issue of race was not mentioned by these groups. While there may be a tendency to interpret such an omission as positive, it actually points to a disregard or lack of understanding of how issues of race can contribute to the process of disengagement for Black and other minority students.

Respondents from the categories of dropouts, Black students and Black parent/community workers highlighted alienation, failure of the school system, and lack of support within schools as being the preconditions for Black student's disengagement from school. They also felt that their family values were conducive to greater perseverance in school, contrary to the views expressed by some teachers which suggested that dropouts were the product of dysfunctional homes. While certainly, family problems can impact negatively on a student's school life and may ultimately affect the process of disengagement, this should not overshadow the positive effects of family ethics and values which many students carry with them into their educative experiences. Black students in this study have stated that it was their concern for their parents and the thought of repercussions which helped give them the impetus to remain in school.

It is also interesting to note that low scholastic achievement was not associated with dropping out by these respondents as it was with some teachers and non-Black students. They tended to locate the epicentre of the dropout phenomenon within the family structure and within the individual themselves. Conversely, dropouts, Black students and Black parents/community workers implicated racism and the inefficiencies of the educational system as the co-determinants of Black students' disengagement.

13.1.2 Factors

This section continues to examine issues of causality as they emerge from the narratives, with regard to why students disengage and eventually drop out of school. The narratives point to the ways in which school structures and policies can facilitate a student's decision to leave school.

Black Students:

When asked directly what factors they felt leads to students' disengaging and dropping out, Black students gave a variety of responses. These factors were perceived as contributory and not seen as having a direct causal relationship. Family problems were the most frequent response yet students also talked about the economic situation where the student must work to support the

family, or parents work at more than one job to make ends meet. Indeed, economic factors were the second most frequent response. Students also talked about dropouts not living at home and therefore having to work. Family "problems" was a phrase used along with "problems at home" to bring up the idea of emotional problems that would keep students from participating in the school:

> If your mom or your dad are out of the house all the time, they don't know what you're doing, it's an easy thing to start. If the parents don't seem to care, it's easy to get away with. If they kick you out, then it's an easy thing to do because nobody's watching over you....If you don't want to go to school, you just don't go....If your parents make you go, then you're not going to drop out. (File B19: Lines 64-77)

This quote speaks to the issue of how problems within the home can facilitate premature school leaving, through either financial pressures or lack of support. Reference to "family problems" or "home" must be understood to contain a variety of issues: unemployment for parents or parents holding two and three jobs; students living independently and managing a home while attending school; students living with guardians or extended family until the family can be reunited; and at times, conflict within the family. It is very clear, though, that students see issues of the family only as one of a complex set of issues that affect students' disengagement from school:

> ...the main three:...problems at home, the school's not teaching them what they need to know, and the racism. The racism, particularly, is the main factor in most schools. (File B07: Lines 185-190)

Experiences of racism, whether stated explicitly or implied, were a constant theme throughout students' narratives. Pressure was also articulated explicitly in terms of issues of racism:

> Maybe the racial pressure... Also, I guess, if you're being, let's say, the sole Black person in school, it can be difficult... you feel like a raisin in a glass of milk... (File R01: Lines 209-223)

This analogy illustrates then, the alienation felt by Black students immersed within dominantly White schools, and relates to the pressures associated with this environment which may eventually lead to dropping out.

Reference to teachers was also among the five most frequent responses. "Schools pushing them out" and "not being encouraged" were other explanations given for why students dropped out. This seems to be an indication of the school encouraging them to drop out.

> I don't think the teachers provide enough encouragement towards students, particularly Black students. Whereas in my situation, I know who I want to be, I know where I want to go, so I know about myself as a Black person, so I don't need their encouragement. I know where I have to be and I know where I have to go. (File R01: Lines 470-479)

Again, race is inextricably tied to the experiences shared, in this case, to students' relationships with teachers. Other students spoke of long histories of school experiences which served to undermine students' self-esteem and self-confidence:

> I think that they're discouraged and they feel like they can't make a difference if they go... they feel like they're not part of it, that they're different, that they can't learn... A lot of people were told that they were stupid in elementary school, especially a lot of my friends and... they hear it so much it's like a self-fulfilling prophecy. You just hear it all the time and their family doesn't say anything like, "No, you're not" and so they just say, "Okay, I'm not smart, I can't do it." (File R05: Lines 480-502)

These quotes speak to the perception of differential treatment among Black students which lays the groundwork for a history of negative school experiences. Lack of encouragement by teachers and family serve to compromise personal and cultural self-esteem. The diminished sense of confidence in one's ability which results can therefore lead to a sense of fatalism, where as these narratives show, students begin to internalize negative self-concepts and feel that the demands of schooling are beyond their capabilities. This sense of hopelessness is commonly stated as a precursor to disengagement and must therefore be reconciled in order for students to succeed.

Another common response involved the way in which teachers and administrators apply school policies, ways which appeared counterproductive to keeping students in school. One example of this was the practice where a student who was late would get sent to the office for a late slip where she/he would line up for anywhere from ten to thirty minutes with other latecomers. Students suggest that this only exacerbates the situation by forcing a student to miss a greater amount of class time than if she/he had been allowed to stay in class. Another problem cited was the practice of suspension for skipping class. Students indicated that once kids get on the track of "fading out," by skipping class for instance, the school helps them "out the door" by suspending them.

A large number of students identified specifically, and often immediately, that the absence of Black History/Black culture could be a reason for dropping out. Frequently this was related to the process of disengagement that also finds expression in subtexts of boredom:

> ... maybe they get bored or... Like, okay, I take history and I don't like the way my teacher teaches history, he never explains to us the [real] history about Blacks... So, maybe that's the reason... they drop out, because they think they don't learn anything. (File W26: Lines 64-73)

This comment speaks to issues of teaching styles which are not inclusive and partial accounts of history which exclude the contributions and experiences of Black/African Canadians. According to this student, denying legitimacy to the Black experience in Canada can contribute to the process of disengagement.

Another important issue was the inability of the school to engage students and their inability to connect the relevance of the education they are receiving to their life chances. The student narratives have shown that racial issues and a Eurocentric curriculum play a large role in discouraging Black students from education. They have also shown that when students do not see themselves or their interests represented, they develop a fatalistic attitude about themselves, their education and their future.

Difficulty and pressure were among the most common responses with respect to the factors involved in dropping out. Difficulty in handling school pressures along with feelings of isolation are expressed in the following quote:

> Most of them, they're uncomfortable and they come to school and nobody knows what's going on, how they feel. They could be all alone inside. And they just don't perform at all. They just go to class and they just look in space and they just keep failing. And when the pressure becomes too much, they missed out so much in the class and they can't do nothing. They just drop out. (File D26: Lines 390-400)

Pressure seemed to be a pervasive element of students' situations which ultimately caused strain and anxiety. Some students went on to refer specifically to issues of homework, other students or friends, their economic situation, relations with authority, and rules. This inability to cope, it seems, could not be reconciled despite the existence of school support systems which are designed for this expressed purpose. Black students' discomfort with using these counselling services will be dealt with in greater depth in section 13.3.4.

The school practice of streaming, particularly "colour-coded streaming", that is, streaming which is structured along racial lines, was also cited as a reason for students disengaging from the system. The following quote shows how this practice not only negates self-confidence but contributes to the perpetuation of negative racial stereotypes:

> I can tell you the reason why I dropped out!... The school that I went to, they made me feel like I wasn't smart enough to do the stuff. They told my parents to send me to a technical school. They treated Blacks like we had no brains... and that the Chinese were smarter, the Whites were better, so I just said, "Forget it!" (File W33: Lines 19-41)

It seems clear that where low expectations for Black students are juxtaposed with positive evaluations given to other racial groups, it compromises not only personal but cultural self-esteem. Where these negative conceptions are internalized by students, despondency and a sense of fatalism toward their educational futures sets in.

Among other factors, pregnancy was also a frequent explanation offered for why students drop out of school. This factor seemed to be understood as a final step where reentry into school was unlikely. Interestingly, it did not seem that the issue of pregnancy affected males at all. It was framed as an individual issue which affected a female's ability to pursue her education. Acknowledgement of pregnancy as a factor in dropping out was much more pervasive among the young women interviewed -- 80% of the respondents who recognized pregnancy as a factor were women. The issue of male responsibility and accountability was left unaddressed.

Dropouts:

While the students in our larger student sample tended to isolate factors associated with dropping out, dropouts tended to talk about dropping out in a more holistic fashion. They tended to construct dropping out as a gradual disengagement process where students are simply not given support and encouragement for school, particularly by school agents (teachers, guidance counsellors, and administrators) but also by friends and parents. Dropouts tended to view teachers and guidance counsellors as having given them little support for what they could actually do, having imparted low expectations, and little interest in their work.

Invariably, dropouts cited what they saw as their Blackness working against encouragement, high expectations, and constant support on the part of school personnel. While students in the system tended to generally concur that dropping out might be easy, dropouts themselves emphatically and unanimously declared that the process was not only easy, but compelling. That is, dropouts tended to cite how family, teachers, and guidance counsellors, along with other factors in the school itself, made the process of disengagement easy.

They also discussed how school personnel could not be depended upon for support to stay in school. Sometimes, in fact, school personnel might facilitate the decision to drop out. One dropout describes what happened when her strong family experienced crisis, the physical abuse of her mother, and then the family "broke apart". She recalls that it was only her "in-school" behaviour that was noted:

> I really needed someone to talk to but was afraid of the consequences. I was hoping one of my school teachers will pick up my home troubles and spare me. While everything was taking place, I was being criticized openly for slacking in my school work. But no one was asking me why. (File F11: Lines 54-62)

Here, she refers to what is perceived as an unresponsive school system which she feels is all too willing to condemn her "slacking" in her work yet is seemingly unconcerned with what may have caused difficulties in the first place. Such behaviour should, on the contrary, be interpreted as an early warning sign for students who are beginning to "fade out" and may leave school entirely.

Examples of factors found in the dropout narratives which contributed to their decision to drop out included becoming pregnant and being assured flatly that school under these conditions was out of the question and that flexible times could not be negotiated. Another example was the young woman cited earlier who was not able to articulate the intensity of her family problems to any school personnel and who was never asked why she was having problems. Some dropouts, in looking back on their experiences, mentioned that they felt if they shared their family problems they might be labelled as coming from "another pathological Black family."

One dropout describes a rift between her school and home experiences which she could not negotiate. Together, the feeling that she couldn't talk about her home experiences at school, and that not much was expected of her made it easy for her to "slip through the cracks." She went on to explain:

> ... home problems were not for the school neither were school problems for the home... I was an abused child and I remember running away from my foster parents to hang out with friends and roam the streets. I didn't think it was advisable for me to bring my personal problems to the authorities at school... There was an unwritten code that the school was separate and distinct from the home and that you leave your home problems outside the gate of the school.... Sometimes too, because the school system has such low expectations of Black students, you say to yourself, "Why bother?" (File F04: Lines 41-64)

This "unwritten code" which she refers to can be seen as part of the "hidden curriculum" of schooling where the attitudes and behaviours of teachers and other school agents convey specific messages to students. It is clear that many Black students feel that these messages are often conveyed through a climate of prejudgments and preconceptions which are fuelled by racial stereotypes such as, notions of "the pathological Black family" as referred to earlier, or of Black students being under-achievers. Not only do such attitudes generalize a negative understanding of the Black community, but they are strong deterrents to Black students relating their problems

to teachers or guidance counsellors whom they presume will be evaluating them in light of these misconceptions.

The narratives of the dropouts, therefore, have provided a more holistic view of the problem of disengagement. Central to this is what could be called a "network of disinterest", that is, a sense that nobody is interested, cares about or has worthy expectations of the dropout. Dropouts almost unanimously see the intersection of inaction and an apparent uncaring and discouraging attitude on the part of those who should have a vested interest in their education and well-being. Thus, a network of family, school, and community which could help them remain in school is absent.

In the following quote, a student is making a plea for help to a school guidance counsellor whom they hope will help them to negotiate a solution to their problems so that they may remain in school:

> I made an appointment and I talked to them... I'm going through a major period right now and it's very hard for me in school and I don't want to drop out... but at the same time I needed a bit of the weight lifted... I don't know what to do, I don't want to quit school... I was wondering if I could do correspondence, anything, and they were just like, "No, no, you have to be in school." And the hours aren't flexible or anything... it wasn't even the flexibility I wanted, it was more like a support, just knowing that someone was there... (File F15: Lines 463-496)

In the end, this student acknowledges that it was personal support more than academic counselling which they required, but instead were only confronted with another disinterested party.

Another narrative which describes this generalized sense of disinterest, asserts that the people who did try to dissuade the informant from leaving school were actually dropouts themselves, rather than school teachers, school officials, and parents. In essence, the only secure part of this potential network were students who had already disengaged from the system and understood their experience:

> ... no one told me to, like, drop out of school. But my parents and people, the way they were acting, and my teachers and everything, that pushed me to drop out of school... Other people I know were mad because I dropped out of school... people that dropped out themselves tell me it isn't worth it and stuff, but I did anyways. (File F05: Lines 576-591)

It is through this lack of support and disinterest on the part of friends, family and school which often leads to the student feeling "pushed out" and denied of any other recourse.

Non-Black Students:

Reasons which were most often cited by non-Black students for dropping out included; personal or family problems, boredom, difficulty with school work or difficult relations with teachers. Some typical responses were,

> They have problems at home. They can't handle class work. People they hang around with, stuff like that. (File CG7: Lines 5-6)

> Maybe they want a job, maybe they're having family problems or maybe they can't keep up with their school, problems with teachers. (File CG8: Lines 6-7)

The responses seem to place the decision to drop out on the student. Non-Black students do not mention any systemic aspects of the school which may lead students to drop out.

Teachers:

Interestingly, teachers tended to locate factors as being either within the student's character, the character of the student's family, or the student's earlier educational experience. Teachers, more than any other group, tended to place the blame squarely on the shoulders of the student. A few teachers also included the character of the school itself. This minority identified a number of factors in the school environment which do not reflect the students, their history, their past, or their culture. They talked about students who don't feel they fit in, and feel that the school is unable at certain junctures to support these students effectively.

Unlike any of the other groups, teachers tended to see dropping out as a specific "choice not to participate" on the behalf of a student. While others tended to see disengagement as a process, teachers tended more to see it as a specific event, which took place as a particular choice made by a student. Some teachers saw society as responsible, critiquing North-American culture as allowing kids to believe the best things in life are free. A lack of responsibility on the part of kids was also noted.

The minority of teachers did feel that students were "pushed out". A few teachers noted a "cycling down" of teacher expectations for particular students who are labelled "trouble-makers" due to the lists of suspensions and expulsions which are available in records, word of mouth. These lowered expectations for these students result in what amounts to self-fulfilling prophecies. These few teachers noted that the school system needs to look at strategies to get these kids back into school.

It is notable that teachers who felt that the school system was in part responsible seemed to have hope that schools could intervene to prevent or reverse student disengagement. In contrast, those who blamed the students, their families, and previous educational experiences of the students

seemed at a loss to find hope for preventing the decision to disengage. They appeared to feel more powerless in intervening in this process.

Black Parents/Community Workers:

Parents raised many of the same issues as Black students when they considered why students leave school early. Among these issues were concerns regarding the curriculum, the lack of Black History, the absence of Black teachers, and the streaming and labelling of Black students. Parents acknowledged that in some cases students' personal lives can also make it difficult for them to stay in school, particularly when it appears that the school system is not responsive to their concerns.

The most salient factor in these responses to why students drop out of school is perhaps how some of the teachers view dropouts as being deficient in some way, socially, academically, within their families and their values and attitudes toward education. This, in fact, allows them to excuse the educational system, and their part in it, from any sense of accountability.

While the issue of streaming, for example, is absent from teachers' discussions, it is central to Black students and Black parents/community workers as a primary factor in Black students' decision to leave school. Streaming is expressed as a factor resulting in limited life chances, low self-esteem and confidence, while lack of encouragement and low teacher expectations are seen as adding to the already negative stereotypes of Black students. Teachers and non-Black students individualized the issue of dropping out, implicating the student's home life and social networks as part of the problem but bypassing issues of race and systemic inequality.

The fact, that many of the teachers' understanding of why students drop out is so out of sync with the responses of dropouts themselves, is evidence of what these students describe as an unresponsive school system. Students who were fading out of school felt deprived of the support needed to get back on track.

Personal and family problems were compounded by the lack of interest among teachers and other school agents. Moreover, students felt that their situations would be viewed within a climate of prejudgment fuelled by negative racial stereotypes, which made confiding in teachers or guidance counsellors difficult. This, therefore, speaks to the need highlighted by Black parents for more Black teachers to serve not only as role models, but to provide the personal support and guidance which is otherwise lacking. There is also a need to culturally sensitize non-Black teachers and support staff.

13.1.3 "Dropping In/Back"

Dropouts:

A significant proportion of the dropouts interviewed were themselves in the process of trying to drop back in, or had already returned to school and had moved on to post-secondary education.

The dropouts who were in the process of "dropping in" were, without exception, experiencing continuing hardships in that process. In particular, women who had dropped out because of pregnancy were receiving little support from the school for continuing despite the challenges of motherhood. For these women, there was no one to talk to at school about how to balance the responsibilities of motherhood with the demands of schooling. The young women "drop-ins", who dropped out primarily because of pregnancy, suggested that this was a continuing issue as they dropped back into the system, specifically the lack of flexible time and space considerations and support services for young mothers. Interestingly, both male and female dropouts who had returned to school noted particular situations where they felt they were treated as adults and found a curriculum which actually included them. Some of these students then mentioned teachers and subjects, particularly Black History and Black teachers, who made them feel like they were finally learning about themselves. As well, alternative schools were positively mentioned as offering more options, and, in particular, offering a curriculum which allowed discussion about social issues and personal feelings.

Yet most dropouts found that the pain and the stigma associated with dropping out made them feel less intelligent, and worked against their return to school. One dropout was asked whether she regretted leaving school, to which she responded:

> I don't know whether it is regret or something else. I rather resent the lack of support for me to finish my education. That's what I think it is, not regret as much but the resentment... (File F17: Lines 234-242)

It is significant that this dropout speaks in terms of resentment for the lack of support in her past educational experiences, rather than regret, since to speak in terms of regret would imply that dropping out was a decision she could have made differently, rather than a situation to which she felt there was no other recourse.

Black Parents/Community Workers:

Many parents were currently returning to school after having left high school early. Their decision was based on several factors which were both personal and economic. On a personal level, they wished to serve as role models for their children and feel more confident about themselves. Economically many of them believed that by pursuing an education they would gain better employment opportunities:

> Why did I go back to school? Well... you see women getting in their mink coats and their cars and their house... And you see commercials telling you, "Stay in school. Go back to school. Get an education." And then you see other people that you've known, that you didn't think they'd do it, they're going back to school. And you say to yourself, "What's wrong with me? Why can't I go back to school?" So I think the motivation came from seeing other people going back to school and accomplishing. (File P06: Lines 390-407)

Dropping in for all former students is therefore seen as a means to increase job prospects, after having been hindered by a lack of academic credentials. Aside from these pragmatic concerns, Black parents who were former dropouts also cited the need to raise one's self-esteem and self-confidence as well as serve as role models for their children. The fact that many Black parents interviewed were former dropouts accounts for their very insightful responses throughout this study, but is also indicative of how entrenched this problem is in the Black community. The longevity of the dropout problem in the Black community is also indicative of the inefficacy of the educational system to deal with the needs and challenges that have, and continue to face Black youth.

13.2 SCHOOL PRACTICES THAT LEAD TO DROPPING OUT

This section examines the connections between social location, in terms of race, class and gender, and other social, cultural, pedagogical and systemic factors which effect the disengagement of Black students from school.

13.2.1 Intersections of Race, Gender and Class

The following is a discussion of the intersections of race, class and gender as they relate to the realities of Black students. They are examined in terms of their relationship to the issue of student disengagement. As such, we do not attempt to confine the discussion of how race, class and gender intersect in the lives of Black students to this section alone. These factors provide social, political, cultural and ideological vantage points which are inextricably linked to the issues associated with student disengagement.

Race

Black Students:

In terms of race, some students spoke about positive experiences related to being part of the Black Heritage Club or similar clubs and organizations, and also various moments when they felt a sense of pride about being Black. For the most part, however, students focused on negative experiences, racism being a pervasive theme throughout their narratives.

Differential treatment by teachers, but also by students and administrators, was frequently mentioned as occurring along racial lines. The experiences which students recounted often related to teachers treating some students differently than others:

> White people seem to get positive attention, meanwhile we're getting negative. Like, "Stop talking and do your work."...And, [for] the White people [it's] just, like, "Oh well, she got 100 and she da, da, da" and all this stuff... (File W11: Lines 495-501)

The issue of differential treatment was also emphasized in terms of the lack of positive recognition being accorded to Black students:

> If I was White... with the athletic stuff that I did... I would have got so much recognition more at school than if I was Black. Even though I did do well in that, there was still a negative side towards it that was pinned on me. No matter how good you did there was still that part of you, well, you know, "He does get in trouble sometimes." If I was a White kid they would overlook that... (File A07: Lines 801-819)

Also, students spoke of teachers and administrators singling out a group of Black students as responsible for a disobedient or disruptive act. Within the classroom, students often mention such things as segregating themselves, teachers picking on them, being stereotyped etc.. In the school hallways, the biggest issue for students was being singled out as a group and labelled as "trouble-makers".

These actions were observed by the PI and his research assistants during the course of conducting ethnographic research at the four high schools participating in the study. The segregated nature of the school environment during recreational times, such as in the cafeteria, was a particularly salient feature of the school's culture. Here, Black students were observed socializing together, while White students socialized among White, Asian among Asian and so on. The Black students were further divided in affinity groups based on ethnicity and language, some of these noted were, Somali/Continental African students and Jamaican/Caribbean students. Some gender segregation was also noted within every group.

Students also spoke about their inability to relate to the curriculum. The issue of Black History was raised in many different contexts, and was also a direct response to the question of their experience of being Black in the school:

> Canadian history. I did not learn anything about Black people... in the past two years, we have improved in our geography... but we don't really learn about the cultural background... not even the people, but just the city or the country. Basics, nothing deep... I

> would like to know more about my history, yes, a lot more. I think I need to know a lot more than I know. (File W06: Lines 573-588)

This speaks to the need for greater ethno-cultural equity in education, specifically the integration of African-centred studies, in order to legitimate the experience and histories of Black/African Canadians, and create a more globally-oriented curriculum for all students.

In other instances, schools were described as racially hostile environments as students spoke about the inter-racial tensions which exist. Explicit examples of name-calling, derogatory comments, and in some cases violence, were cited as part of the experience of race within the school. Some students talked about the frustration in seeing no consequences for White students when they engaged in racist language or activity as another example of their subordination within the system.

Teachers:

The ideological position of teachers was again very apparent on the question of race. Most teachers claimed not to see colour and to see only people. These teachers felt that they treated all students the same, regardless of race. They felt that it was important to treat all students equally and not give preferential treatment of any kind to students who are racially "different". These teachers saw racism as a social problem that should not be dealt with in the school. Furthermore, they felt that the majority of teachers are colour-blind and that this was demonstrated by the way teachers teach. Some of these teachers stated that stereotypical ideas about Black youth are represented in society, although not necessarily within the school. As such, they saw it as the responsibility of the community to deal with racism.

The fact that a few teachers felt that racism should not be addressed may be evidence of their own discomfort with dealing with the issue, but it should not be an excuse to disregard the reality faced by Black students in the schools as well as the community at large. To view schools as being somehow separate from the community, as some teachers stated, fails to see the function and role of schools as integrally related to society.

A number of teachers also said that it did not matter whether the student was "orange with purple polka-dots," they would still be treated the same by teachers. Yet some teachers, less rigid in their denial of the school's responsibility to deal with racism, felt that the way to deal with diversity was by trying to assist every student to learn and to validate the experiences of students within the school context:

> It still presents all of the basic challenges of trying to assist every student to learn as much as possible. The difference is that it involves knowing more about the background and the experiences of students...to bring all of those backgrounds and experiences and also things like customs and religious aspects as well into play in

> some way, or at least to allow all of those things to be validated in terms of the school system. (File T17: Lines 74-87)

Some teachers viewed the actual disadvantage as being a limited background in terms of literacy for certain groups of students. While others felt that English as a second language or non-White racial characteristics allow students or parents to receive "special treatment." Following the same logic, these teachers were noticeably frustrated in "having to hear" about racial issues. Some of these teachers felt that prejudice is a fact in society, but it is the responsibility of the individual to deal with it, by speaking up and identifying racist teachers. These teachers strongly felt that the school system is based on equity and that accusations of racism in the school can be a cop-out: an excuse for personal failure. As well, these teachers felt threatened and sometimes angry when they were referred to as "the enemy". One teacher noted a desire to not have to "feel guilty" because of the past, and a need to be viewed as part of the solution. Some noted that people seem to be searching out controversy by "crying racism", a practice which "gets tiresome."

Some teachers felt uncomfortable with the word Black and with the practice of citing difference. One teacher claimed that students feel the same way and do not really like to deal with issues of race and difference in the classroom. They noted that racism should not be an issue. If there is a problem it should be addressed as a problem, not be made into a racial issue. These teachers also tended to note that there is a great deal of anti-white racism, and racism within groups. As well, they tended to attribute racist incidents to students. Other teachers, who shared this perspective, tended not to see a connection between low expectations as conveyed to students and possible subsequent failure on the part of the student.

It must be taken into account that the views of these teachers, in contrast to those of Black students on the subject of race, come from completely different vantage points. While Black students approach the subject of race as a part of their everyday lived experience, many teachers are only able to see race from the position of White privilege. Without a subjective knowledge of racism, they react in response to their own position with feelings of discomfort, avoidance and resentment of being made to feel guilty. However, these sentiments cannot be allowed to deter the initiatives towards anti-racism education.

Some teachers tended to reduce racism to a process of name-calling, rather than seeing it as a wider systemic issue. A few teachers noted having heard racist comments being made about Black students by other teachers:

> I've heard the comment made generally before... when I hear words like that pop out of someone else's mind, I write them off. Unfortunately, I don't think that even as educators and facilitators of knowledge that everyone has that idea themselves or carries that ideal within themselves. There are some individuals here that do not embrace education and learning and are not open and are racist and that does continue on. (File T21: Lines 527-543)

More progressive teachers, who were in the minority, felt that lower expectations were conveyed to Black students in the schools in subtle and perhaps unconscious ways by teachers; part of the hidden curriculum. They cited, sometimes reluctantly, behaviours on the part of colleagues which they felt exemplified these lower expectations. In particular, they noted that Black students seem not to be encouraged in the schools to go into math or science, and that it is difficult for Black students to express themselves within the schools. They also noted that Black students tend to be placed in the lower streams. These comments were also corroborated through observational research in high schools, where it was noted that very few Black students could be found in either science or math classes. A number of "visible minorities" however, could be found in E.S.L and E.S.D classes.

A White teacher mentioned hearing racist comments about students of colour which she felt were shared with her because she is not Black:

> And because I am not Black, they think they can say it to me and I will accept it. And other teachers who are not of colour have actually said something to those teachers, that [it's] not funny, that [it's] racism. (File T24: Lines 249-254)

Thus, while some teachers react against open racism, others maintain different sorts of biases. For example, there exists the perception among some teachers that minority students who are smart are seen as a threat:

> I think they are treated unfairly and almost like they're dangerous, and that scares me because I felt the anger as an adolescent and I was always angry. Because when you're smart you see it, and you will get angry at fifteen, you know! And I was angry at fifteen, but no one treated me that way. (File T24: Lines 271-281)

Such fears may be grounded in ignorance and perhaps an unwillingness to see minorities transcend certain perceived boundaries and expectations.

It was also indicated by some teachers that there is preferential treatment accorded to White students in various ways, such as being more tolerant of mistakes or issues that develop among the White student population.

Class

Black Students:

When students talked about why they are staying in school, in light of the pressures, alienation and disengagement they experience, an explicit connection was made between education and future employment and ultimately social class:

> Say I go to school with this person for like 18 years, then... ten years down the line, he's like a lawyer and I'm a garbage man or janitor. I'm gonna feel stupid and dumb and I'm gonna say, "We went to school together and, look, he's somebody and I'm nothing." (File B21: Lines 902-912)

Students made this connection between education and work consistently throughout their narratives. In many cases it seemed to be the single motivation that kept students in school. The level of awareness of consequences associated with no education in society was very high. Again, some students were able to look at their parents and the hardships endured because of a lack of education. They related this to what they currently saw as their parents' relative lack of power within the school.

Most students talked about issues of class in a superficial manner in terms of clothes and material possessions. Others spoke of economic, social and cultural disparities which translate into different kinds of pressures for success. Some of the students felt that rich students might feel more of this pressure from their parents, while others felt that poor kids, especially if they are Black, have to work a lot harder in school in order to succeed:

> A child of poor parents, they've got more pressure on them because the parents are always telling them to work hard... especially if you're Black because they say, "Oh, the White man don't have to worry about it because there's always jobs for them to get." You may be Black and you have the same qualifications as they do, but they're going to get the job. And for rich people it's, like, even if it's Black or White, they probably don't have to work as hard because their parents will probably get them a job for them in a company or something. (File W36: Lines 269-289)

This student highlights the complex relationship between race and class and how this may be experienced. The complexity between race and class is exemplified by the student's confusion in regards to how these factors impact on the experiences of different students in the school system.

Through another frame of reference, class was viewed in terms of the time a parent has available to offer support to the student:

> I think that parents on the poorer side wouldn't be able to push their students to do that because they're probably out working all the time. But the rich parents, they're there watching, they're home, like, maybe at five o'clock. They are able to do that. (File W03: Lines 502-510)

This relates to the differential opportunities parents have to provide support to their children. This is seen as a fact of life wherein realities are circumscribed by socio-economic status and reproduce the conditions for success for some while limiting the chances of others.

Also articulated is a clear vision of the complex relationship between social class in both school and society. Some students indicated that poor students were subjected to differential treatment, in general, by teachers:

> I think they could achieve the same thing but the poor student would have to work harder to get the same treatment. (File W33: Lines 375-378)

Another student also discusses the issue of differential treatment, but in this case names the issue of race as well (Hippy students in the schools are usually the White students).

> In our school the rich ones are kind of the hippy girls and the hippy boys and...the teachers are always so nice with them, and always, "Oh, you did so well on your tests" and stuff. But to other students, they just hand them their test, don't tell them nothing, just kind of give them a dirty look or something, you know. (File O30: Lines 552-564)

Therefore, race and class are seen as providing the basis for differential treatment of Black students in both schools and society.

Dropouts:

A large percentage of the dropout sample discussed an intersection of economic factors related to dropping out. A significant issue was the rupture of the school and work linkage that they felt. That is, many dropouts stated that since they were already at the basic level in the streaming hierarchy, it just didn't make sense to continue with school. Realizing that school was not going to lead to university and professional jobs or high status was a deterrent to pursuing education for these students. As well, some articulated that earning money at a job was preferable to "feeling stupid" in basic classes.

For dropouts, therefore, the practice of streaming "fixed" their future prospects to a specific social echelon. Streaming was understood to limit their ability to transcend their socio-economic status and class backgrounds, and thereby represents a process of reproducing the extant social class inequities in society, particularly along racial and ethnic lines. Being denied access to social mobility lead to a profound sense of disempowerment for these dropouts. The lack of control felt in determining the course of their educative experience, and what was described as being constantly given messages of one's inadequacy, for some, made school a lower priority than getting some sense of power and control in the world:

> When I left school, I left a situation that was very negative and I put myself into a situation where I was able to get some power, get some control over my life -- figure out who I was and where I was going... I don't regret dropping out of school (File F03: Lines 1409-1419)

Again, the perception here is one of sacrificing the long-term goal of education, that is, to achieve a higher social and economic status in society for the short-term benefit of disengaging from a system which was in itself socially oppressive.

Dropouts experienced situations of social class discrimination in school which they related as embarrassing, belittling, or destructive attitudes and behaviours among teachers and other school agents. One dropout clearly remembered a discussion of welfare, which exemplified this treatment:

> ... something that happened in the class, about people on welfare, [the teacher] pointed out a kid in the class that was on welfare, and she said,... "Oh, I'll work my butt off to go and give you welfare..." (File F05: Lines 1292-1299)

Such demeaning experiences occurring within the classroom must be seen as destructive to students' morale and self-esteem, and which consequently lay the psychological groundwork for students to disengage from school in order to be liberated from such sources of conflict.

Non-Black Students:

Many non-Black students indicated that they were bored with school but they realized the importance of a high-school education in attaining their future goals, which for the most part included college or university. Non-Black students mentioned that if they were to drop out they believed they would have "no future" that they would probably end up "working at McDonald's" or being on welfare. They predicted that this was the future which awaited those who dropped out, and at times were able to give examples of people they knew who had met this fate. For themselves, they saw the connection between school and work clearly and often relied on it to keep them focused in school. One student felt that if she left school early her goals would be:

> ... pretty much demolished. I'd end up working at a job that I know I wouldn't be happy in. (CG02: Lines 262-264)

Non-Black students felt strongly that their future goals and social class were completely contingent on their continued success in school.

Black Parents/Community Workers:

Parents expressed similar beliefs regarding the connection between education, employment and current social class structures, as those of the students. They stressed the idea that education is important to their children. In some cases, parents themselves were in the process of returning to school to complete their own education. Their decision to return to school was often linked to their desire to be an example for their children as well as for their own personal growth, rather than being a decision based solely on social class mobility.

Parents were well aware of the difference which education could make for their children's future but they were also aware that young people could be greatly influenced by the systemic racism which they witnessed in their daily lives. One parent, who has worked extensively with youth, spoke about how the issue of collective mobility among Blacks, may reflect itself in a student's decision to leave school early:

> I know of students who drop out because when they look at the issue of educational aspiration and how that is linked to employment, and they look within society and see that their own people are not attaining jobs, they are unemployed, and they themselves have got an education, they feel that the educational system is not just, and regardless of whether or not they have an education, they will not gain employment... they've reached the point that they do feel "pushed out". (07/24/92 Dena)

Lowered aspirations betray a sense of fatalism toward the future, fuelled not only by the existence of race and social class hierarchies in society, but also in the recognition of the same disparities existing within the educational system.

Teachers:

Teachers tended to discuss class in terms of family finances which can make it harder for some students to stay in school because of money for supplies and resources or the need for the students themselves to work. They also mentioned that in poorer, or in single-parent homes, less support was given to students. While a few teachers mentioned that they thought students were given more attention by teachers if they were privileged, this was not the view of the majority of teachers.

Therefore, the issue of poverty has a significant impact on the educational success of students as they negotiate between satisfying immediate economic survival needs and receiving education that has no apparent/immediate material gratification. Students' economic worries and concerns only serve as a distraction to education, particularly for Black youth coming from low socio-economic family backgrounds.

Gender

Black Students:

In terms of differential treatment by staff and faculty, male and female students noted that there is heavier surveillance of Black males and that they are more likely to be targeted for discipline. Some females could not respond to gender differences in their own experiences, but spoke about the differential treatment of Black males. The following comment by a female student summarizes the complex set of pressures which are felt by Black males:

> I think Black guys have it worse... the teachers and all the fight people come to fight the Black guys and you have to act like you want to fight even if you don't want to fight... and you're pushed to just do sports. And if a Black guy's smart, they don't admit it, they don't want to talk about it... They just want to just do enough to pass to be like the rest of their friends, just wear the clothes and that's it... if you're Black and you're smart it's usually female that'll admit it, not male -- it's awful. (File R05: Lines 1237-1254)

This student speaks of the pressures of violence, within and outside the school, and stereotypes which are applied to Black males, particularly emphasis on success in sports and minimalizing academic success. Another female student also articulates the problem of stereotypes, but she goes further to talk about the lack of support and recognition of Black males who are excelling:

> I think Black males have it harder because they're stereotyped, they're all bad... I guess, like, "they" see a couple who are just like messing around, or whatever, and they don't take note that there are some people over here who are doing good... It's not fair. I don't know why they just can't treat the person who's doing good, treat him, don't just keep putting him down or whatever, and don't put the people who are doing bad down. Tell them, "You shouldn't be doing this." Talk to them, and not just, "Go down to the office." [But] then they suspend them. I mean, that doesn't do anything. You're just doing a favour for them. (File W11: Lines 217-245)

The issues of recognition and encouragement raised in this response directly address the role of the school, and also makes an explicit connection between these issues and "dropping out." Finally, reiterating the effect of stereotypes, this female student, speaking in a focus group meeting of female students also makes the connection to role models and talks openly about "living" race, and the differences of that experience along gender lines:

> When you're a Black male, you're already, you don't have to do anything, you know. You could be a good student, you could be a good father or whatever, [but] when you're out on the street,

> [you're seen as] a criminal... a drug dealer, whatever, you beat your wife, you have several children and you don't take care of them. It doesn't matter what you do. I think it's a little easier for Black women... our role models have changed, and stereotypes, it's just such a big part of our lives as a race. And it's hard for us to connect with our men, and it's hard for them to connect with us and with themselves. So I think it's a little harder, I mean, we're working on it. We're working on ourselves and I think we're reaching this point of evolution and leaving our brothers behind. (File D05: Lines 338-372)

While this student sees progress being made for young Black women, the inability to connect with young Black men indicates the disjunctures in their realities and experiences. This quote also relates to the difficulties of attempting to transcend negative stereotypes which stigmatize and malign individuals on the basis of race.

Negative perceptions and stereotypes associated with Black males operate for the most part in terms of inter-group relations that is, between Blacks and other social groups, in particular the dominant White culture. Negative attitudes towards Black females often seemed to be perpetuated by Black males -- an intra-group phenomenon. While Black females were able to identify the sources of Black males' oppression, the Black males interviewed lacked the same insights into the subordination of Black females, particularly how they themselves are implicated in that process.

Both male and female students however did recognize the fact that female students are harassed in the hallways of the schools, and that this is often by Black males. This harassment included verbal and physical intimidation, and even termed as violent:

> F1: I think, Black guys, it's not only, everything they do is violent, because if they're talking to you, they're like,
> F2: "Bitch!"
> F1: ...and like, "What's up baby? I want to talk to you." It's aggressive and it's violent. Everything they do is violent.
> F2: Yeah. (File O08: Lines 2397-2406)

These female students complain about the treatment they receive from male students within the school. Black female students feel a deep sense of disrespect from Black male students and when discussions about the issue took place in focus group meetings, the exchanges were highly charged. Interestingly, males felt that females who are treated in this manner bring it on themselves -- in their behaviour, dress, and speech. Their position was that the young women did not respect themselves. These males, however, were unable to recognize that, by blaming Black females for creating their own problems by their manner of dress and behaviour, they subject Black females to the same sort of stereotypes as those constructed around Black males,

which focus on the same sort of superficialities. This behaviour demonstrates their lack of regard for the subordination of Black women and their inability to recognize their own complicity.

Gender politics within the Black community have created schisms among Black females and males. One student even goes so far as to avoid spending time with Black male students:

> I don't talk too much to [the males] because some of them, you do talk to, and it's, like, you pass and you say, "Hi", "Bye" and the next time they see you it's like they want to touch you all over your body. And if you tell them no, it's like, "Oh, you think you're this, you think you're that, you think you're better than people." So I really don't talk too much to them. (File D06: Lines 749-759)

The perpetuation of negative attitudes and behaviours on the part of Black males serves to undermine the unity of Black students.

Young women complained about the double standards which apply to men and how this allows them to escape responsibilities toward their female partners. This issue of being unable to enforce male accountability was discussed by Black women with regard to pregnancy:

> F1: Yeah, but that's only when they're young. When a woman, when she's pregnant, nobody's going to say anything.
> F2: Yeah, but just because you're young, so you're a whore if you have a baby? When a seventeen year old or a sixteen year old or whatever, maybe, that doesn't mean she's a whore, that doesn't mean she sleeps around.
> F1: Yeah, it could be an accident, right?
> F2: ... but I'm saying, they'll call a girl a whore...
> F3: But, she didn't do the job alone... It's like we did it by ourselves.
> F1: Exactly. (File O08: Lines 2301-2316)

It was felt generally that women's sexuality was under intense scrutiny and that men's sexuality and sense of accountability was not an issue. While these are issues that reach beyond schooling, the school's role in addressing these issues was never raised.

Gender bias in channelling students was also identified as an area of concern for both male and female students. Black males were seen as more likely to be channelled into sports rather than academics. The lack of legitimacy and support given to women's sports was criticized, as was the channelling of women into paths which ghettoize them in specific segments of the labour market. At the same time young women felt discouraged from taking math and science as requisites to alternative and often male- dominated career choices.

The issue of inclusion was also raised by Black women in regards to curriculum:

> Maybe it gets Black women even more, if you're dealing with gender. I took a Canadian literature course and we did poets by mostly White males and we had the odd White female but we never ever had Black women be mentioned. Like you hear Malcolm X, but you wouldn't even hear Angela Davis. Like you would never hear anything about Black women. (File R06: Lines 1468-1479)

The absence of Black women in the curriculum, as noted by this respondent is indicative of the student's understanding of the complexities of knowledge production with respect to issues of race and gender, and how such omissions legitimize certain Eurocentric and patriarchal forms of knowledge, while delegitimizing others. It is evident then, that the ways in which students interpret and relate their experiences as either male or female are inextricably linked to race. The students' expressions of these experiences also demonstrate that gender is a constant variable in constructing inequality for Black youth.

Matters of sexuality also included issues of homophobia. During focus group discussions the PI and some of the student researchers would often hear homophobic comments from students, either in response to the mention of a particular name/person or incident, or expressed in the form of a greeting when a student arrived late to join the interview. Homophobic comments were also made when students complained about teachers who have the habit of touching students.

Teachers:

Teachers tended to note that discrepancies existed in terms of encouragement along the lines of gender and culture difference. In particular, some noted that non-Western societies have a particular role in giving messages to females in terms of what they cannot do, and that teachers have a difficult time negotiating this:

> ...any non-Western European background,... the girls have this whole societal thing that seems to be laid on them as to what they can do and what they can't do, and it's a real hard thing to fight. (File T04: Lines 1330-1340)

The tendency here to refer to female students from "any non-Western European background" as being bound to the same cultural codes of conduct is a misinformed and essentializing statement, and betrays the propensity to regard non-Western European cultures as being somehow sexist or misogynist. Such ideologies not only demarcate clearly the social boundaries between "us" and "them", but they also negate the cultural differences which exist among these groups. Ultimately then, non-Western European cultures are evaluated in terms of their incongruence with Western values. Thus, labelling the issue of gender discrimination as somehow foreign in effect allows

teachers to avoid confronting the nature of sexism within the context of their own attitudes and behaviours.

Also implicated is the socialization practices of the family. A number of teachers felt that schools should help girls develop skills so they develop their potential, as opposed to succumbing to pressures of family and society. This would involve working with parents:

> I think that what the school can do in terms of helping a lot of the girls who are facing family pressures to do one thing, and their inclinations and skills lead to another, is to help the kids develop those skills, not in opposition to their parents, at least overtly but in terms of letting them know, "Yes, I know you're under this kind of pressure." ... Try to communicate with their parents, help them to develop strategies for dealing with the problem they have at home, so that they can reach their own potential. I don't think it's a matter of taking one of the girls under your arm and helping her put an application into an out-of-town university... (File T04: Lines 1344-1360)

Again, by placing blame exclusively outside of the practices of the school system, teachers avoid interrogating the issues of gender bias in education and thereby avoid implicating themselves as contributing to its perpetuation.

While some teachers complain of sexist behaviour on the part of the male students towards females in general, and citing specifically that some students don't hold them (female teachers) in high regard because they are female, it is significant that no teachers remarked on differential treatment of Black males. Male and female dropouts mentioned this differential treatment, but it was not noted by teachers. This may be due to a general reluctance to confront issues of race; avoidance being a strategy to elude responsibility.

13.2.2 Authority, Power and Respect

Black Students:

Problems of authority, power and respect are woven throughout the narratives of the students. Students generally related issues of authority and power to teachers and administration in the school, as well as to police. It is interesting to note that parents were not mentioned in discussions of power and authority, and when parents were discussed, it was not within this frame of reference. Teachers and their way of handling authority and power were a key issue for students:

> F4: You know, they always have to be right, and if you, like, get sent to the office, they're not going to believe you, they only believe the teacher.
> F2: Because the teacher's authority. It's authority. (File D04: Lines 733-739)

Authority is constructed as a sometimes arbitrary means of control and power. Students' experiences with "authority" within the school system do not appear to get explained to them, nor do the students seem to have any ability to participate in resolving conflicts -- they feel that they are silenced:

> I think what wasn't fair is... where the teacher is worth more than the student... like the teacher's a god or something... I mean, I think you should respect them but, if they do certain things to you, then you should be able to say things back... If... they get in your face... what are you supposed to do? You're supposed to just obey them. (File B19: Lines 784-801)

This refers to the lack of institutional recourse for students when dealing with problems related to specific teachers. This also isolates the need for channels of communications to be opened where students feel safe in registering their grievances and can be assured that their concerns will be given equal consideration to those of the teachers.

Many students did not feel that teachers were concerned with the interests of the students. Without genuine concern, they felt that they did not owe teachers any respect. Lack of respect from teachers was expressed as insincerity, derogatory references, disinterest, lack of encouragement and support, and negative attitude.

In a focus group meeting with Continental African students, one student draws a comparison of teachers from his school in Africa and those in Canada, specifically around the issue of respect:

> Yeah, we used to, we used to respect our teachers from the bottom of our hearts, not like from neck up. You know, here... you are not really respecting the teachers... You're just pretending to... it's lip service... [an] artificial smile... But back home we were respecting our teachers because they were... trying to encourage us to get a good education. (File W02: Lines 1693-1714)

The disjuncture between this student's experience with teachers in Africa versus those in Canada makes it clear that within their cultural context, the issue of respect is something to be earned by a teacher through their actions and behaviour, rather than an inherent feature of the position.

It is also clear that respect is something which is expected to be reciprocated; in other words it is a two-way street.

Dropouts:

For dropouts, the issuse of authority, power and respect represent the disparate power relations which exist within schools, and are thus seen as areas of resistance. Many males, and a significant number of females, state that "contrary behaviour" or acting out is a response to racist acts, or to oppressive behaviours on the part of the school itself. In particular, male dropouts discuss their rage, thoughts of violence, and the need to act out against a system which they feel diminishes them. Male students still in the system, however, tended to have a less detailed and introspective understanding of their experience. This is possibly due to the fact that the dropouts have had more time to reflect on their past experiences in school, while those still in the system may lack the emotional distance needed to put some of their experiences into perspective.

One "dropout" recalls a disturbing incident where issues of power and authority transcended the boundaries of acceptable behaviour:

> ... and we were all together and he called us a bunch of niggers, so we looked at him. Everything's okay, cool, we didn't say nothing, because I knew that was his last... I wanted to kill him, but we just walked out. The next day I get suspended, just because I say I'm going to kill him. (File F05: Lines 1126-1138)

If there can be considered to be accepted standards of mutual respect, decorum and fair conduct between teachers and students, the incident described in the preceding quote has breached every level of this unspoken code. It is obvious how justice was meted out differentially in this instance. While the Black students were suspended for threatening the teacher, the teacher's racial epithets and provocation of the incident remained beyond reproach. This is evidence of how the abuse of power and authority on the part of the teacher was supported by the school system, and with the lack of structures in place to provide advocacy for the rights of the student, we can see how this power can be perceived as oppressive and arbitrary.

Non-Black Students:

Most non-Black students suggest that the discipline in their schools is not very strict and laughed at suggestions to the contrary. Non-Black students felt that they and other students were not deterred from committing certain infractions due to the level of discipline at their school. They felt that discipline should be stricter in some cases, such as classroom control, and did not feel that the teachers always had enough control of the classroom, making it difficult for those students who want to learn. These students did not feel that suspension was an effective means of punishment. For instance, in the case of "skipping" class, most non-Black students felt that being given more time off through suspension might encourage some students to continue this

behaviour. All non-Black students reported having skipped classes either occasionally or more frequently with little or no consequences. Non-Black students felt that the discipline at their schools, although lenient, was fair and administered equally to all students.

Teachers:

The ideological position of teachers was again apparent. Some teachers felt that some of the problems involving racism were due to the different ways in which Black students resist authority in comparison with White students. They mentioned receiving or experiencing anti-White comments from Black students in school. Some of these teachers related such comments to experiences of racism they assumed these students had undergone at the hands of other Whites or even White teachers. Others attributed them to racism against Whites.

Some teachers tended to refer constantly to violence and Black youth. It was their belief that the standards are the same for Black and White youth and that low expectations do not exist for Black youth. Standards for numeracy and literacy were seen as too low, and yet some students who do not meet these standards simply have to work harder. The teacher, as an authority figure in this process, has to be the judge and may be a target of student dislike.

Other teachers tended not to focus on issues involving authority, power and respect, but talked instead about other facets of school-related to disengagement, particularly the curriculum and teacher-student relationships. These teachers felt that discipline problems had to do with students defying authority for particular reasons. Some identified markers which they felt signalled a student's feelings towards school, such as forgetting a pencil, or coming in late.

Teachers across the board noted that students call certain teachers "racist." This, however, was interpreted differently: some saw it as a means of acting out, while others saw it as related to the behaviour of teachers.

One teacher noted that other teachers tell her they are uneasy about approaching a group of Black students. She stated that there may be one "bad kid" in the bunch, but that teachers may tend to view and treat them as if they are all bad. This tendency to essentialize or make negative generalized statements about Black students was identified as a common practice among certain teachers. Teachers exhibited frustration about issues with discipline and struggled with finding ways to hold students accountable for their behaviour.

It seems that shifting the locus of blame back and forth from teachers to students is indicative of a social and cultural schism within schools, where there appears to be little empathy or understanding for the position of the other. Another significant issue is the way authority is constructed within educational settings, often in an arbitrary and unilateral fashion. This can lead to feelings of disempowerment among students, many of whom have legitimate grievances, and are left without any institutional means to affect change.

Black Parents/Community Workers:

Some parents spoke about their own issues with power and authority in the school, and particularly how this has influenced their role as parents. One mother spoke of the difficulty in dealing with the school's and her own conflicting aspirations for her daughter. She mentioned that the school encourages her daughter to aim for goals which are based on stereotypes of Blacks. When asked if she feels that this practice "undermines her efforts" as a parent, she responded:

> Of course it does because it really basically ties my hands at home, because if...a child [says], "Mom my teacher says that...," you tend to stand back and my flexibility as a parent becomes undermined. You don't want to challenge your child because you want to... reinforce education... Without education there is no power. There is no power. But it's how you use that education to facilitate the power that you hold within yourself. (P01 lines 184-203)

This, then, refers to a duality within the notion of power, whereby the inner power of the individuals can be either facilitated or constrained through education, and also refers to the role of educators in channelling that power.

This parent makes the point that the influences of school can often disempower and undermine their role as parents and facilitators in the education of their children. The disjuncture between the parents' ambitions for their children's educational future, and those prescribed by the schools, are often at odds especially as in this instance, where racial stereotypes are said to define the scope of these goals.

A community worker outlined a profoundly disturbing scenario which captures many aspects of the often disempowering relationship some Black parents have with the school system:

> This is a young man who has just stabbed a White student over some racial incident. The principal sort of reported the end results of that tragedy. But the tragedy started way back when this [student] first entered one of the schools... and the treatment that the student received through the principals, through teachers, through administrators, and not only the student, but also the parents of the student... They [the family] are currently applying for landed immigrant status using a refugee claim... The parents have been very active in school life, advocating for him on several occasions. One incident: he was late. The principal decided he was going to be suspended for a whole week. The parents were annoyed; he was upset. The parents went to principal. Principal says, "I don't want to see you, I don't have time." His teacher tried

> to advocate, [but encountered] the same kind of attitude that, you know the principal, "I'm all powerful and if I say no, there is no negotiation." But it's a whole series of things that led to this child being so alienated. He's watched this teacher who is supposed to have authority and some power trying to mediate on his behalf. He's seen his parents coming in, and nothing seems to happen. Eventually, the school decided that they didn't want him and for whatever arbitrary reason the principal decided that "People like you we don't want in the school," and he basically said that to the kid. The mother sent him to live with his sister and what happened was, he was in a classroom and the teacher was talking about some incident with Black people and sport. That eventually led to some racial name-calling. The teacher didn't really deal with it in the classroom... sent them to the principal's office. The principal didn't really deal with it either or react to it. You know, so this whole thing of being pushed around again, the White student threatened the Black student, Black student decided he was going to protect himself so he took a knife to school and when he was approached by the White student he decided to protect himself. So we see the end result and we wonder, "What's happening to the little kids? Why are they becoming so violent?" (CW01 lines 230-293)

This provides the brief history behind what culminated into a violent racist incident. This background provides the context in what would otherwise be seen as a random act of racial violence, rather than a situation which was breeding throughout a history of mistreatment and disempowerment within the school system. It is left to wonder whether these situations could have been avoided if intervention from parents, teachers and guidance counsellors had been accepted earlier on, and the opportunity given to negotiate an outcome which might have circumvented the violent action from occurring. It seems clear, then, that the principal's unilateral actions and unwillingness to consult other stakeholders simply exacerbated an already volatile problem.

Scenarios such as this also speak to the need for alternative cooperative strategies to be employed to deal with conflict management. It also refers to the need to interrogate the causes of such conflicts within the systems and structures of power in educational institutions.

13.2.3 Labelling and Streaming

Black Students:

Of the students who expressed a position about streaming, almost 90% understood it as a practice which had negative implications for students generally and could be considered as a contributing factor for student's disengagement from the system. There were certain students who had

specific (unconditioned) narratives about streaming leading to students feeling less able or less smart, and fading out:

> ... there's a stigma with basic level... the students in basic level are all [considered] stupid... ignorant; they don't know what they're doing and they're there because they're below or inferior to the ones that are in the advanced level. Nobody wants to go through their life being labelled stupid or ignorant. It would be much easier for you to leave that. You know, leave all that crap behind and just say, "Why should I go through this system where when people look at me they associate me with... stupidity and they think that I'm not gonna get anywhere in this world anyway? Why should I leave myself in a system like that? Everyone else is superior to me, everyone else is in advanced level." People just want to get themselves out of a system like that and so they drop out... (File O04: Lines 293-318)

There were a number of specific instances of being "placed" in basic, then having parents intervene to "get me out." These accounts talk about "how hard" it was to get out, or "impossible." The "impossible" cases involved similar experiences; asking to get out and hearing, "We'll look into it;" leaving the student caught in the bureaucracy; witnessing the inertia of the system; and hearing the response, "It's too late," being told that there's no way to go into advanced after taking basic.

It is notable that some students, in their answers, said they were in the basic stream and later on in the interview indicated goals for which the advanced stream was necessary (i.e. being a doctor, going to law school etc.). Clearly, they had not been counselled or given the information required to make an appropriate choice regarding streaming:

> The guy I'm tutoring, he's streamed into a technical environment, but he wants to be a lawyer. You can't really be a lawyer if you're going to a technical school unless you work really hard at it and... get 90's. So I think once people see that, they get discouraged and go, "Oh, I can't be what I really want to be because I'm where I am," and then they just leave. (File O22: Lines 237-249)

The spectrum of vocational school, technical and commercial school, to the collegiate, was often considered and named as an example of colour-coded streaming. This was how students described this process and the fact that many Black students were ghettoized within basic level streams, which were often the result of teachers' low expectations of Black students, rather than their actual ability:

> ... there's a lot of students who are not encouraged... I see a lot of brilliant Black students who teachers tell, "Maybe you shouldn't take advanced. No, It's really, really hard. You should take general." And to me that person is brilliant. It's just that no one has encouraged them or told them to try harder or anything, and so they take the easy way out and just take the basic or take the general... that makes the ability in a person just dwindle. (File O09: Lines 152-167)

The following quote also shows how stereotypical notions can impede the process of educational advancement for Black students:

> ... in Grade 8, I went to a majority Black school. Our guidance counsellor was telling, "Well, when I look at your faces, I could see that not many of you are going to be going to university. So, there's no reason why you should be taking advanced. What you should do is just stick to the general and basic." That's what he was telling a group of us. There were a lot of us there. And so, it's like the guidance counsellors and the teachers and everybody, they just push into the basic courses. And then, there's nothing after basic. You don't realize that until you get to grade 12. You know you can't do nothing with that... (File R06: Lines 471-490)

For these students, their educational choices were laid out for them with little opportunity to negotiate options. The fact that the students felt they were being stereotyped and ghettoized into lower educational streams lead some students to express their desire to go to schools which had a larger Black population because they felt there would be a higher level of comfort for them and more equitable treatment.

Many so-called immigrant students felt that it was unfair and unwarranted that their cultural and linguistic differences were treated as deficits. Despite the fact that they had previously been schooled in English, students from the Caribbean mentioned being put back a year or placed into ESL or ESD classes. Some talked explicitly about how that made them feel to be in class with a younger brother for instance, while others talked about their anger at "having to do things over." What we see then, is how negative evaluations are ascribed to language characteristics, such as speaking with a different accent. Therefore, it seems that conformity to White middle-class standards for language and cultural norms has become the manifest purpose for schooling in Canada, with obvious and lasting repercussions for those who cannot or will not conform.

There were very few students who did say that streaming is a good means of categorizing students according to their abilities. Many of these students, who were in advanced programs, were in support of this practice which they perceived as an example of meritocracy in the school

system. This group believed that you got what you worked for and did not see a process of differential labelling as occurring.

Dropouts:

Dropouts tended to see the processes of labelling and streaming as represented through the hidden curriculum: in subtle teacher behaviours and behaviours of guidance counsellors, as well as in the practices directly associated with streaming. Dropouts associated streaming with dropping out, and described streaming as a process which resulted in a loss of hope for those streamed into the "lower" or "non-collegiate" levels. While many students still in the system couldn't really define "streaming", and had not formed an opinion on whether or not streaming was "good" or "bad", in the dropout sample virtually all the respondents were able to define and judge streaming as a process which often leads toward disengagement from school. With few exceptions, the dropouts in the sample identified streaming as a process which stripped them (and others) of any desire to be in school.

The feeling of being "trapped" is emphasized when they discussed how their own self-perceptions are negated by this process:

> ...you're saying "Oh my goodness, I'm so advanced, but yet I'm sitting here in basic. How is everyone viewing me?" And you want to get out. And it's just like trapping a fly in a jar, he will eventually die... (File F12: Lines 628-633)

Almost without exception, dropouts discussed the process of streaming (as well as that of dropping out) as having significantly narrowed their options and chances for the future:

> There might be a thin line between advanced and general in reality, but then the consequences are so wide, so varied... So I don't really agree with streaming... you end up streaming right into society... (File F19: Lines 1416-1424)

It is significant that, at the time they underwent streaming, most dropouts were not fully aware of the consequences and what the impact would be on their future options. The correlation between streaming and future occupational prospects then, becomes part of a deterministic dynamic when, as it was put, being streamed in school means "you end up being streamed in society."

A typical story was recounted by one dropout who felt that it was far too late to pursue her original goal, although she now felt that this goal was originally quite attainable. With hindsight, she sees that she was, in fact, quite "bright" and that her consequent choices were diminished by the following encounter with a guidance counsellor:

> I went to guidance and I was told that you have to be very good at Physics and [do] many years of university, and "Oh dear, you'll be too old before you have kids." No wonder I'm so confused. Because that was my ultimate. I was extremely bright when it comes to science and I couldn't understand why my focus was so shifted and why I did fashion designing. (File F08: Lines 909-924)

This is a clear example of both gender discrimination (with the insinuation that furthering her education would hinder childbearing options) and also once again of how lowered expectations for Blacks among school agents can limit and deny a student's potential and life chances. It also relates to how gender roles are stereotyped. Females wishing to pursue sciences are channelled into fashion design, due to the ghettoization of women in specific sectors of the economy and the domination of men in others.

Examples of racism and the process of colour-coded streaming pervade the narratives of dropouts:

> ...[the counsellors] direct them: the general's for the Caucasians and the basic's for the Blacks. Or you can tell the way they try to manipulate you, they think, "Oh, [this class] is too hard for you, are you taking too much?" (File F19: Lines 1071-1076)

These comments point to the fact that all too often racial stereotypes preclude the equitable dissemination of students into streams based solely on abilities. Black students are ghettoized into streams which are more in accordance with the preconceptions of teachers than with their abilities, desires or interests. The implications of this have also been articulated clearly as a loss of self-esteem, diminished hopes, being channelled into inappropriate careers or disengagement from school entirely.

Many dropouts mentioned that they ended up in a "streamed school", and discussed the fact that their parents, at the time, were not aware of this fact and could not intercede on their behalf. One respondent discusses how this happened in her experience:

> My parents didn't realize that [it] was basically a trade school. I think because they were busy trying to settle in and do other things with the kids, because I'm not the only one. They didn't realize what the educational system was all about. (File F08: Lines 169-175)

The role of parents then, as advocates for their children, becomes diminished when they are not regarded as stakeholders and are not apprised of the school's educational policies and practices.

Teachers:

Teachers had very definite opinions on streaming. Interviews were conducted during the period that the controversial destreaming of Grade Nine in Ontario schools was being introduced. Some teachers believed quite strongly in streaming, and felt that students in basic level were those who deserved to be. It was felt that these students could not cope with higher streams. They felt that it was reasonable to have different expectations for different students with different demonstrated abilities.

Among supporters of streaming, some believed that work experience was essential to help the students in lower streams. They noted that basic level students and special education students tended to participate in co-op, programs which prepared them for the world of work. They also noted that the lower streams are for students who simply wanted to be cooks and who "realistically couldn't be made into doctors." These instructors felt that students with lower abilities in a class would "pull down the good" [students] , if classes were destreamed, and the result would be dilution of the curriculum.

Some teachers had a strong belief that Black students are placed more often in the lower streams and intimated that this was because of lower teacher expectations. Some also noted that students at a lower level may feel badly about themselves, because they don't expect themselves to be able to achieve at the same level as advanced students. Students in lower streams may have poor self-esteem and low expectations of themselves. Yet, rather than providing encouragement, some teachers were reported to be condescending, teaching "down" to the students.

Some teachers were able recognize how negative stereotypes influenced their expectations of Black students:

> I don't want to put myself in the position that I am above having these stereotypes, and it's not pleasant to admit them, but I have found them...There was a Black student who won an award for something and I was surprised... I'm quite sure that race entered into it, and that was very upsetting to acknowledge in myself. (File T33 Lines 573-598)

These low expectations on the part of teachers, all of whom may not be consciously aware of them, translate into diminished opportunities for Black students who are socially bound to these stigmas.

The question of whether differential abilities were simply the natural result of a meritocratic system, as many have indicated, or could in fact be attributed to other factors was raised by the teachers. The fact that many dropouts return to higher education suggests that demonstrated ability is not always an indicator of individual potential.

Black Parents/Community Workers:

Parents saw too much labelling and social stereotyping taking place in the schools, often with direct and immediate consequences for Black students' sense of connection to the school system. In particular, some parents complain about the labelling and steering of young Black males into athletics and music programs.

Many parents spoke of labelling and streaming as ways in which Black students are lead into the process of disengagement. They spoke of students being put back when they enter the Canadian school system and the negative impact this can have on young people. They also spoke of stereotypes which carry a heavy price for Black students striving to succeed in the school system. One woman, a mother of eight children who have gone through the school system in Canada, spoke eloquently about some of these issues:

> What I find about going through the system is the stereotyping and labelling of different nationalities and races. If you were a Black student, one could look upon you as, "Well, she's not going to be able to do well in grammar or writing -- your abilities would not be as good or as efficient as one who was born here in Canada"... once you were from a foreign country you [would] not... be able to go through their school system, because of that. Because of stereotyping, kids fail because then the teachers put extra pressures on them which cause them to become more distant because their self-confidence and their self-esteem is gone, is taken away from them. If it's known that you're not going to succeed, then of course the person who's talking to them is... not going to smile, to encourage you to speak more, or to encourage you to elaborate on the question they asked you... (File P13: Lines 12-38)

Another mother speaks of her own experiences with streaming in the Caribbean, and how, in her opinion, racism is the problem and not necessarily the practice of streaming:

> I have mixed feelings about streaming. In the West Indies streaming was done in that if you were recognized as above average you were put in a class with your peers who were also above average. You simplified the way in which the pedagogy was imparted. But we weren't fighting racism. If you were bright and you worked you were also given a chance. So streaming for me has different connotations. Here in North America, it really means that my child, if I am not vigilant, will be put aside and will not be given the opportunity that his intelligence so richly deserves. So I mistrust streaming in this context. In another context, where...race

> is not the basis on which the cookies are given out, I see nothing wrong with it. (File P12: Lines 810-833)

In regards to standardized testing, Black parents recognize the need for more appropriate standards of measurement of students' academic achievement. The following parent's narrative illustrates the contradictions and ambivalences that Black parents have about school procedures which fail to acknowledge the differences in histories, skills and privilege that students bring to classrooms.

> ... I think sometimes it (testing) will allow the school to know where they are failing and where they need to develop. If you just go basically on what you're doing in the classroom then you may not know the strength of the students or where they're lacking, so it all depends on what they will do with the result of the testing. You know, will some kids be grouped and show up at one place, or are others going to be stuck in one position because they failed that test in Grade 6 -- that I don't really agree with, but if it's... an assessment of where the students are going or where the school needs to go, then definitely... I think in all fairness, I mean if you're doing (standardized testing) I would think it would be more a testing of what the kid has been taught and not whether the kid is astute or not... the result of the test or how it's done should not be entirely up to the school system to decide, the community should have an input on what goes on. I think parents should be allowed to question it too. (File P08: Lines 623-638; 649-676)

The responses of the parents, therefore, echo many of the same sentiments as the Black students and dropouts. The centrality of race within issues of streaming was seen as definitive. As one parent suggested, meritocratic principles cannot be applied in a society where racial disparities exist, as they are in effect corrupted by social and cultural biases which can preclude the just determination of student's abilities.

13.2.4 Teachers, Teaching Styles and Expectations

Black Students:

When talking about their favourite teachers, most students described specific styles of teaching. Teachers who answer questions in class, (and outside of class), without making students feel uncomfortable, less intelligent, ("stupid") or like they are wasting teacher's time were commended for their abilities to encourage student participation in the classroom. Teachers who are actively helping the student to do better were also favoured:

> The time they take -- they give you your work, but then they show you why this work is important. And, when... you don't get the perfect grade, they'll tell you why and how can you improve yourself so that maybe the next one will be even better. (File R01: Lines 2416-2422)

Another student speaks of a favourite teacher in terms of the support offered:

> He is kind; he understands what I'm going through and he knows how to teach real well and if you don't get it, he'll make sure that you get it, that's to show that a teacher really cares, that you're learning... (File O04: Lines 328-334)

Favourite teachers are therefore considered to be those who show the belief that a student can succeed, or is able. In short, teachers who have positive perceptions and high expectations of the student are valued:

> She's encouraging. She always tells me... that I could make it somehow, that I could be somebody. I always look at her... I'm thankful for that. There's somebody that believes in me. (File B21: Lines 256-265)

Students described favourite teachers often in familial terms or as being "like a friend." This is often connected to the description of favourite teachers as being supportive and accessible:

> They're the ones that let me feel... [like] I'm doing something good. They're behind me, like a father or mother figure... [If] I do something wrong... I don't have to sit there and figure it out myself, they go, "Come up here I'll show you how you did wrong" and try to change it. They're always behind you. (File W05: Lines 569-583)

For students with difficulties at home, the school often serves as a surrogate, where students hope to receive the attention and personal support missing in their lives. Teachers who took a personal interest in the students were therefore regarded highly. One way this was seen was in teachers empathizing and even taking into account a student's personal problems that could affect their school performance.

It is significant that while students rarely described a good teacher as one who demands less of students, or gives out good grades, good teachers were consistently described as having positive perceptions, high expectations, and the time, energy and commitment to point out and help students to correct errors. In this sense, respect was regarded as an important issue, particularly

in reference to best-liked teachers. Teachers that are described as respecting students, were seen as being worthy of respect.

Teachers who were "fun" and had interesting classes were also noted -- specifically teachers who encouraged classroom discussion, and seemed to be creating knowledge with the student rather than just passing it on. Teachers who joked freely with students, and had "hands-on" work such as research projects or experiments were also mentioned. These teaching styles, moving far beyond the confines of the classroom "lecture" often seemed to involve interaction between people in a "community of learning":

> I like the way he makes an attempt to mix people up according to different backgrounds, that you learn as much as you can from your lab partner. And, he also mixes people up according to the kinds of grades that you're getting. So he'll put a student who's doing really well... with a student who's not doing so well and then he urges you to help that person out as much as possible. So you learn to help each other out. (File O04: Lines 798-810)

Therefore, cooperative learning strategies seem to be favoured as opposed to traditional didactic structures. This outlines the importance of peer support in the learning process.

There was frequently a consensus among students at each school on the teacher identified as "the favourite". It is also significant that some best teacher and worst teacher experiences go back to grade school. A number of students described grade school experiences with teachers which still affect them and remain in their memory -- an indicator of how significant a good or bad teacher-student relationship can be.

When students spoke about teachers they disliked, differential treatment in the classroom was frequently mentioned:

> ... there's three Black students in my class, yeah, we sit together... [I]f the White kids talk and are making jokes... [the teacher] is going to laugh with them. And if we talk, she's going to look at us and cross her eyes... (File W30: Lines 1153-1161)

Students' perception of being reprimanded for behaviours accepted from White students supports their feeling of subordination. Lower teacher expectations of Black students also contributes to the perception of their inferiority vis-à-vis White students:

> What she does in her class is that she says,... "You guys are stupid and you guys are smart." That's what she's done every year... My brother wasn't doing too well in the first term... My parents wanted him to get a tutor, and there's a special tutoring thing... My parents

> were willing to pay... and wanted to get the tutor and [the teacher] made it really hard. So they came in and made sure he got the tutoring... And then in class, they have this new pairs system, tutoring kind of thing, where older students who have spares come into the class and help the students. She would give everyone one tutor and she'd say, "Here, you need two because you're stupid", kind of thing like that... (File O09: Lines 370-405)

Stories of teachers who "belittled" students by telling them they should be in a lower stream, indicating that they should work at McDonald's, etc., were related on a very emotional level:

> I really like to ask questions. That's how I learn... [But the teacher], she'll manipulate the question in such a way that I answer my own question and then she says to me, "You didn't really need to ask that question. I don't want you to ask any questions if you don't need to." And then I try to counteract by saying, "But I really didn't understand" and she says, "Well, if you don't understand maybe you shouldn't be in enriched math. Maybe you should... take a course in plumbing." She goes, "You guys aren't very intelligent are you?"... It's horrible. She should not be able to treat us like that. (File O04: Lines 884-906)

Another student cited similar derogatory and derisive behaviour on the part of a teacher:

> ...if you had a problem, [the teacher] would put you down. He would tell you, "Hey, my daughter or my son could do better than this." And I don't think that is right. If I knew someone had a problem I would go, "Hey, do you have a problem? Maybe I can help you." (File W40: Lines 174-181)

Another student illustrates the attitudes of disinterest they were confronted with and saw this as a lack of willingness on the part of teachers to support their students:

> I don't think that teachers are reaching out to their students. One of my teachers said, "You know, whether or not you pass or fail, I still get paid." (File O03: Lines 1267-1271)

Therefore, teachers exhibiting condescending demeanours were seen as alienating students, while those who took the time to provide extra help and had a supportive and nurturing attitude toward their students received high praise and were able to help students excel.

Teaching style was seen by students as an important factor in whether or not a teacher could engage the interest of their students. Some teachers were seen as boring. Students commented on teachers who did not allow for student input for the lesson.

> If you ask her a question, she tells you how long she's been teaching for, and it's like, "I don't really care how long you've been teaching for, I just need your help." And then she gets mad and if the students get her upset then she stops teaching and it doesn't make the rest of the class feel better. So, almost the entire class is failing. (File W33: Lines 472-480)

Teachers who seemed to be doing the minimum amount of work required in the classroom were noted as being those who just instruct students to "open your books" to such and such page number, and fail to actively engage students into their learning experience by eliciting and incorporating their knowledge and experience into the classroom discourse. The role of teachers as facilitators in a student's learning experience was preferred by students to the role of teachers as the disseminators of information. Therefore, teachers who could make learning a relevant and egalitarian experience -- that is they were prepared to incorporate the student's input and experiences -- were regarded by students as being the best able to engage the interest and performance of their students.

Students talked about instances where teachers did not consider students' interests and experiences. An example one teacher who said, "We won't talk about the Rodney King incident, because I don't know about it," and then went on to talk about sports. Cultural insensitivity on the part of some teachers was also criticized:

> She said this to the whole class, that AIDS came from Africa... and like, there's all this kind of proof. (File B19: Lines 486-495)

Teachers who do not allow critical thinking about the curriculum and teachers who do not accept Black students' statements about racism or Eurocentrism in books such as "Lord of the Flies" and "Huckleberry Finn" were also disliked by Black students:

> I had to do an essay on Huckleberry Finn and Roots, and I was writing that I thought Huck was racist just because of the things he said, and I backed it up and everything. And because I said that, [the teacher] didn't like it and gave me a really bad mark. And when I went to talk to him about it, he said, "No, you can't say Huck was a racist because he became friends with Jim"... I told him that the book offended me and he was, like, "This book did not offend." (File R06: Lines 1072-1088)

The unwillingness to discuss students' attitudes on race, particularly as it relates to the curriculum, serves to further alienate Black students. These narratives have shown that in order to create an equitable and engaging environment, classroom discourse and curricular content must legitimate and include the concerns and experiences of all students. From the perspective of critical pedagogy/teaching, materials cited as offensive serve a viable pedagogical purpose and should be taken up collectively by the instructor and class for critical examination. Critical education and the fostering of critical understanding can only develop when students are accorded the ability to challenge and redefine the knowledge which is presented. Thus, teachers who are unwilling to divest authority over the discourse, create educational environments which undermine the creative instincts and critical consciousness of their students.

Dropouts:

The dropout sample also recounted falling victim to low teacher expectations, as was the ongoing case for many Black students still in school. They described how low expectations were conveyed as part of the hidden curriculum within schools and translated into behaviours and attitudes on the part of certain teachers and guidance counsellors which relayed messages of inferiority. In the following quote, the impact of these low expectations was discussed in terms of the ways in which the attitudes of guidance counsellors and teachers conditioned their thinking about their own "potential":

> I blame... my guidance counsellor, because, in so many words, she told me that I don't have the brain to do it. She wasn't overt about it, but that's the impression I got. And it's just like a disease, it stays in your brain, until you realize that "Hey, there's a problem" and get it treated, it remains there. (File F08: Lines 971-979)

This is a story of constant discouragement and is typical of the dropouts' narratives. Dropouts tended, more than students, to see the ways in which subtle messages from guidance counsellors and teachers had very real consequences in their lives. Many dropouts discuss instances where counsellors told them to move into lower streams, take fewer challenging classes, or drop out of classes that they are finding difficult. While some of the students are able to identify teachers or guidance counsellors who have told them that they "can do the work", uniformly dropouts are unable to recall such instances:

> One of the teachers told me that I could drop math... [so] me and my friend, as a matter of fact another Black guy... dropped math and then... the next [week]... we seen that same teacher that told us to drop math talking to a White student saying, "Don't drop math because if you do you might as well say good-bye to 87 jobs." (File F13: Lines 62-72)

Other such examples of differential treatment on the part of teachers included "chatting" informally with White students but generally not including Black students in such discussions, and telling White students that they want them to achieve, that they believe the student could do better, or that they are bright, not telling that to Black students. While students tended to recall specific incidents of these teacher behaviours, dropouts tended to see these behaviours as typical, and endemic to the school environment as they experienced it.

In relation to factors which dropouts assert make it easy to disengage, specific practices by teachers in the classroom are mentioned, such as being denied access within the participation structures of the classroom:

> And you'll be surprised, you'll have your hand up for days and never be called... (File F12: Lines 1000-1001)

This quote refers to the sense of invisibility some students reported feeling within the system. Being ignored or undervalued as a member of the class results in student alienation and contributes to the process of fading out.

Issues of conformity and acceptance were also seen as problematic:

> One or two were cool. But they were like the rest. Cool only when you toe the line and do what they want. No one is willing to accept people on their own terms. You must conform. It was too much for me. (File F19: Lines 212-217)

Incidents of "veiled racism", that is comments which carry an implicit messages of racial differentiation reinforced student's feelings of alienation:

> One day I was walking with this teacher and I thought, "I know how they are, it's in their nature, but maybe she's one of those liberal Whites who will suppress it"... it was hot outside in the sun, she goes, "Oh you get tanned too don't you? I know, I have a friend who's brown and he gets darker"... and in my head I go, "I guess your nature must come true." (File F19: Lines 487-499)

Comments of this nature speak to the need to culturally sensitize the school community. The insensitive attitude among school agents, as described by these dropouts, is evidence of their lack of preparation to teach in a multi-racial, multi-ethnic context.

Non-Black Students:

The sentiments of non-Black students differed with respect to Black students and dropouts on the issue of differential treatment based on race:

> I think that education has no colour so those people who want to learn will and those who don't, won't. (File CG05: Lines 596-598)
>
> I think the teachers here are fair to all students. They treat everybody [with] the same respect. (File CG06: Lines 108-110)

These responses were typical for questions regarding differential treatment of students by teachers based on race and also class. Non-Black students responded that the school administration and staff treated everyone the "same". The non-Black students believed that if someone wanted to learn and wanted to do well in school they could do so through individual efforts. The individual was the unit of consideration in terms of opportunity and educational achievement; they resisted speaking in terms of groups.

Yet there were those non-Black students who felt that Black students were subjected to differential expectations by the school staff:

> I think that the school system looks to the Blacks as inferior, that they won't know as much. So they expect them to have less grades....I don't think that's right at all. I don't think that's fair. (File CG04: Lines 918-925)

Although these students were not the majority, it must be noted that there were contradictions in many of the non-Black students' overall responses. For instance, a response like the above may still be followed by a comment about equal opportunity. These students had not given the thought necessary to these issues to reconcile systemic racism with the daily practice they observed.

Most non-Black students described teachers they disliked as being "boring," and this spanned different subject areas. Most non-Black students said that those teachers they disliked did not appear approachable and were not available for extra help. Also, these teachers only seemed interested in the students' performances in that one class and knew nothing about the students' personal lives or personalities. Issues of fairness and equal treatment arose only with respect to the individual student as opposed to students as part of different racial and cultural groups.

Teachers:

Of all the groups, teachers spoke the least about teaching styles and expectations, although some teachers did discuss the ways in which lower teacher expectations contribute to the process of disengagement. These teachers also talked about the issue of expectations related to the race, gender and class of the student. Some teachers were mentioned as being unable to deal with issues relating to racism and sexism and felt they were suppressed in the classroom and at the administrative level due to the fact that their discussion often leads to conflict.

Black Parents/Community Workers:

Parents express the belief that teachers have a vital role to play in the academic success of a student as well as in the psychological and emotional growth of the individual:

> I think teachers play a great role in influencing or even socializing the children, and when they are negative or show negative attitudes towards students, you tend to lose your self- esteem and it makes you want to leave. (P18 lines 110-116)

The role of the school as a primary agency of socialization is recognized here, as well as the pivotal role played by teachers.

One parent emphasized the expectations that teachers carry for Black students and explains how these expectations are further prejudiced for Black students from a homosexual family:

> I think because I'm a lesbian that that has an impact on how she is perceived within the school system. I think teachers who know very little [about] lesbianism or who have their own ideas about what it means to have lesbian parents assume the worst. So they assume because you're a lesbian and especially because I'm Black lesbian, that my child isn't encouraged to excel in school, that she may not have a study area at home... And so they assume that I wouldn't be involved in the system, I think, because I'm a lesbian and because I'm an out lesbian... Yes, I think that's the stereotype, you know, that the child is coming out of an unstructured home... (File P7: Lines 278-311)

Homosexuality is seen by the woman as poorly understood, and that homophobia is inadequately addressed in the schools. Teachers are seen to hold assumptions about the values and home structures for children of homosexual parents. The assumptions are attributed to a lack of understanding of and exposure to the realities of homosexuality. This impacts directly on a teacher's ability to relate to students who have this home environment, and the potentially dangerous messages they can pass on to these students. Overall, parents stressed the need that teachers remain aware of their influence and use it to positively impact on all students.

13.2.5 Curriculum: Content and Connection

Black Students:

Black students had strong feelings about how the inclusion of Black History in the mainstream curriculum would enrich their educative experiences. Some students pointed to the fact that

including Black History would mitigate the boredom experienced by some students. One student makes a connection between a friend's decision to drop out and curricular content:

> Bored, just bored; not getting what they want, like learning different things. I thought Black History would be good to learn but they don't teach that there in [her] school....sometimes I think that's why she dropped out, because she wanted to learn Black History too. (File B23: Lines 64-73)

In responding directly to the question, "What is important about Black History for you?" one student states:

> Because I'm Black. They're robbing you of your past....And unless you have the interest and you could be in a group of people who have the interest that they want to learn, you're not gonna learn anything. (File O01: Lines 1395-1418)

The exclusion of Black History, then, was regarded by these students as a clear deterrent to gaining a meaningful experience from their education. Moreover, it was seen as "robbing" them of a part of their history and denying legitimacy to the Black experience.

Dropouts:

Virtually all dropouts felt the curriculum had not included anything relevant to their experiences, whether in the form of Black History or in the form of an understanding of Black experiences in general. There was a pervasive feeling of being systematically excluded. Dropouts recall that in every class they experienced exclusion, an absence of themselves in the curriculum. In fact, dropouts directly associated the lack of Black History with their inability to stay in school.

One dropout mentions taking an African History class upon returning to school, then goes on to critique the curriculum as it existed before he dropped out:

> The curriculum... was one-sided, especially when it came down to history. There was never a mention of any Black people that have contributed to society... I mean, everything, it's the White man that did. History is just based on the European Canadian that came over... There was no mention of the Africans that helped build a railway, that ran away from the South and came up to Nova Scotia and helped work and build Canada too... no mention of that. (File F08: Lines 316-332)

This student refers specifically to the absence of Blacks in Canadian history, a fact that contributes even more so to Black students' sense of invisibility and status as Canadians.

Further, it explains how this exclusion places Black African-Canadians somewhere outside of Canadian history, rather than acknowledging them as an intrinsic part of it. The following quote speaks to the frustration and alienation experienced by Black students in this regard:

> It's like you're learning about somebody else's history. You're learning about when they discovered America when things were good for them and when they did this and when they did that... It started to take its toll on me after a while. (File F13: Lines 397-410)

These students expressed the need for fundamental changes in the way history is represented, and in a broader sense they addressed the need for rethinking the efficacy of a strictly Eurocentric knowledge base in a multi-ethnic society and increasingly globalized world.

Teachers:

On the issue of inclusive curriculum, teachers were again divided by ideological conservative and progressive positions. Some teachers did not believe in the notion, and felt that including groups other than the "founding groups" in Canadian history was unnatural, and not a part of the teacher's responsibilities. They expressed the sentiment that inclusive education was simply a response to pressures of "political correctness", and felt that the curriculum should reflect Canada, and implied that Canadian history basically went back to European contact and that "minority presence" is recent and peripheral. Thus, in trying to be "all things to all students" the educational system then fails.

For these teachers, the label of Eurocentric curriculum was considered unfair: the good traditional curriculum with values that all should be made to identify with, was considered sufficient. Other teachers were frustrated with the monocultural focus of education and discussed the difficulties with their independent efforts at making the curriculum more inclusive:

> I am fairly new to teaching art history and it's all White European history and what I have to confess is that I'm still doing it, partly because I'm still learning it myself and I'm getting it across and all the while I'm thinking God, I've got to interrupt this somehow. And it is very difficult. I don't have the materials at my fingertips and I don't have the time at my fingertips...So all I end up doing is saying look at how White this is, look at how European this is, look at how we're not looking at what the Asians are doing at this time, what the East Indians were doing at this time, and I try to throw in the odd thing happening at the time but it's not on the curriculum, it's not part of the 120 key words they have to know so I can't spend time on it... I throw on a video now and then, I bring in some posters that a Black artist or an Asian artist has

> done....but I think that's a little bit tokenistic, if there's such a word. (File T33: Lines 286-327)

This teacher's narrative speaks to the need to broaden the scope of the current curriculum to include the contributions of other cultures. It also deals with this teacher's sense of frustration in attempting to integrate this knowledge without proper institutional support, that is, without the development of an inclusive curriculum. As is stated, this leads to tokenism when individual teachers attempt to integrate their curriculum without the necessary time allowances governed by course requirements. Therefore, this piecemeal approach to transforming and creating a more holistic curriculum, is undermined by the institutional structures. However, these constraints should not be considered valid reasons for not pursuing educational change.

Other teachers were also critical of the middle-class, monocultural nature of school culture and values and discussed how this poses problems for students outside of these social boundaries :

> I think we have a very middle-class, White environment. I think that's the majority of teachers, the majority of the focus of the curriculum. I think in terms of values altogether, it's middle class and White.I think in terms of, for instance, what is an acceptable noise level in a room or in a hall or in a cafeteria, that's a middle-class, White perception. So I think there's a discrepancy for kids who aren't part of that. I mean, I think there is a cultural discrepancy... the whole way in which we, who are part of the dominant culture, have this tendency to think that what we do, what we organize is what's right, what's absolute... and I think we are so oblivious to the ways in which we impose all of that, all those constructions, that we can't even give you all the answers to why the kids are dropping out, because we're oblivious to a lot of it. (File: T33 Lines: 67-92)

This teacher situates the norms of schooling within the domain of White, middle class society which therefore contributes to the alienation of non-White and lower-class students. The statement goes further to explain how this cultural hegemony can contribute to student disengagement for those who fail to fit in with the normative standards defined by White middle-class society. It also implicates teachers who fail to recognize the impact of systemic discrimination and social cultural exclusion due to their own immersion in the normalcy of Whiteness and the standardization of middle-class values and perceptions.

Other teachers felt that people interested in learning about their own heritage can go and do their own research. Some of these teachers felt that Black History is a part of Canadian history and is indeed taught. However, they noted that having a separate Black History class would be "too exclusive" and would be less likely to be taken by other ethnic/racial groups. These teachers felt

that a Black History class would create segregation and would be unnecessary since no one really feels left out:

> It could be too exclusive. And then, you would have to ask how many other ethnic or racial groups are going to take the course. And... are we building in, then, segregation within our school system?... But I have never seen, in my classes, any student of any particular racial or ethnic origin reacting as if they have been excluded or don't have a role. And I'd like to think that we provide opportunities for everyone to succeed. No one is put out on a limb and cut off because of who they are, their name or what have you. (File T07: Lines 247-254, 264-272)

The argument put forward by other teachers to counter this view was that the issue was one of integrating as opposed to segregating, since minority interests are already peripheral to the mainstream discourse.

The inclusion of Black History was regarded by some as the result of special interest groups getting tax dollars in order to receive special treatment. Others perceived that impediments to the integration of Black History include the lack of materials, an inability to find junctures where it would fit the curriculum easily, and a lack of African or African-Canadian accomplishments in certain areas. Some teachers recognized the ministry directives that curriculum is to reflect the population of the classrooms, yet without means to assess whether this mandate is being applied, they felt that there could be no accountability. Others noted that Black students have a difficult time with their identity due to a lack of knowledge of their history:

> I think it's difficult for them to even express themselves, because they themselves don't even know where they are coming from and anything about their history. The whole issue of identity and how that isn't reflected in their education, that is something I think the school system needs to deal with because the students themselves are not, do not feel a part of the school system. And, if they don't see themselves reflected in books or in the curriculum, they cannot express themselves. They don't know how to express themselves according to the images that they see on television. Whether it is through a magazine, that is the image that they perpetuate, and it is not an image that is created by themselves, but it's an image that is created by the media. (File T02: Lines 836-857)

These teachers state that currently Black students don't see themselves reflected in the curriculum. One teacher noted that Black History Month is only one month and that there is a need for inclusion year round. These individuals tend to see inclusion as a challenge, and a task to be taken up:

> If it's one month, you sort of say, "Now that we've done it this month, we can forget about it for another year," and I don't think that makes any sense. We have to seek a lot of ways to be far more inclusive in terms of students' backgrounds. It's quite a challenge here, given the range of backgrounds that they do have. (File T17: Lines 677-680, 699-708)

This quote brings up the important issue of how confining Black History into one month can become a form of cultural and political containment, and diffuse the impetus toward a truly integrated education. Black History Month, then, can become an excuse to dismiss broader issues of cultural inclusion and equity -- while it brings Afrocentric knowledge one step closer to the mainstream curriculum, at the same time it keeps it one step away.

Black Parents/Community Workers:

Many parents saw a need for changes to the curriculum. The incorporation of Black History and Black heritage into daily lessons was a suggestion. Others simply wished the curriculum to be more inclusive of all students' lived experiences:

> They can expand the curriculum so that it's relevant to Black children... [T]hey need to include things that have daily meanings for Black students, that things that they experience as they grow up are discussed in the classroom, that things that they experience at home with their families are discussed in the classroom. And I think I can go on to say that that's true for kids coming from not only a Black home but also a gay home or a lesbian home. (File P07: Lines 317-328)

This parent sees clearly the need to validate the various experiences which different students bring with them to the classroom. The issue of children from a gay or lesbian home highlights the struggle against homophobia within the school system, particularly in making definitions of family and family life inclusive for all students.

One woman, who works in the community and who has experienced the Canadian school system herself, talks about the detrimental effect that not learning about her history and the contribution of Blacks has had on her and continues to have on other young people:

> For example... I did Greek philosophy and Greek history. Now I, as an African person, if I had not done my own research, read on my own time, I would not have known that a lot of people who they were saying attributed the great works of civilization to Greece and Rome... were African scholars... Africans... being portrayed as being born as... Greeks or Romans. So, you see, when

> an African person goes to school, he does not see himself in the picture. He does not see his people contributing anything to the advancement of civilization and therefore he doesn't feel as if he has a place there. (File CW5: Lines 475-495)

Another mother speaks of how, in her opinion, the curriculum is outdated and does not take into consideration the changing characteristics of the student population:

> I think a lot of people who are responsible for the education for our children are locked in this time warp where they feel [that if] these kids are not learning, it's their [own] fault -- it has nothing to do with me. They can't see the irrelevance of what they teach or the inappropriateness or how alienating it is. That's how I think the system was designed, probably sometime in the sixties... not reflect[ing] the reality of what we have in our schools now. (File CW04: Lines 294-307)

The school system is therefore viewed as an anachronism, incongruous with the current social and cultural conditions, and therefore in need of transformation.

13.2.6 Experiences of Black Students in the School Environment

Positive Experiences of Black Students

The most prevalent school experiences which students mentioned as positive had to do with achievement. One male student talked about how his achievements in sports gave him a position in the school which he could not gain through the classroom :

> I was the only Black guy in the classroom and didn't get heard most of the time, [my] ideas didn't get heard. But... in sports, and I excelled in that, even if they didn't want to hear me they'll hear me anyway 'cause I was usually at the top, right, so they had no choice but to hear me that time. (File A07: Lines 672-685)

For this student, sports activities were the only situations within the school context where he was able to be heard, yet this does not necessarily compensate for the invisibility he experienced within the classroom. The issue of invisibility has been strongly correlated to race in the student narratives. This quote illustrated the student's need to gain social empowerment in areas where he excelled in order to be accorded a voice, something he felt as a Black student he was otherwise being denied. Therefore, even though this was related as a positive experience, it still contains very negative undertones.

One student relates the experience of feeling empowered by confronting the discriminatory practices of a teacher:

> ... the class was very integrated... It wasn't such an important class... sewing or whatever, so we used to talk a lot and the teacher used to get angry and then she started to segregate us. She started to put all the Blacks at one table and all the Whites at one table. And I asked her,"Why do you do that? Don't you think that you're causing... some sort of rut in the class?" And whenever our table talked, she used to get angry and [whenever] that table talked she never used to say anything... I got angry at her, but in a civilized way, and I told her, "You should change this because it doesn't make you look good. If you're not prejudiced then don't make us think that you are." And then she integrated us again. (File A03: Lines 1287-1350)

Having a sense of agency about what happens within the classroom and feeling as though she was a part of what eventually unfolded in the class was clearly empowering for this student, particularly in terms of addressing what she saw as divisive practices on the part of the teacher.

Other students related the importance of having relationships with other Black students and found these social experiences to be among the most pleasurable:

> The most pleasant experience at school was one lunch time... [I]n the basement, there's one part where these White students hang out, there's the other part where nobody, like it's pure dead. So, one day at school everyone was at the patty shop and we went downstairs in the basement, someone brought out some music and everyone's dancing and having fun and everything. (File O30: Lines 983-993)

This quote also illustrates how social segregation based on race has a great deal to do with common cultural interests, and therefore should not necessarily be seen as a divisive element within the school culture. As such, students must be allowed to express their interests and identities without being labelled as separatists.

For other students, extracurricular activities, particularly sports, represented another positive aspect of school life which kept them motivated to attend and simply made the process more pleasurable. Certain classes also made the school experience more enjoyable, as the following response demonstrates:

> I really like my English class 'cause the teacher gives something back to the class. She's very open. She's White and says, "You

> know, White people have done some really bad things." I've never found a teacher who's ever said that before, that Europeans have devastated the world. But she'll come back and say, "There's good and bad in everybody, and I acknowledge the fact that this happens to Black people or to people who are non-Whites" or whatever, and she makes a class fun. And she treats you like an adult. She treats you not like you're 13 years old. (File O03: Lines 1187-1204)

Again, the student's positive evaluation of the class was contingent upon the attitude and pedagogical practices of the teacher. Teachers then, as the narratives have shown, are an important factor with regard to student satisfaction and achievement. With this case in particular, it was the willingness of the teacher to openly and critically discuss issues of race, which inspired the interest and enthusiasm of the students.

Negative Experiences of Black Students

Many of the students' most negative experiences with school had to do with differential and unjust treatment at school -- related strongly to issue of race/Blackness within the teacher/ student relationship. As well, unpleasant experiences had to do with peer experiences, whether in their own group, or outside their group (i.e. with White students). It is at this juncture that people speak of being harassed by other students, getting into seemingly unsolvable conflicts, and, at times, having conflicts treated in unjust ways by teachers or administrators:

> ... Grade... Eleven or Twelve... everything was [going] along fine, I was doing well and... [the teachers and principal] thought that I was like a leader, a peer leader for them... Then... one day, and I hear the teacher talking about "All the niggers, they always cause trouble. These damn niggers, they're so many of them now. What are we going to do?" Hearing that, and then hearing them when they talk to me when I'm either at a wrestling match or something like that, it's totally different. It's like a big shock. And if [I go] to them and say, "Well, I heard this. What's going to be done?" And nothing gets done, that was a pretty big letdown for me. (File A07: Lines 694-714)

Being confronted by racial epithets by those who are in positions of authority within schools is a particularly disillusioning factor for students, yet having such indignities go unresolved is even more problematic. Consistently, the narratives of Black students and dropouts have shown that racism exists unchecked within schools, and even when incidents are brought to the attention of school authorities, just and decisive measures to address the problem are lacking. This may be particularly true when teachers or other school agents are the perpetrators.

For some students, in fact, school was their initiation into the experience of racism:

> I just remember being called jungle bunny very often and... the whole three years was an unpleasant experience for me....it made me understand that this thing called racism really exists. (File R07: Lines 1094-1104)

Other students spoke of the inter-racial schisms which exist among the student body, particularly in the following case, the seemingly mutual suspicion and distrust which exist among Black and White students:

> My most unpleasant time at school was when me and one of my friends were walking down a hall and there was all these White boys and White girls and they start talking their language and laughing... you get that sense from them that they're talking about you... [T]hat's why, there's a lot of splits, because in our school, a lot of White students, they don't care... I guess they're picking up from their parents or something. They're not trying to make things easier for one another, they're just making it worse. (File O30: Lines 994-1012)

Tensions with non-Black students and having to be on the defensive were also mentioned as unfair:

> ... everybody's like jumping down your neck... maybe they can't relate. Maybe other students... don't understand because they're not Black students. So... they're, like, "Well, that doesn't happen to us so I don't know what you're talking about." (File W11: Lines 1190-1208)

Again this refers to the need for inter-racial, and inter-cultural channels of communication to help bridge the gaps in understanding between the various groups in our multi-ethnic schools.

These sorts of negative attitudes can therefore translate into an environment which is counterproductive to social and educational goals. The sense that the various existing interests within schools seem polarized is evident in the following scenario:

> When we were starting the club, it was really horrible... [At one meeting], we were just talking about a police shooting. The next day the school just "exploded". We got called into the office and they're saying, "You cannot have this in our school. If you want to have a Black club, you're going to have to rent the room after five o'clock and you have to have it somewhere else because you

> wouldn't like it if we had a White racist club." We just had to go through a lot of red tape to have this club. I was going to give up. That was the worst experience. (File R06: Lines 1769-1786)

Where the interests of Black students are absent from the school's agenda, their desire to pursue these issues collectively is also hindered by the school administration. This sends a powerful message to Black students that their interests are devalued and have no place within the system. There is also concern with regard to the lack of Black teachers and administrators. This sends a message to students that there are glass ceilings on the ladder of social mobility for Blacks in society and thus limits their aspirations for the future:

> Our administration is all White... it goes back to the dropouts' point of view for reasons for dropping out, if you look at that and... you can see that the people in power are all White and... you might start thinking that there's no place for a Black person there. You aren't seeing any role models... You might say, "Blacks can't do that; Blacks can't make it that far, so why am I bothering because with this school system I'm not gonna make it anywhere." (File O04: Lines 558-605)

Overall, the issues raised by students which related to negative experiences within school included; teachers' ability to deal with race, lack of Black teachers, power, inter-racial conflict and lack of role models. Clearly, the centrality of race within the lives of Black students and the ability or willingness of teachers to address these issues within their pedagogical practices counts a great deal toward student satisfaction. Their dissatisfaction lies in the Eurocentricity of educational institutions which exclude the needs and interests of Black and other minority group students.

13.3 IDENTITY AND REPRESENTATION

13.3.1 The Politics of Identity

Black Students:

Most Black students found it difficult to discuss how they express their personal and cultural identities in school. This may have been partly due to their general inability to fully comprehend the term "identity". This in itself suggests that the students are neither learning about self and cultural development in the classroom nor consciously exploring it through other school activities. Occasionally, students mentioned a class where they were permitted to discuss identity issues. This, however, occurred infrequently.

> You don't have much opportunity to, unless it's in the clothes you wear and things... [and] the organization for Black students... but,

> if you didn't have that, like, take away that, there's nothing... you can't really express yourself. (File O1: Lines 1508-1523)

Students clearly felt that there were few structures at school which allowed them to explore their culture. This, in turn, tended to hinder the development of their creativity, esteem etc.. Moreover, when they do have access to creative outlets, they are sometimes made to feel guilty, a sense of wrong-doing:

> ... when we were working on Black History Month, we got into so much problems... with the teachers and everybody else. And then, at the end of the year, all my teachers were saying, "Oh, you got too caught up in Black History Month"... It's like all my marks went down because of Black History Month. So, my answer was, "Well, if you had Black History in the curriculum, then I wouldn't have to forget about what I'm doing and focus on Black History Month." (File R6: Lines 1967-1981)

This quote also critiques the placement of Black History as simply an addendum to the regular curriculum, and argues instead for a more integrated approach to incorporating Afrocentric knowledge and history into mainstream discourses. Attempting to contain Black History in this way ghettoizes African-centred knowledge, which, far from the goal of inclusion, confines it to the margins of mainstream culture and discourse. Furthermore, as this student argues, this limits the access students have to Afrocentric knowledge and forces them to compromise other courses in order to contend with the limited constraints placed on Black History.

Other students expressed how their identity was stifled by the school system which demands conformity. Of most concern was that, not only does the school fail to support students' personal growth, but it actually serves to silence them:

> You couldn't express it...because you have to assimilate and you have to be like everyone else. So, you had to be like they be. If you didn't, then you're a trouble-maker or you're the strange kid that's got this, you know, psychological problem. But even nowadays when you say it's more expressed, even still, you're looked upon as a trouble-maker because you want to learn your identity and something other than [in a] class[room] where you feel... wrong; you don't feel it. And, you bring it up and... you're a trouble-maker now because you're going against the school. So even though they say you can express yourself... it's not the same still. To me, it's all a big puff of smoke. (File A08: Lines 761-782)

It is clear that the lack of tolerance for cultural differences within schools is mired within notions of deviance. Students who do not conform to the standardized norms and conventions of the status quo are labelled as "trouble-makers," a stereotype which is particularly difficult to negate once it is attached to race.

The unwillingness to conform to the normative standards, codes or conventions of the status quo culture within schools, or society at large, can be seen therefore as an act of resistance. This is not, however, simply teenage rebellion, it is a response to the oppressive conditions which constrain cultural identity and sense of self.

For many students, dropping out actually becomes an act of empowerment in order to maintain their self-esteem which was otherwise compromised within mainstream schools. This form of resistance to assimilation and the need to preserve one's racial or ethnic identity is in keeping with the Deviance Theory (LeCompte and Dworkin 1991) where the cultural non-conformity of those who look and act differently from the mainstream is viewed as anti-social and deviant behaviour. Consequently, these students in turn begin to internalize these institutional labels and redefine themselves in terms of this perceived oppositional behaviour.

Muslim students found it easier to formulate an identity through their religion. When describing themselves, they talked about their food, clothing and daily rituals (eg. praying), all strongly linking their everyday experiences and self-development to their faith. However, even though they at least have the support of a strong religious infrastructure, they too experience a lack of support for their own personal growth within the school. They explained that their religion is not always recognized and validated in schools, either on an ideological level (eg. the acceptance of their faith as legitimate) or on a structural level (e.g. spaces available for praying).

Although students could not expressly give many details of their own personal identity, they were able to see several commonalities between themselves and their Black peers. Thus, while individual students may be feeling psychologically "lost", together they have a strong sense of group identity. Indeed, when asked if they felt they had anything in common with other Black students, 88% of them responded "yes", with little variation according to gender or place of birth. They spoke of shared interests in music, clothing, sports and community leaders. Black Heritage clubs were also mentioned as an arena in which common bonds were fostered. As well, some students talked about their conscious choice to hang out with other Black students, regardless of whether or not they were friends, because "We're Black", "We all understand each other" and "We have the same experiences". Blackness is seen as an experience which is felt and understood, and which unites individuals. There is consequently a sense of "us" and "them". Some students admitted that they deliberately avoid having White friends on the grounds that these students would not be able to understand their experiences or give them support:

> I hang out with mainly... Black students and stuff. I don't really associate myself with any of the White students because... I don't feel so loose with them and comfortable. I have to act, like, not

> myself. I have to be, like, you know, downplayed. (File O30: Lines 335-342)

> ... sometimes when you go into the classroom, you look around and see if there's any Black students and... sit down beside them... There's just a need to, I guess, stick to each other and notice each other... looking for another strength. (File R6: Lines 1605-1627)

Not only did students feel that there is strength in numbers, but they also felt that they can be themselves and be "recognized" in a positive light among their Black peers. It is a feeling of comfort and support that they do not get elsewhere in the school. Some students gave the impression that this sense of validation made school a more bearable experience and literally helped them get through the day. This aspect of "surviving the system" pervades their school experiences. Indeed, Black students share strategies of coping with each other which can be instrumental to their school success:

> ...we were going to write an exam...I think it was a parenting or sociology exam. All the Black students were at one place studying together, even though we didn't really know each other that much. And some of them were saying "Oh no, I don't know if I'm going to pass." And then some of the Black students said, "Just think White. Think of the way White people raise their kids and you'll pass the exam because that's what's going to be on the exam." And we felt a closeness because we know that we're raised differently. (File R6: Lines 2312-2329)

This puts into perspective not only the disjunctures between family socialization patterns among Blacks and Whites, but more strikingly it highlights Black students' awareness of the normative value of Whiteness and the power that it holds within the curriculum, hence the need to "think White" in order to succeed. Being able to fully express themselves in terms of their identity prevented some students from hanging around White students. As one student in a focus group discussion states:

> ... I want to be myself and show everybody who I am, but you can't, you can't be yourself too much, you have to hide some of your Blackness when you're around White people, because then you become like an alien to them. (O10: Lines 691-704)

This student makes the claim that being around White people prevents Black students from being themselves out of a fear of alienation.

There is concern among some students, however, that feelings of commonality and racial group affinity may dissipate as students grow older. One student believed that Black people do not

continue to work against racism once they have achieved some level of success and have fully assimilated into White culture. This denotes the pervasive sense among some students of how cultural assimilation causes individuals to detach emotionally and psychologically from their group in order to garner acceptance and legitimacy in White society. This is often perceived as a form of "selling out":

> ... one thing we do talk about a lot is [Black] people who... when they're forty, they've got a good wage and they're in a powerful position somewhere... They're just the same as their White partners in terms of doing things we've got for the people. (File O2: Lines 858-876)

The fact that students feel that a Black person must give up their personal and group identity in order to be successful reflects their situation in the school system. Black students are often very aware of how the differential distribution of rewards in society occurs along racial lines, thus they relate similar disparities in their school experiences as part of the same systemic oppression. Assimilation, then, can often be seen as an attempt to gain parity by conforming to the codes and conventions of the dominant society, often at the expense of their own cultural integrity.

There were other ways in which some students felt that they did not share anything in common with other Black youth. This is significant in that it ruptures the monolithic notions of Black culture and experience. Religion, clothing, dance and values were all cited as sources of difference between groups of Black students. Language was a particularly significant element of division. For instance, Blacks from the Caribbean often have a patois accent which tends to create a barrier between themselves and Canadian-born Blacks and Caribbean-born Blacks who speak without an accent. Similarly, some Canadian-born students felt that because they did not speak in a "Black dialect", they are prevented from really fitting in. African-born students and Black students from other countries, who were in ESL classes, felt more comfortable with their own language group than they did with the larger Black group. These observed differences may be exacerbated by the differential treatment that the students encounter within the school system itself. For example, those students who speak English but who have an accent are sometimes put into ESL classes. In a sense, they are perceived as inferior by the system which then projects this image to other students.

Intra-group differences among Black students were most explicitly expressed by students born in Africa and the Caribbean. In a female student focus group discussion, the reality of how these differences are addressed by students themselves is elaborated:

> F1: I didn't know you guys, see, I was new to the place, to Canada and all, and it was my first day... [you were saying] "But I am not African!" -- you were resisting.
> F2: We're just glad you came.

> F1: Oh my god, [I thought], I'm not going to talk to these people, you know? Because I never actually seen, you know, this was my first time interacting with Jamaican people. I always spoke to African girls and my sister and African people. I never wanted to talk to you guys because I heard her say that, as if they hate us, you know? They hate us, that's it, you know?
> F2: I must say, at that time I did.
> F1: And I was so shocked, I don't forget it. It was one year and a half now, and I never forget.
> F2: Because I was, I'll tell you where I was at that moment. I didn't want to be associated with Black people, with anything that has to do with Africa, because well, like I said before, what I hear was all negative things, and I think that they were all this, right, and I didn't want to be associated with,
> F1: Girl, you couldn't fight that because you didn't even know.
> F2: Exactly, because I don't know anything.
> F1: I understand.
> F2: But I started learning a little and little about myself, and I found out that, hey, that was all wrong. A lot of people, and I've made that comment to a lot of people, a lot of people now are frightened to see that I am the same person who used to talk like that, because I've grown so much. I've learned so much...
> F3: There's been this huge evolution for all of us. I mean, we've all gone past a lot of things, together, and that's where, way back to the beginning, I mean, that's the importance of this group. I mean, we're all doing this all together. (File D05: Lines 1440-1504)

The African student who opens the discussion talks about the resistance of the second student -- resisting her African heritage and identity. The discussion progresses as the students exchange very honestly their misconceptions and educational and political development. The second student admits to having accepted stereotypical understandings of African culture and people. The first student supports her by pointing out that she didn't have the tools "to fight", that is, she did not have the knowledge. The group had developed a relationship over time and learned about each other, differences and commonalities, to the point where they were then, able to talk honestly and continue to learn. This discussion provides an exemplary sample of the type of process that needs to occur for all students if they are to discover and realize the misconceptions they carry and the knowledge which will provide them with understanding and help them to build connections across differences.

School activities (e.g. yearbook committee, student council, various sports) were perceived by students as being dominated by certain races and/or nationalities, a factor which alienated other students and deterred their participation. For example, one student mentioned that although she

wanted to play soccer, she did not join the team because she would have felt uncomfortable being the only Canadian-born Black in a team of Caribbean-born Blacks. This ghettoization of extracurricular activities can become a "Catch 22" situation, supported by the teaching staff and then maintained by the students themselves. For instance, if teachers encourage White students to be on the student council and Black students to be on the soccer team, eventually students will only be comfortable trying out for those activities. The result in this case would be that the Whites are found in the decision-making positions in the school while the Blacks are relegated to the realm of sports.

Not being "Black enough" was a problem encountered by students in the higher academic levels. They felt that they are labelled as nerds and are penalized by other Black students because they do not fit into the Black youth stereotype of hanging out in the halls and of having poor study habits. During a focus group meeting one student voices her disdain for those very students who "act White":

> F4: Sometimes, it don't matter how White you look sometimes you have a little bit of Black in you. You are Black, so you're Black. They act Black, they talk Black, but acting like they're White... I hate those people.
> *What's acting like White?*
> F4: They just act like White people, you know, like they're White. You know, they walk with, they only have White friends, you know, they listen to White people music, they don't know nothing about Black people music, they talk about that nonsense ... and all like this, you know. The just act White. (File D04: Lines 1211-1235)

These barriers of difference can lead to a lack of solidarity between Black youth and consequently can weaken the power of the consolidated group of Black students. This can also leave some Black students "out in the cold"--neither Black enough nor White enough--they are left with no cultural group in the school to which they can turn for moral support. This issue of Black identity also finds expression in the construction of difference along lines of "shade" among Black students:

> F4: Another thing too ... you're a Black person calling them, "Oh, he's too Black,"...
> F2: Yeah, I know. Shadism, thank you.
> F4: ... "He's too Black."
> M1: Oh yeah, too Black...
> *Are you always talking about skin colour, or is anything else?*
> M1: Skin colour. Skin colour.
> F3: Well, yeah.
> F2: And it could be the way that you act too.

> F4: Or, something like, if you turned out the light, you'd never find that person, the way how he's Black. All that stuff.
> F2: Shadism.
> M1: You know what? Sometimes they're just joking when they say that, it's just a joke.
> F2: But the thing is, it shouldn't be a joke.
> F3: It shouldn't be a joke... The thing is, Black people have to learn to respect each other, you know.
> F2: Exactly.
> M1: Stick together. (File D04: Lines 1112-1149)

This example of intra-group racism highlights the divisive effect difference can have and the importance which students attribute to respect and unity in resolving these divisions and racisms.

Dropouts:

If outlets of self-expression are lacking for Black students today, they were probably almost non-existent in the school days of the dropouts we interviewed. The absence of this support no doubt contributed to their disengagement process. Moreover, it perhaps explains why dropouts tended not to discuss identity development in terms of the conventional ways (eg. clothing, art etc.). Instead, they described "contrary behaviours" such as skipping out, arguing with teachers, and even dropping out itself as their response to being Black in an all-White system. They added that, contrary to popular belief, it was on these occasions that they most tapped into their reserves of self-confidence and self-esteem. It was a resistance to a system that was eating away at the core of their identity, as one adult dropout explained:

> ... the system destroys their inner strength and character... I have always maintained that we Africans have self-esteem... We always had a positive image of ourselves and that's why the school system has tried over the years to deny us our self-worth. I know who I am. I know where my roots are... School didn't teach me that... This... is a big issue with some people when they say the kids lack self-esteem or what-have-you. It may be true for a few but we have to ask, "Why?" It is the school that makes them lack that self-esteem. So the school should see the problem as its own doing, not the kids... (File F19: Lines 115-133)

> Those who go astray are pushed aside and made to feel as if it is their fault or some personal weaknesses in character... that is why they can't behave like everyone else. There is no serious effort to find out why some of us behave contrary to what is expected of us... This failure gives me the impression that not many people care... My philosophy of life is... don't hang around in places and

> among people who are only interested in remaking you... (File F19: Lines 170-184)

These views express the language of marginalized resistance from students no longer willing to be participants in what they see as their own subjugation. In this case, being liberated from the source of contention means disengaging from a school system which is perceived as hindering personal and cultural growth and self-esteem. Yet it is important that they define this as an act of dissent rather than of personal failure which they acknowledge is the popular conception of dropping out.

These sentiments are echoed by a number of dropouts who felt that it is a struggle to maintain an inner identity in a school system that wants to transform and hence defeat them:

> I think anyone with self-character, anyone who has an inner strength that nothing and no one can defeat, will most likely either be a dropout or, if they attain an education, and they always bear in mind who and what they are and their culture and where they've come from, they will be a deadly weapon as far as society is concerned. (File F12: Lines 462-470)

Dropouts articulated the notion that differential treatment is a major commonality between themselves and other Black students. They added, however, that there are also differences between themselves and these students. A major difference is that dropouts put up more of a fight to retain their Black identity. They would rather drop out than to give in to the system.

> Well, I went to [school name], there was Blacks but they were too... how can I say, cultured. I mean, they were too "runny runny", you know what I mean? I'm just not part of that... They were imitating Whites and having some White person be their head, have them lead on a string... I also went to [school name]... there were more Blacks there. Again... on the one hand they'd be cursing White thing, but the next minute you see them buddy-buddy up with them, taking on their culture, dressing in the clothes they dress in... (File F19: Lines 179-202)

This dropout is critical of the hypocrisy they feel exists among Black students who attempt to follow the dominant culture. Thus, for other students more strongly grounded in their own sense of identity, the need for some Black students to conform impedes racial solidarity and is viewed with some contempt.

For the most part, however, comments on the similarities or differences in inter-group Black identity were either peripheral or absent from dropout narratives. This may be due to such differences being eclipsed by other more pertinent problems. As well, for some dropouts, the

population of Black students in their school was much smaller than for those students presently in the system. The lack of a large peer group likely meant that dropouts had a weaker network of informal support within the school and thus no source to validate their experiences or to help them to develop strategies to survive in the system.

Non-Black Students:

Many non-Black students indicated that they do not feel it necessary to express their cultural identities at school. Conversely, other students felt that it was difficult to express their cultural identities at school. One reason for this was that they feared that any attempts to express themselves would be met with considerable resentment and rage by non-White students.

> Well, because people would say, "You're White. You're nothing because everyone knows about White history and everything 'cause that's what you learn in school." So people just ignore it. (File CG01: Lines 418-424)

This attitude may be due to an unconscious fear of change, a reluctance to give up the security of a system which has favoured them, a denial of the reality of the inequity in schools, and an ignorance which is perpetuated by a system that fails to teach them the true meaning of multiculturalism and the enrichment that it could offer to their formal and informal educational experiences.

Like Black students, most non-Black students had friends who shared similar backgrounds to themselves. They admitted that this made them feel more comfortable because these students understood them. Again, this may be the result of a school system that tends to be "unicultural" and that does not encourage "mixing".

Teachers:

Many teachers found it difficult to describe commonalities and differences of students. This may be due to timidity rather than ignorance -- an attempt to maintain a superficial air of cultural blindness. When discussing differences among students, teachers stuck to "safe" and obvious traits such as language, rather than the more abstract and sensitive issues of culture, race and nationality. Some teachers observed that those students who have difficulty with English or who have a different accent are made to feel inferior and thus have more problems negotiating the school system and tend not to express their ideas in class.

Although there was reluctance to pinpoint racial and ethnic group traits, it was clear that many teachers could indeed identify such differences between groups of students. Most teachers were well aware that student peer groups segregated themselves by race. Some teachers were particularly insightful, remarking how this tendency to congregate in racial groups was a means of self-expression and peer support:

> ... the [Black] girls in particular, they do seem loud! They seem louder than most... to sort of risk stereotyping... if you see the Vietnamese and the Chinese girls [in the cafeteria], they will all be sitting together... and they'll be active, talking and so on, but you won't really hardly hear anything they're saying. And then across the way there'll be the Black girls and you will hear everything they say and... their conversation will be peppered with lots of fucks and all kinds of things, you know, that are really offensive to a lot of people's ears... I have some theories. I don't know whether they're right or not, but I think it's real insecurity... In the classroom, I find them very, very quiet. Like in this room, a class of 30 I guess it is, with five kids Black, I find the Black kids are quieter than some of the others. So, it's only in this social group situation. To me, it's a reaction to an insecurity that they feel in almost every other situation. It's kind of a bravado that they feel they need to put up. (File T18: Lines 582-605, 627-645)

Following this teacher's analysis, Black female students feel intimidated in the classroom where they are less free to express themselves. This may lead to getting lower grades and then labelled as low achievers. The situation is not helped by teachers who believe that academic ability is an inherent trait that can be neither nurtured nor stifled:

> I think a lot has to stem from the individual. If somebody doesn't want to be motivated, you're not going to motivate them. (File T14: Lines 187-190)

Many teachers failed to make the connection between classroom behaviour and the mechanisms in the school which hinder students' personal growth and identity. By focusing on the individual and not seeing broader issues of discrimination and inequity within the system, responsibility is placed squarely on the shoulders of those students who disengage from the school system.

Black Parents/Community Workers:

Some parents regarded language and culture or nationality as sources of both student identity and discrimination. While such characteristics can help to foster a sense of self, as well as create bonds with other students, they can also be used by teachers as the basis for differential treatment:

> Most [students] were actually born here and they have been referred to as immigrants. But they are not. They are Canadians... My kids were born here and they're still referred to as Jamaicans. So the alienation is right there in the school where teachers are not

> seeing them as Canadians and are probably treating them differently... (File P08: Lines 840-853)

Some parents and community workers reflected on their own experiences in school. They talked about how it is difficult to express oneself in an environment which seems so "foreign". In particular, they remember how hard it was to relate to a fundamental element of school culture -- their teachers:

> I could see that young people... who did go further than high school, seemed to have a certain comfort... this is how I saw these White teachers teaching... they told these lovely stories about their children etc. And I knew my reality was very different... my mom gave me the piece that would have been missing otherwise. If my mom had not been there, the self-esteem piece would have been missing. (File CW2: Lines 1251-1266)

Therefore, we can see how cultural incongruence can be destructive to the self-esteem of those outside of the dominant group. When Black students are constantly faced with the knowledge that their reality and experience is not constructed within the dominant framework of cultural convention, they experience feelings of dissonance, which in turn can compromise the development of positive self-image. As this quote also shows, familial support is often necessary to fill the void one has when they do not fit in.

13.3.2 Deep Curriculum

In this section, we will examine the school environment in terms of the "deep curriculum". By deep curriculum we mean, not simply what is or is not present in textbooks and lesson plans, but also the climate and the tone of the official and unofficial curriculum of the classroom, and the general conditions of school life. In other words, the deep curriculum encompasses all formal and informal aspects of the school environment and the intersections of culture, environment and the organizational life of schools.

Black Students:

On the subject of the formal curriculum, students identify junctures where Black History is needed, where they have disagreements with Eurocentric curricula/texts, and where they feel unrepresented. These assertions are rooted in the daily school experiences of these students.

Dropouts:

Dropouts attribute weaknesses in the deep curriculum to an overall "Whiteness" of the school system. To dropouts, this "Whiteness" is, of course, obvious in the formal curriculum. One dropout, who was particularly interested in science, noted that throughout her classroom

experiences she was never taught about any Black scientists. When asked if it would have made a difference if, for example, Einstein had been Black, she responded with the following comment:

> It wouldn't have been in the book if he was. That's the thing, it wouldn't have been in the book if he was... during Black History week on TV [I learned that] the first guy that did a heart transplant was a Black surgeon. (File F08: Lines 811-869)

For this reason, dropouts often seek out other sources (eg. media, community groups, books) outside school that will help them to develop a "personal curriculum" which will have more relevance for them.

While both students and dropouts discussed how they, as Black students, need a formal curriculum which includes them, dropouts furthered their analysis to highlight the reciprocal relationship between curriculum and school culture. Thus, from this more holistic vantage, they were able to see the interconnectedness of curriculum, culture and politics within the educational system and to link their lack of representation in the formal curriculum to their marginalization in the school itself:

> ... the mainstream kids... they may not think of it, but when they look through all those books, they see a representation of themselves. And, somewhere in their little heads is, "Well, I don't see someone who looks like so and so"... the ridicule starts then, you know. (File F03: Lines 568-584)

> So really, the curriculum, it's geared to Europeans -- the way they think, the way they go about their lives. (File F19: Lines 1561-1562)

Lack of representation in the curriculum also relates to the sense of invisibility many Black students and dropouts reported experiencing. This occurs not only through what they have described as an unresponsive school system, but also through not seeing themselves reflected in the formal curriculum. This is described as reinforcing the power and privilege of White society, and contributing in a sense, to the colonization of other knowledges and experiences.

An ability to see the "big picture" gave dropouts particular insight on the schooling process and why it was that they eventually dropped out. For some this was linked to what they saw as the school's attempt to deny their identity and assimilate or reconstruct them according to dominant norms:

> Why did I drop out of school? Personally, I believe, high school especially, it's a processing plant. You walk in there in Grade Nine, and you are about to be processed and in the end you will

> come out a product, for lack of a better word... [T]he atmosphere lacks respect. It lacks principles, morals, values. I think it invades everything about one's character, totally breaks it down to then reconstruct another character. (File F12: Lines 186-200)

Thus, the attempt to deny legitimacy to the Black identity is perceived as an assault to personal and cultural sensibilities, which as the following quote explains often results in students' dropping out:

> I believe when an African stops going to school, it is in part because he has too much self-pride and cannot stomach the system's moves to take that away. The school was successful in the past when some of our brothers and sisters were... ashamed of their history and their roots... I can see a person dropping out for the reason of declining self-esteem. I don't honestly think this is the case today. These kids have too much pride. When they leave school today it is because the system got them in other ways, yes, in other ways, man, but for sure not because of any lack of self-esteem. (File F18: Lines 120-138)

Therefore, rather than associating dropping out with a lack of self-esteem, it is argued that it is precisely the existence of a strong sense of cultural pride and self-esteem among Blacks, which schools seek to contain, that eventually forces students out.

Dropouts cautioned, however, that it will take more than just equal representation in the formal curriculum to correct the situation. Given that the deep curriculum encompasses all aspects of the school environment, they suggested that many changes need to occur. Everything from cafeteria food to teaching practices needs to be examined.

> ... you can't just... drop a few in the pot. You have to dump out the pot, start from scratch and put the proper ingredients that were there in the beginning... (File F19: Lines 1612-1620)

This quote was also used as analogy for the need to restructure the representation of Black History and to simply "tell the truth". That is, to incorporate Black History and experience as an integral part of the curriculum rather than as a token element. This, it was argued, could not be done by adding on to the existing knowledge base. It would require a rethinking of how history and the representation of the "other" is conceived and presented.

Teachers:

Responses to the subject of the deep curriculum and anti-racism education were influenced by the age and social location of the teachers, that is, their race, class and gender. The responses

of teachers, consequently, were most consistent with those with whom they shared the above characteristics.

A number of teachers claimed that anti-racism education is not needed and maintained that the current curriculum is adequate to serve its purpose. Some believed that anti-racism education is too abstract for high-school students. Others felt that this sort of education segregates groups and "teaches kids the wrong stuff," sometimes resulting in students "crying racism" against their White teachers. This seems to be a partial attempt to lay blame on the students rather than attempting a critical examination of teachers' discriminatory behaviour or acknowledging their powerful position in society.

The following anecdote reflects what some teachers felt as "reverse racism", or being discriminated against on the basis of White privilege:

> Like, I walked by a group of kids in the hallway... and one of them was a Black girl that I hadn't seen for a while. I taught her last year... I heard my name mentioned as I went into the washroom and [when] I came back out... [I] went up to her and I said, "Hi. How is one of my favourite kids from last year doing?" And, this other girl, who was also Black, walked away because I had walked up. And I said, "Why is she walking away?" And this girl said, "You don't have to run away... He's a good guy. He's okay." And, I suddenly realized this girl had walked away because she saw me as White power... I have to live with that kind of thing. (File T01: Lines 816-824, 1115-1141)

Some teachers, then, have a lack of understanding of their position relative to Black students. They feel maligned for being White, yet confuse this with racism which refers to a system of advantage based on race. Those whose race accords them advantages in society cannot equate their position with those who are disadvantaged on the same grounds. The reality of "reverse racism" can therefore not exist without fundamental shifts in the distribution not only of rewards and penalties in society, but also power. There would have to be a reverse in the relations of power and in the hierarchy of privilege in order to validate claims of "reverse racism". While the sentiments of these teachers should not be dismissed, they speak more towards the need to create a culture of tolerance and equity within schools which, at the same time, attempts to bridge not only generational, but cultural gaps. These sentiments also speak to the need for anti-racism and critical race education as a requisite part of the educational system.

Understanding this need, a somewhat larger group of teachers maintained that anti-racism education should be implemented. They see it as a tool which can empower all students by encouraging a global perspective in the class and by incorporating student experiences into the school system. In this way, the students can relate to and have a vested interest in their formal education. However, teachers complained that a lack of resources makes it difficult to fulfil this

mandate. Some mentioned strategies such as finding resources in the community or from the students, going for professional development and participating in various projects which move them in the direction of inclusive education:

> I think it incorporates a lot of different things. I think, number one, anti-racism education is geared towards the empowerment of all students through anti-racist teaching and practices and... setting up the classroom in such a way as to incorporate the global perspective... and dealing with things from a variety of perspectives and having students themselves participate in their own learning by understanding students' experiences and having them bring their experiences within the classroom and validating their experiences. (File T02: Lines 683-701)

Yet, as these actions are still voluntary, many teachers remain ill-informed about anti-racism education. Thus, as one teacher stated, "Those who need it, don't go."

13.3.3 Black Heritage/Black History

Dropouts:

Most of the dropouts did not have access to a Black Heritage Club during their schooling days and noted its absence. Some believed that because they did not have access to this type of support group they had more struggles than students have today. This seems to corroborate the participation-identification model (Finn:1989) which holds that the greater one's sense of belonging and participation, the greater the likelihood of remaining in school. Thus, the fact that the dropouts were denied such avenues for culturally-based participation greatly enhanced their sense of alienation, which had substantial impact on their decision to leave school.

Non-Black Students:

Some non-Black students expressed that it was unfair that the school recognized a Black History Month but no other cultural or racial celebration. They felt that if the school was going to sponsor events for Black culture, then they should do so for all cultures. One student suggested that these celebrations indicated that the Black students had more "power" in the school than someone like herself (White Anglo-Saxon). This defensiveness was shared by other students:

> Why didn't we have a European history month? And if we did, I honestly think that the Black kids wouldn't have attended. But, we had to attend [Black History Month activities]. (File CG02: Lines: 894-897)

There was a tendency for non-Black students to view Black History Month as another example of the preferential treatment Black students are receiving. This is typical of the view that social justice is somehow tied to particular interests, and therefore not seen as contributing to the betterment of society as a whole. Yet when understood and implemented correctly, inclusive education, far from being divisive, would help to broaden the scope of what constitutes the "Canadian experience" for all students and allow them to feel connected to the curriculum and to each other.

No student directly mentioned that they considered the current history courses biased or unfair (just boring!), therefore they may miss the whole point of having a Black History Month. Many students said they attended Black History Month activities and enjoyed them. Others said they did not attend because they did not think it would be interesting or useful and, furthermore, felt that these events were for Black students only. No student mentioned having been involved in the organization of or presentation of any Black History Month celebrations. It seems then, that while the school is allowing Black students a forum for expression, it is not doing enough to promote the event and its cause, or to encourage the involvement of the general student population. This suggests that the school may consider the celebration as a token gesture and that it is not seriously committed to the fundamental principle.

Teachers:

A number of teachers felt that Black History Month and African Heritage organizations cause divisiveness in schools and allow Black students to exercise anger at non-Black teachers and students. Such organizations inculcate a separatism that is not healthy for the school itself. These teachers did not feel that positive messages about African heritage or the grouping together on the basis of race are at all helpful or conducive to student well-being in general.

Black Parents/Community Workers:

Parents wanted more Black History taught in the classrooms. They appreciated the creation of Black History Month, but felt that this information needs to be provided on a more regular basis within the curriculum. They felt that, in the current mode, Black History serves only as a palliative rather than constituting meaningful change:

> Black History Month, to me, is better than nothing, but it's sort of like Caribana: you have one month and you tell students... a few things and the kids remember a few great guys and then it's forgotten. To me, that's not really incorporating Black History in the school. It's seen as a festive occasion. How seriously it's taken and how much respect it's getting, I really don't know. I'm not saying don't have Black History Month. It's nice that they would give us a whole month, you know. It's almost as if, well, you're

> important for this month... It's good to have, but long term, you know, I'm still concerned. (File P08: Lines 1564-1584)

Another parent continued the argument for a more globally-oriented curriculum, but restated the important fact that Blacks must also be constituents of that world:

> I think it's necessary to have that sort of world vision, but definitely you have to be in that world....(File CW1: Lines 819-822)

Fears of exclusion even within a globalized discourse stem from the fact that "world vision" must necessarily be presented from a vantage other than Eurocentrism, in order for the legitimate representation of non-White cultures to occur. It is therefore necessary to include knowledge from outside of the dominant historical paradigms rather than to continue to colonize the knowledge and experience of those represented as social and cultural "others".

13.3.4 Black Teachers and Counsellors

Black Students:

When asked if it would make a difference if their teachers were Black, there were differences in the responses of males and females and those of Black students born in Canada and Black students born abroad. Overall, 66% of female students stated that it would make a difference to them, as opposed to 54% of male students. Of students born in Canada, 59% stated that Black teachers would make a difference. This represented 68% of the female respondents and 48% of the male respondents. Of students born outside Canada, 63% thought that it would make a difference. This represented 64% of the female students and 63% of the male students.

Black teachers could provide students with positive role models who could give them advice, hope, encouragement and a sense of the wide range of opportunities that exist for them. As role models, Black teachers would enable Black students to believe that their success could be emulated:

> ... they could actually give the Black kids... you know, "Look. I made it. I know it's hard because you're Black. You know, when I was younger, it was even harder because there were more struggles. So stick with it." You know, just give them a bit of encouragement. (File O28: Lines 774-780)

> ...we're young, right, and for ones, like the older ones, then would like to see the younger brothers want to make it in life, not like leaving school and end up on the road or in jail or something like that. (File B16: Lines 284-291)

They would also provide a social perspective more cognizant with that of Black students; one that emanates from similar experiences and struggles:

> ...if I saw a Black teacher in a classroom, I'd be proud. It's, like, it's someone that I can look up to, you know. I could identify with this person. This person knows what I have been through or he's... already paved the road for me and if he can do it then I can do it. (File W35: Lines 688-698)

There is also the sense of being able to connect with a teacher who has firsthand knowledge of the Black community and therefore does not have to base their understanding on second-hand (and often biased) information:

> Well, I know that they'd, you know, be there to help me and I will feel... more comfortable. If I want to talk about something about Black, you know, that they will carry on the conversation... [not like] the teachers who just go [by] what they read from the book and from the TV and everything... (File W10: Lines 1123-1133)

Thus, Black teachers are people to whom the students can relate (and vice versa). The students know that these teachers have likely encountered the same societal barriers and survived, which the students can respect. Some students also mentioned that a Black teacher may even make them feel that they are a part of the school. This feeling of connectedness, a commonality of experience, is directly linked to the students' sense of ease in the system. Their level of comfort can be stimulated by this representation, with students finally "seeing themselves" reflected in the school system:

> ...it was just like a sea of White faces. I was, like, "Wow!", you don't really feel comfortable you know, but [with]... a couple of Black faces in there, you feel closer to the staff kind of. (File O22: Lines 520-525)

Students also suggested that they respond better to the teaching style of the Black teachers than to that of the White teachers. This relates to the fact that there are cultural differences in learning and cognitive style which respond more effectively to pedagogical practices other than those which exist within mainstream education. Black students are aware of these differences and feel that a Black teacher may be better able to provide learning strategies more consonant with their learning styles and they ways they were taught at home. Often Black teachers are referred to in familial terms, which reveals the affinity that Black students feel toward them:

> I feel like I've got to act a certain way. There's a standard act I've got to live up to... [We've had] Jamaican supply teachers, and I feel like I've got to be "proper" because it's like my mom there, so

> I've got to be proper and behave myself. I wouldn't think of acting any other way. (File O6: Lines 459-468)

In terms of the classroom structure, Black students felt that White teachers let certain things "go by" and thus tend to discipline less than Black teachers. As an example of culturally different communicative styles, some students noted that while White teachers "suggest" things, Black teachers are more explicitly "demanding". Students seemed to appreciate and respect this forwardness:

> ... Black teachers, I find that they're a bit more strict. You can't really get away with some stuff that you did before. (File R2: Lines 699-702)

> ... they're more, like, they're strict, and then they can be fun. But... White teachers, they're just easy... they don't, they don't reach me like the Black one's will reach you... (File B12: Lines 289-295)

When students talked of their encounters with Black teachers, each illustrated it with a positive and memorable experience. Indeed, the general absence of Black teachers in the school system elicits a certain amount of anger and sadness among the students. They felt that having a Black teacher would help mitigate the feelings of alienation they felt within predominantly White schools:

> ... all my courses, it's all White teachers. It's just, it would make a little difference if there's a Black teacher, even one of them through my day. Just one would make me feel more comfortable. (File O29: Lines 583-588)

> When we moved around this neighbourhood, it was our first time going to a school with all White students and we were so outcast. It wasn't funny. And I'm telling you, looking back now, if I had a Black teacher who I could just go to and just sit down and even talk... that... would have made a difference. (File R6: Lines 1271-1286)

Other students stressed the need for minority teachers in general and for a wide variety of teaching staff. In their opinion, minority teachers of any group might be more likely to relate to their experiences than would White teachers.

Of the students who said that having Black teachers would make no difference to them, many qualified this statement by saying that race doesn't matter as long as the teacher is not racist. Others stressed that teaching ability is the most important factor:

> ... if they want to help you, if they care about you, they want you to get a nice grade in the class, stuff like that. If they're prejudiced or whatever, I just switch to a different classroom. But, it doesn't matter if he's Black or White or Chinese or whatever, I don't care. (File W29: Lines 488-503)

Interestingly, while some students expressed a desire to have Black teachers, they did not necessarily care equally for Black counsellors. Only 41% of students believed that having Black counsellors would make a difference. There was no significant difference between male and female responses; however, there was one between those students born in Canada and those born abroad. Of the former, 45% believed that Black counsellors mattered compared with 37% for the latter. The majority of students may not see Black counsellors as important as Black teachers because of their lack of contact with the counsellors.

Those students who did see Black counsellors as important, believed that they are more likely to understand Black students' personal experiences than are White counsellors. The students felt that it would especially matter when problems involved racism or family relations:

> I can relate to the Black counsellor more and maybe I can talk to her about things that I can't talk to my White counsellor about. Maybe because, what if I have a personal problem that I don't want the White counsellor to know about?... but, like, maybe I'll feel better that the Black counsellor knows... she can relate to you... like you're on an even basis... (File W11: Lines 553-567)

> ...[when] there's a problem where there's, you know, something culturally based that they'd be able to understand more than someone who was White. I don't want to have to go into an office and first of all explain my culture to someone and then explain my problem. I want to be able to go in there and say, "This is the problem. Can you help me with it?" (File O4: Lines 1145-1161)

Therefore, Black counsellors are seen by students as being able to provide an environment free from prejudgments and preconceptions of Blacks, a fact which often prevented them from seeking support from White guidance counsellors.

Dropouts:

Even more so than the students, dropouts said that they could better relate to Black teachers than to non-Black ones. While some Black students felt that the race of a teacher does not matter, the dropouts had no such response. A major reason for their overwhelming support is that they felt that Black teachers are not only more understanding, but also more demanding and "strict" with Black students. This is important to the dropouts because it shows that someone is watching

out for them, that someone cares. Being strict, however, is distinguished by dropouts from those teachers who assert their power and authority for the sake of dominance. Again, Black teachers are spoken of in familial terms:

> If there was a lot of Black teachers now like my mother, like, I know nobody would be messing around. They wouldn't be joking around... (File F05: Lines 1511-1529)

Unlike the Black students, dropouts saw Black counsellors as important as Black teachers. This is likely due to dropouts having spent many more hours in counsellors' offices (and, in particular, White counsellors' offices).

Of most importance to dropouts is the fact that the chances of a disengaging student being effectively helped are greatly increased when a counsellor has a comprehensive grasp of the situation. In their opinion, Black counsellors would have a deeper cultural understanding of the realities that Black students face:

> ...if you have a counsellor come from your own country, religion and everything, it's good, because... like, if it's a White counsellor and a Black kid, the White counsellor is going to try to put himself in the kid's place, but it's impossible, he's not Black. (File F05: Lines 1695-1703)

The feeling that White counsellors would not be able to empathize with the reality of Black students was common to both students and dropouts. The lack of Black counsellors was also said to be a deterrent for Black students voluntarily taking advantage of guidance counselling services.

Non-Black Students:

Several non-Black students felt that a teacher's or a counsellor's race did not make a difference to them. In their view, personality and teaching or administrative ability are more important. These same students did not feel that it would matter to Black students either if there were not many Black staff members in their schools. Others thought that it would be a good idea to have teachers and counsellors from different racial backgrounds. They added that for them it did not really matter, but for Black students and for students of other races it probably did.

Some students had not even noticed the absence of Black school personnel. Although when questioned about the issue they were not opposed to the idea; in general they were blind to the bias in schools. They accepted White staff as the norm and did not critically analyze this practice. Their failure to challenge this situation could partly be due to the lack of educational tools to do so. It also relates to the social and cultural vantage which non-Black students occupy. It is difficult to empathize with the reality of Black students when they themselves have not had to deal with systemic discrimination and differential treatment on the basis of race.

Teachers:

Several teachers were unsure of the benefits of an increase in Black staff. Their uncertainty seemed to stem partly from a lack of critical analysis of the make-up of school personnel and a lack of clarity on the process and objectives of affirmative action. A number of teachers felt that equal opportunities are already being given to minorities, so what was there to discuss? Others indicated that while more minority teachers do need to be hired, they were concerned that racial background would overshadow actual teaching qualifications:

> ...people should be judged strictly on the basis of their ability... [I]f you want to have a very good article on that I suggest you read the article... "Affirmative Action: A Worldwide Disaster"... As a matter of fact it's written by a Black...[I]n that article he makes the point that affirmative action programs do not help those who need it. They help the most privileged members of those groups. So it helps most privileged Blacks, most privileged yellows, most privileged reds. The people who need it don't get it. (File T12: Lines 606-631)

While this quote suggests that affirmative action programs target only the most privileged minorities, it also defeats the argument that these minority individuals are not qualified. Those who are privileged have the means to acquire the requisite skills needed in order to succeed in mainstream society. The reciprocal effect, therefore, is through the "community of support" which they are able to provide to other members of their community by occupying the institutional spaces which oversee the distribution of rewards in society.

A pervasive idea among some teachers is that, even if Black teachers are apt role models, any teacher could effectively give encouragement to students. These teachers did not explore the reality of the situation which reveals so much racism in the school and in society and so many unequal relations of power, that a White teacher as a role model, regardless of how nice they are, simply does not make the same impact (if any) as would a Black role model.

Other teachers acknowledged that the presence of Black teachers may offer Black students good role models. However, they did not think that this would necessarily make any difference in terms of teaching quality (and thus student academic achievement):

> I completely agree that it's legitimate [to have Black teachers]. That's why women are here. That's why Jewish people and Catholic people and so on, are teachers. Is it such a concern that the students aren't being served? I don't agree. I don't agree with that. (File T03: Lines 1161-1172)

These teachers failed to understand that Black teachers were once Black students themselves. They, therefore, have a particular insight into which teaching methods and subject matters stimulate Black youth. Moreover, these teachers hold a narrow definition of what learning is all about. It entails more than just absorbing educational materials that are presented in a certain way. Students learn from teachers outside the classroom as well, be it through the advice they give, the personal memories they share or simply the way that they act.

A somewhat smaller group of teachers stated that the system could definitely benefit from the presence of more Black teachers. This group also identified the need for Black role models in the school, adding that the students would appreciate being taught by people who share their perspectives. Some of these teachers observed that several of their White colleagues refuse to acknowledge that racism even exists in the school. Undoubtedly, such denial creates problems for Black students and was cited by some teachers as reason enough to hire more minority teachers.

Black Parents/Community Workers

All of the parents expressed a desire for more Black teachers. They too believed that Black teachers would serve as role models for their children and would be more sensitive to Black students' needs. This would boost student self-esteem and help them to feel more connected to the system.

> ... children need to see themselves reflected among, not only their peers, but people that they can use as role models. In the most ideal of all circumstances it should not matter. Parents and teachers should be there mutually to support each other and the children. But, that's not the case. Therefore, I feel it is necessary to have teachers represent children: Black teachers, teachers that are Asian or whatever other group that is in a school...[to] see that multiculturalism, of which Canadians are so proud, reflected in their lives. (File P12: Lines 399-417)

13.3.5 Black-Focused Schools/African-Centred Schools

Black Students:

Some Black students were strongly in favour of Black-focused/African-centred schools. Clearly, they felt that they are not being adequately served by the current system and they do not appear all that confident that the situation will change anytime during their high school career. This sense of despondency over the current state of education overrides any concerns that Black-focused schools are a reversion to segregation:

> I don't think it matters about segregation, because as long as... the children are being helped more, segregation has nothing to do with it... [T]he teachers will reach out and help the kids. And in a mainstream school like this, like, the kids have to go to the teachers, or else the teachers won't really help them. (File O10: Lines 64-75)

Black-focused schools are also viewed as a response to the devaluation of Blacks in the mainstream system:

> ... here [in a non-Black-focused school] some people, they think that you don't know anything about the situation and they treat you like you're nothing. (File W02: Lines 388-403)

Some students wanted to go to a Black-focused school but feared the social repercussions, referring to the impact that racism has had on "Black projects". Not only do such projects tend to be devalued, but they are often not given adequate resources to ensure their success:

> ...when you look at the States, you know, now they have public schools and private schools... Public schools are violent... and the education level is not as good as the private ones... and mainly those who attend public schools are Black students. (File W02: Lines 167-179)

Other students were opposed to the idea of Black-focused schools. Students who did not feel that Black-focused schools would benefit Black youth generally spoke about the consequence of voluntary segregation and of turning a blind eye to the multicultural nature of Canadian society. Ironically, this latter action is exactly what the mainstream school system has done historically:

> I don't think it's necessary... It would just harbour segregation, you know. It's a multicultural society that we're living in. There's all kind of people here. Why should we have just a Black school? There shouldn't be just a White school either. (File O10: Lines 24-34)

> I don't agree with segregating. I don't think it's right... I just don't think we should have to separate to learn... because if we segregate in schools, does that mean that when we get out in the real world we're going to segregate again?... we'll still have to be with other groups, so there's no point in separating us. (File O8: Lines 18-28)

Some students revealed the notion that segregation, however necessary, may continue on into the larger society after the students have graduated. What this shows is that these students feel that

such schools might not serve to combat systemic racism. Particularly since they felt that graduates from a Black-focused school would not be accorded equal status with students from the mainstream schools:

> A Black school, to be realistic, in my opinion, would be a disaster... because... if you have a Black school, right away it's going to be classed as the worst school in Metro Toronto. I mean, you graduate from that school, they're probably not going to want you, to hire you or anything like that, once they think it's a Black school. (File D06: Lines 202-220)

This suggests, of course, that, in order to eliminate racism, we need both educational and societal reform to occur:

> That means we have to have Black investors to hire those students... we have good example from the United States. There's a Negro college which is funded by Black millionaires. But, after they graduate, I think they have [a program for students] to be hired by the Black business owners. But right now... the number of the Blacks who own some... properties, it's not comparable with the population of the students. (File W02: Lines 239-258)

Therefore, without corresponding changes in society, which would provide the equitable allocation of students in the labour market, Black students argue that corporate sponsors from the Black community would be necessary in order to hire Black graduates.

Dropouts:

The dropouts were virtually unanimous in their support for Black-focused schools. This response is not surprising given that the regular "White" system failed to meet their needs:

> I think a Black teacher might have the tendency to pay greater attention to Black children. And if that's going to be so, its better we create schools for Black and White... If segregation is so much a part of the system, do just that. Make it obvious, because in my eyes it is obvious. (File F12: Lines 1247-1255)

Those who had already attended an all-Black school, after leaving the mainstream schools, reported feeling a greater sense of freedom and comfort:

> ... the school of only, like, all people of colour... I went to a school like this and I feel free, like, you don't have no problem. It's like it's your own world... (File F05: Lines 2301-2310)

These arguments in favour of Black-focused schools relate factors which may also serve to hinder student disengagement by providing an atmosphere which is more culturally congruent and hence free from negative racial and cultural biases. Moreover, students relate to these schools as their "own world", having a true sense of belonging and therefore a vested interest in the school and their role within it. It has been clear from the narratives that the absence of these factors in mainstream schools are very real deterrents for Black students continuing their education.

Non-Black Students:

The majority of non-Black students were opposed to the idea of Black-focused schools. The main reason was that it would be a type of segregation which they did not feel was right. The students thought that everyone should try to get along and that this could best happen if everyone went to the same school. Others felt that, although it was true that the different racial and cultural groups in their schools currently separated themselves into groups, to completely divide them up would be worse, destroying any hope of them all getting along at some point. Black-focused schools would only make the lines of separation between different racial groups more rigid, causing further problems. Some students also suggested that it might be difficult in the long run for Black students to get along with the rest of society once they had left school and were surrounded by people of various races.

Some non-Black students also opposed Black-focused schools because they feared that the Black students would feel superior to them. Moreover, others felt that Black resentment towards other racial groups would grow if Black students were separated from them and given special treatment. Some students were also afraid that it may encourage Black students to "band together" against Whites and that putting all Blacks in one school would be "asking for trouble". This is very indicative of the type of negative racial stereotypes which exist in relation to Blacks; that is, the notion that wherever Blacks congregate society would be "asking for trouble".

Other non-Black students objected to Black-focused schools on the grounds of what they perceive to be as the preferential treatment of Blacks:

> [Black-focused schools are] stupid because... like, they don't have a school only for Whites; they don't have a school only for Chinese people... If [Black students] were to go to a different school, like an all-Black school, they'd probably be going, "Yeah, we're better than you" like, you know... I think it would just be bad. (File CG09: Lines 333-335; 339-342)

This student, therefore, does not see the issue in terms of educational parity, but rather as a form of preferential treatment being accorded to Blacks. Yet such a view fails to interrogate first the issue of the differential treatment of Blacks in mainstream schools as a means to contextualize the argument for a separate system.

Teachers:

A number of teachers thought that Black-focused schools are not the solution. They believed that, in order to have a healthy society, people should not separate themselves on the basis of ethnicity or race. Everyone should feel welcome in a supportive climate, which they were convinced already exists in the schools. Yet this view is inconsistent with the realities expressed by Black students who have reported feeling marginalized and alienated within the same school environment these teachers have referred to as "welcoming and supportive." Although the issue of divisiveness was raised in relation to Black-focused schools, this was not recognized as being a fact of life within mainstream schools as much of the testimony of students and dropouts have shown.

Racial division was also witnessed in regard to the social interaction among Black and non-Black teachers within the schools which were chosen for observations in this study. Black and minority teachers were found to be not using the staff common rooms as much as White teachers, therefore issues of social distancing are not confined only to students.

Some teachers did feel that the system needs to become more inclusive, but believed that this transformation process has to occur from within:

> If you're unhappy with something, I think you work within the system to change it. You don't opt out of the system. (File T18: Lines 1468-1471)

Another group saw how Black-focused schools might be advantageous, but were torn between these benefits and the negative consequences of segregation.

Black Parents/Community Workers:

Many parents believed that both they and their children need to at least have the choice of a Black-focused school. It was clear that parents had given much thought to the idea. Indeed, many of the parents were actively involved in groups that were working towards this end. They realized that such an initiative would be met with resistance within and outside of their own community, but they stressed that choice was the key to it all. Parents clearly saw the various benefits and advantages a Black-focused school would offer:

> I think Black-focused schools are a good idea. I think we have to be careful that they don't become ghettoized... that people see it as less important than regular high school, that it doesn't become the Black school as opposed to a normal school. I think a Black-focused school... builds self-esteem... Black students feel themselves as the centre, which they usually don't feel within a regular school setting, and we see that. During the summer I sent

> my daughter to... a school made up primarily of Black and Caribbean kids and, whether or not they perform well academically, which they usually do... just the fact that what they learn in history class is about Black people, the examples they use in English class are Black examples of things... (File P07: Lines 692-720)

Therefore, while the issue of Black-focused schools remains controversial, both dropouts and Black parents have provided important and valid reasons for their existence. In their view, these schools would provide what public schools are not, namely a more culturally congruent environment, free from racial hostility, stereotypes and low expectations. In addition, the centrality of African and African-Canadian history, culture and experience focuses intellectual purpose on the lived realities of Black students rather than situating them on the margins of Euro-Canadian history and discourse.

The fact that Black-focused schools may be problematic for some teachers and non-Black students may be the result of their misunderstanding the purpose of these schools and the social, economic, cultural and political factors which give rise to the need for such alternatives. Clearly these are not issues of preferential treatment, as some non-Black students felt. Preferential treatment can be said to be inherent with the mainstream educational system by its privileging of the Anglo-Canadian experience and the creation of advantages for Anglo-Canadians above all other racial or ethnic minorities. Rather the purpose here is to achieve greater parity for those students who do not find the mainstream school comfortable or hospitable, by carving out a parallel niche within the Canadian educational structure. This should not, however, be regarded as a panacea, merely an alternative to the dominant "unicultural" school.

The struggle for anti-racism education, however, does not end at this point. Public schools are at the forefront of social change and must be prepared to host the diverse needs, interests and realities of students from all walks of life. Therefore, we must not see Black-focused schools as an excuse not to reform mainstream schools or to dilute the movement toward greater cultural and educational democracy.

13.4 FAMILY, COMMUNITY AND SOCIETY

13.4.1 Parental Involvement in Education

Black Students:

Black students regarded home support as an integral part of their educational success. Almost all of the students said that parents should show an interest in their children's education, especially by giving them moral support and encouragement.

> I think they should support them and everything and they should help them... just be available for them. Make time for them, even if they have... their work laid out at night or something, and their kid asks them for help, I think it should be their priority to make time available the next day for them... (File W13: Lines 837-847)

> What the parents have to do is sit his or her daughter or son down and say, "Listen, this is not the time to drop out of school. This is the time for you to hold your head up and look towards the future. You hold your head down, it won't reach anywhere. You understand?" (File W28: Lines 359-365)

> When I'm feeling down about myself [my parents] always seem to sense it and always come and tell me, "You can do it. You can do it"... they're pushing me in some sense, but it doesn't feel like they're pushing me... So it's like they're always there. (File W33: Lines 445-458)

Students also thought that family (parents, siblings, cousins) can serve as a source of help for school work. Most students reported that if a parent helped them with their homework, it was usually their mother. In fact, at times, mothers were eager to help but did not have the necessary educational background, time, or language.

> I live with my mom alone. And...she dropped out of school when she was, like, a teenager. So the type of work I'm doing, she doesn't know how to do it... I never ask her. I do my work on my own. (File W37: Lines 230-242)

Perhaps of more importance to students is that their parents have a stronger presence in the school, attending meetings and advocating on students' behalf:

> They should come often to school and talk to the teacher and be more part of their kid's life because I don't think... parents have enough control over their kids, you know. That's why they just do whatever they want because they know they can get away with everything. (File W26: Lines 842-851)

> ... make more of a presence, they have to go (to) the PTA meetings and... set up their own little Black students board... and discuss things and, if you feel shy, go and talk to the teacher... for you. But, you should never say, "Okay, we're intimidated" and you're just gonna leave it in the hands of the educators. You're selling out your child like that... (File R7: Lines 2263-2274)

It was obvious that students saw some danger in their parents giving too much credit to schools to do the right thing. This suggests a general mistrust of the system. They are, however, sympathetic and realize that whatever renders students "powerless" within the schools also affects their parents.

> ... I guess they trust the school system to take [care] of their children and they assume that they don't have to... or maybe they feel powerless that there's anything they can do. (File O6: Lines 691-697)

This sense of powerlessness which students attribute to their parents' role in the school is also a reflection of the subordination that they feel themselves.

Dropouts:

Unlike the Black students, dropouts rarely expressed situations in which their parents gave them encouragement, shared advice on how to survive in school or helped them with their assignments. They also tended to mention abusive home environments more often than did the other interview groups. This lack of support at home no doubt combined with the lack of support at school to build a mountain of odds against dropouts' success.

Many dropouts strongly expressed the belief that parents should serve as advocates for children. Indeed, they felt that parents should be downright vigilant.

> [Parents] should take a demanding role in the school system. When... the teacher's trying to put the kid in general, ask, "What the hell are you talking about? No, my kid's in advanced"... parents should take a demanding role and demand some history, Black History in there and demand some Black teachers. Demand it! (File F19: Lines 2263-2277)

A problem common to many dropouts, however, is that their parents do not know how to deal with the system in order to be able to advocate on their behalf. Furthermore, there are few structures to help parents better understand the system so that they can be more effectively involved in their children's education.

> My parents, they were old-fashioned. They didn't know how to fight the system. My mother did complain a lot about that teacher, but, on the other hand, a lot of situations went down and they didn't fight it and they just sort of let things slide. They were told this and that, that I couldn't do this and I couldn't that... (File F03: Lines 347-356)

Thus many Black parents may lack the "cultural capital" necessary in order to successfully negotiate within the system.

Non-Black Students:

Parents figured prominently in non-Black students' decisions not to leave school. Many students suggested that their parents would be upset if they left school early and this deterred them from doing so.

Teachers:

Teachers listed parental involvement as an important and positive element in students' academic success. They acknowledged, however, that currently there is not much parental participation in the system.

> ... parents, they seem to feel that they need to be interested when they're in elementary but when you get into secondary they forget about it. For the immigrant kids it seems to be even worse in terms of getting that kind of involvement. They like to view us as the experts, which is good for my ego, but it doesn't help me if I perceive that there's a problem... or even the opposite... a surfeit of strength in the kid. You want to take advantage of talking to the parents. (File T04: Lines 168-181)

Teachers realized that parents come up against some barriers which hindered their participation. Teachers were aware that some students do not want their parents involved in the school system. They also knew that many parents have neither the time nor the energy to participate in schools or to help their children do homework. For other parents, the system can be an alienating sea of bureaucracy. For this reason, some teachers believed that schools need to make more effort to reach out to parents in order to form a strong partnership.

> I think what we need to do is try to bring parents in... we also have to be very flexible with parents... flexibility in time. We can't operate on a 9 to 3:30 mould; we have to be able to give of ourselves in the evening... to work alongside the parents. I think that the school system needs to find out the educational levels of parents and how well they understand or not understand the school system and... have information that is written that is easy to read, easy to access for parents so parents... can associate themselves with schools. I think we need to work alongside not just with parents, but with the broader community and get community agencies involved in school issues. (File T02: Lines 977-978; 983-992; 1023-1034)

Black Parents/Community Workers:

Parents clearly saw a role for themselves in the school system. But, they also realized that it is very difficult for some parents to participate in their child's education within the current system. They too understand that in order to be most effective, both teachers and parents are going to have to make a significant effort to understand one another, to cooperate and to support and encourage each others' involvement.

> The other day I was at a parent/teacher meeting and the teacher said something... he said, "You know, the people who are here, it shows that they're interested in their children." ... and I said, "No, it's not necessarily that you're interested in your children... there are other parents who cannot make it. There are some that work nights... [others] are probably sick. They can't make it. So, therefore, thank the ones that are here and try to find out why the others didn't show up." (File P06: Lines 808-822)

As these responses have shown, parental involvement is central to student's success in school, and as primary stakeholders in their children's educational future, they are a resource which should be utilized by schools.

13.4.2 Community Involvement in Education

Black Students:

Black students felt that their community could also play an active role in helping them succeed in school. For example, community members could help in setting up a homework club by donating space and tutors. These clubs would give students a place to go after school where they could be with peers and work with adults on their homework. As well, people in the community could be guest speakers in schools and act as role models to students. Communities could also sponsor Black-focused schools in their neighbourhoods and set up a summer jobs program for Black students.

> Just be simple role models. Come in and talk for free... and say, "Hey, this is how business is going and whatnot, and you can do this." (File R6: Lines 2993-3000)

> Set up their own school! Set up their own school and educate their own children. I mean, the Jewish do it. A whole bunch of people do it. But, when Blacks do it, they really, you know, "they" have a label for it or a name for it, they don't accept it or they don't support it. (File W35: Lines 918-928)

This demonstrates how Black projects are measured negatively against those of other groups, and how legitimacy is therefore differentially accorded.

Students further suggested that those community members in powerful positions advocate on their behalf:

> ... their voice has to be heard by government or... the Board of Education. They have to pose plans and suggestions to keep Black kids in school, to make school more appealing to Black students. (File O2: Lines 1540-1547)

It was often difficult for students to conceive of what role the government in particular played in education. This may be because the question is fairly abstract and quite removed from students' daily lives. This may also be because students rarely see Black people in any positions of power in government and thus do not consider it a realistic or sympathetic source of help. Students did, however, offer some suggestions as to how government could be involved in education. Common student responses were: give people more jobs, improve and diversify the teaching staff, eliminate racism, and listen to the Black community and implement its ideas.

> The government... should listen to what the Black community says and do the stuff that they're telling them to do instead of just, "Yeah, yeah, yeah," and not doing anything about it... Blacks... are just dropping out and saying, "Forget it! The government isn't doing anything and there's no jobs out there anyways for us to go to even if we graduate." (File W33: Lines 812-824)

> I see that the government is pulling a lot of funding from different programmes [but] that they realize there's a problem with racism... there should more forums [on anti-racism] where all high-school students attend... to promote tolerance within our community. They should be putting more funds in... (File R7: Lines 2431-2439)

The reality of such funding is, of course, limited due to the current political and economic climate. Yet the draconian cuts in educational spending are not only short-sighted but run counter to the very real needs which exist within society. In the long run, by undercutting programs which can help ameliorate the problems related to student disengagement, the government creates a potential drain on social welfare services if dropouts do not have the requisite skills to compete in an already declining labour market. Therefore, the assessment of initiatives designed to help keep students in school and improve their life chances should be evaluated with this in mind.

13.5 EDUCATIONAL AND SOCIAL CHANGE

13.5.1 Student Input

Black Students:

Black students did not elaborate much on their roles and responsibilities in school. Besides going to class and doing homework, very little else was mentioned. This may be linked to their general opinion that there is not much that they can do to change the system. This feeling is heightened in a system that does not encourage student activism nor does it tolerate any behaviour that agitates the status quo.

> I tried to deal with... my Physics teacher... Some kid did something, like, that lit off a match or something like that... and [the teacher] collected all the Black people... and he let all the White people go because he said, "I know it's your kind of dude that does this kind of thing and we're not leaving until we find out who it is." And he let all the White people go. Nothing was done about that... He had no clue [as to who did it], but he said, "Your type of people who does this kind of thing." I was told [about this incident] by one of the students and I told him to complain [but] he didn't want to. (File O2: Lines 1153-1186)

This deals with the issue of the inequality of voice which subverts the equitable treatment of Black students. Even in the face of such blatant acts of discrimination, Black students are silenced by the lack of structural supports available to deal with their complaints.

In some cases, however, students can provide a system of checks and balances on the behaviour of the teacher if they are willing to challenge the racial and cultural biases which often find their way into classroom discourse:

> I was the only Black student in [this class]... I would sit in the back in the corner. But [the teacher] knows he can't say nothing about Black people because I'll start arguing... I could see that the way that I acted was having an influence because whenever he said something, he'd go, "I don't mean it that way... I don't mean Black people are this"... so, I think in a way you do [have input in school]. (File B19: Lines 746-760)

In fact, when students become more proactive in their school environment, there is a greater correlation between active involvement in school life and perseverance in school:

> I try and get good grades... I try to be there for other students if they need my help. I try and help the ESL students a lot. I'm also on the Black Heritage club. And I went to a camp for a race relations thing, to help them do policy and... I'm going to be doing stuff so that other students know about the policy, their rights in schools. And I'm going to be doing stuff for the Grade Nines for next semester... so they'll learn about racism and how it started. And we're trying to do a policy on homophobia and sexism in the school... (File W33: Lines 569-585)

This may be an example of how the logic of the Participation-Identification Model (Finn 1989) operates. While this model cannot be seen as a means to explicate the diverse experiences of minority students, it may be germane to situations such as the one described.

The fact that the nature of this student's participation and identification with the school occurred within the context of African heritage and anti-racism activities is an important factor. In order for participation and identification with the school to occur, which in some instances may help dissuade students from disengaging, these activities must be in accordance with the needs and interests of students. Therefore, schools with multicultural and anti-racism initiatives have the best opportunity for helping to "re-engage" these students.

Dropouts:

Unlike many of the Black students, dropouts were well aware of their lack of input into the system. This conscious attempt not to get involved was likely due to too many overwhelming barriers or to a desire not to get too entangled in a destructive system. In order to protect themselves, they "preferred" to disengage from the whole thing.

Dropouts also tended to be more cynical as to what their input would ultimately do. In their past experience, their voices were rarely heard. More than any other group, they conveyed the idea that little change would come from outside the Black community. While they sometimes acknowledged that schooling was better now than it was when they were in the system, this positive feeling did not lead them to believe that things were going to change for the better. The idea that anything could be changed seemed somewhat far-fetched to the dropouts.

Who, they wondered, was likely to listen to their narratives in this study and, even if they were heard, would anything really be done?

> I know [Black youth] have been saying some of these things about the school system for a while now and no one has listened to us. I am not sure it is because no-one seems to care. Why do you think people will take seriously what we say to you now? Maybe I'm a sceptic... What I want to know is, what do we get for

> speaking out? What would come out of your work? Some more silence and denial? (File F07: Lines 5-17)

13.5.2 Social Limits, Concerns and the Future

Black Students:

Black students were asked explicitly if they felt they could be whatever they wanted to be in this society. The question was to probe their perceptions of systemic barriers in Canada. Overall, students were closely divided in their responses: 54% believed that they could be or do anything they wanted. Interestingly, female students had a more positive outlook, with 63% of them positively responding, compared with only 43% of the males. Differences also emerged in light of students' place of birth. Canadian-born males expressed the least amount of optimism with only 36% feeling optimistic compared with 65% of Canadian-born females. Among students born abroad, 50% of males and 60% of females felt positive about their opportunities in society.

In terms of the social limits placed on them, some students related this to their financial status and how the lack of money restricted their access to further education and to power in society:

> Say I wanted to be a lawyer, right? I could not afford to go to law school, right? If I wanted to be a doctor, I could not do that because I could not afford to go to medical school, right? (File O24: Lines 1096-1106)

Moreover, they tended to perceive a person's position of power or powerlessness as more or less static, which is perhaps why half of the Black students are pessimistic about their ability to succeed:

> Once you have the money, you have the power. And for poor people, they don't really have that much power. They don't have that much status. They're not respected in the community the same way as a rich person is respected. So that is something that will keep them down. (File O26: Lines 936-943)

Racism is yet another social limit that is seen as a constraining factor in Black youths' aspirations. Real and psychological barriers interconnect to lower Black youths' job prospects, chances for success and financial achievement. This was related to as part of the legacy of slavery and domination:

> I think a lot of that comes from history... [T]he White male is the one that was dominant... and, I think a lot of that stems back from slavery and the kind of the way that Blacks were just completely dehumanized and desensitized. The slavery, the way we were

> treated and everything, it's made the Black male especially take on this attitude that he can't get anywhere or he's not supposed to... "success" is just not a word in his vocabulary... It's not only Black males, it's females also. But it has affected the male in that way because [he] used to be such a dominant force in his culture...and now he's been reduced to, you know, getting a job at McDonald's or whatever and not being able to support his family. (File O4: Lines 1938-1964)

Racial and social hierarchies which privilege Whites and Anglo culture, are seen as precluding the mobility of Blacks into positions of overriding power and authority. Therefore, Black students are acutely aware of how such glass ceilings operate to maintain their subordination in society:

> If you're a Black... although you can make it good, there's only so far you can go. Like, a White kid can say, realistically, "I want to be Prime Minister." There's no way a Black kid can say that... [Canada] can't even handle a Black premier or a Black mayor much less a Black prime minister. And there's no Black people even in the runnings... If you're going to be anything as a Black person here you have to set up your own shit. You can't expect to make it in White people's stuff... White people don't like to give Black people nothing. (File R4: Lines 733-756)

There was also the notion that some members of society perceived themselves as "more Canadian than thou", that is, the superior status of White Canadians *vis-à-vis* their non-White counterparts. Black students spoke of the need to have their status as Canadians socially validated:

> To be identified as a Canadian now that I'm a Canadian. I'm not Trinidadian. I'm not in Trinidad... I have a culture, yes, but I'm in a country that I identify as my home and I want to feel an equal right to where I'm at and whatever I proceed to do. (File W19: Lines 1407-1416)

The sense of affinity students of all walks of life have to Canada cannot be disputed. Evidence to this effect was noted during visits to participating schools in this study. When the national anthem was played over the intercom, it was seen as a very solemn occasion. Students, irrespective of their race or ethnicity stood still for the duration of anthem out of respect and certainly a sense of allegiance to Canada, and as a means to affirm their identity as Canadians.

Violence was a further element of concern for Black students. While females particularly feared rape, Black males mostly feared police brutality. Black students grow up in a society in which they do not feel safe or free. They go to school in an environment in which they have similar

feelings of oppression. Neither situation stimulates learning and positive self-development. Moreover, students are angered and frustrated by the school's unwillingness to deal with these issues, and of how the negative stereotypes of Black youth go largely unchallenged:

> Well, number one, the police. The police and these shootings, and just the idea of racism in the police force. And I think that school should be addressing that as well. I see people do studies and say that there's no racism on the police force, but I have a feeling that there is... Young Black kids, I kind of worry about them because they're very antagonistic now towards the police and that might get them in trouble... I think that their attitudes towards young Black children, it's disgusting the way that they view them. They... see a baseball cap turned backwards and maybe some baggy jeans and they automatically pinpoint that person... they might not arrest them or harass them but they have their eye open... (File R7: Lines 2707-2746)

The reality of being from neighbourhoods where drugs and violence are commonplace also compromises a student's ability to deal emotionally with the demands of schooling:

> ... right around [where I live] there's a lot of drug dealers. You can step out of your house and you could get shot, right. You come to school and the people in this school have guns on them... you piss off the person they could pull out a gun and shoot you. And then you have to worry about your marks in school, [and] if you're going to get into any trouble today. (File W32: Lines 1726-1738)

Despite these concerns, however, many students have ambitions involving college, university and a professional career. This is regardless of what academic stream they were currently in, which, for some students, demonstrates that they do not understand the process of streaming and its potentially limiting consequences.

Many students simply said that they wanted to be rich and/or successful, and had no specific goal:

> I want to be somebody great. I want to be, like, a great speaker or something. I don't know, that's what I want, that's what I feel like doing. (File D14: Lines 718-731)

These high aspirations are reflected in the students' overall optimism for the future of Black youth (70% were hopeful). Their enthusiasm, however, varied by gender and place of birth. Interestingly, 80% of males, those who encounter the most overt racism in society, and had a relatively higher evaluation of systemic barriers, were, nevertheless, optimistic about the future

of Black youth. This may be evidence of the sense of agency they feel they have in overcoming these barriers. Female responses showed less optimism toward the future for Black youth than did males (64% were hopeful) yet the overall trend was optimistic among the Canadian-born youth. Among Canadian-born students, 92% of males and 65% of females were hopeful. Among students born abroad, 73% of males and 64% of females were hopeful for the future of Black youth in Canadian society.

This optimism, however, does not change their concerns about the school system which, to them, is an obvious source of their oppression.

> ... the future of my children... I have a fear of having sons, okay, because... even if you become a stable family, there's still some way they can, you know, grasp you... a study showed [that] it was Grade Three or something...that [Black boys] started to show the decline... I even see [it with] my two little brothers... It just scares me too much to see it. (File O9: Lines 1040-1063)

> ... if the school system doesn't change, the students won't change. (File O26: Lines 1053-1062)

Dropouts:

Dropouts identified the same social limits to those of the Black students. They took their analysis further, however, and discussed how the school and economic systems interconnect. They explained that "success" is defined in terms of money and power, and that part of their consequent disengagement from school had to do with the declining expectations of what stream they were in and what that meant for their earning power as graduates. These dropouts felt that they were given the message that, economically, they were not going "to make it" and that school wasn't going to give them the skills necessary to ameliorate the situation.

Of all the interview groups, dropouts were consistently able to see life within a larger context. They linked their concerns about society to a group sense of Black experience. They also philosophized about the Black population *vis à vis* racism, stereotyping and police targeting.

Their goals, however, were much more on an immediate and personal level. Unlike the student groups who always mentioned the distant goals of a career, dropouts were much more focused on meeting the goals of everyday life (eg. finding a job, raising a child).

Their visions of the future, however, expanded beyond the immediacy of their goals. Dropouts expressed hope for the future not in terms of themselves, but rather in terms of the Black youth population and of their own children. Dropouts had faith that, because today's Black generation is more aware of racism, the youth may have a more developed sense of group strength and

identity. This, hoped dropouts, would help the youth overcome the barriers that they would surely encounter throughout their life.

In their contribution to the empowerment of the Black population, dropouts are working at the grassroots level, strengthening the self-confidence of their children, advocating on their behalf in the schools, constantly conveying high expectations and strong support, and inculcating good work habits. This raises their hope that their children will not experience the disengagement from school and the marginalization in society that they themselves experienced.

Non-Black Students:

Although the non-Black students were not specifically questioned on whether they felt that society limited them in any way, none of them voluntarily brought up any perceived social limits. They did, however, have concerns about society and their future. These ranged from wide issues such as the state of the environment to more personal issues such as their education and job prospects. Nevertheless, students appeared optimistic about their general welfare in the future and had a fairly clear idea of how their lives would evolve. Most planned on continuing their education beyond high school and on pursuing a career. Moreover, they expressed goals that were well-defined and detailed, which was a contrast to the vague responses of the Black students. This may be because the non-Black students did not perceive as many social limits which gave them the confidence to pursue their aspirations in a direct manner. Black students, although optimistic, are perhaps better aware of the struggles ahead and are thus more hesitant.

Teachers:

A few teachers worry about the lack of a Canadian identity in society for which they blame multicultural education. This is the criticism of those who view the notion of a "Canadian identity" as being synonymous with Anglo-conformity. These individuals have a general unwillingness to incorporate differences into their definition of who is a "Canadian" and therefore, are in fact representative of the problems faced by Black and minority youth who struggle for legitimacy and social acceptance. A corollary to this view is found in those teachers who attribute a decay in social responsibility to a society which lacks structure and gives people too many rights.

Black Parents/Community Workers:

Parents' concerns for the future often reflected those of their children. These stem primarily from economic concerns conditioned by the current political and economic climate:

> I'm worried about the future because I don't know what the future holds... Is Canada going to become worse? Is there a place in society for our children? Are there going to be jobs for our children? I mean, I'm going to school right now. Is there going to

> be a job for me?... and you find out that the government's cutting this, cutting that. University's getting more expensive. Will your children be able to get post-secondary education if you're not from middle-class background? Yes, I'm worried about it. (File P06: Lines 2370-2398)

However, another parent expresses optimism for the future in terms of what she hope will be greater access to Afrocentric knowledge as a source of strengthening communal bonds and self-esteem:

> I'm hopeful simply because I see a resurgence within the Black community of some sort of a Black pride, a coming of an identity, more accessible information about Black people... Hopefully, within the high school system there will be more accessible information about other cultures and more glorification of the Black past rather than the slave history that we've all been taught. And, if more people in my age range become a little bit more conscious of what they're doing... and be more encouraging of their race and be more proud of what they are, hopefully the next generation of young Black people... will not have to... plough through the barriers that we had to, and have better self-esteem and better self-value... from day one, understanding about their past -- Africa... the good things about Africa, not necessarily the bad things, and... better self-images... And, hopefully, that will be an end to this long, long history of Black people, just the discouragement of Black people... (File CW3: Lines 2971-3012)

13.5.3 The Role of the School and Reflections on Change

Black Students:

Students observed that the school seems "not to notice" or, indeed, care, when students start to disengage, or fade out of the system:

> If they said you're out because you missed this many days, they should try and deal with it before that, instead of saying, "Well, you did this. Get out"... I've missed a lot of classes sometimes and teachers talk to me, but I think if you want to drop out, it's no big deal. Of course, if you're some kind of brain or something, I think they're going to... they want you... But, if you're Black and they see you've got problems or something... "Okay, he's missed a certain amount of days, let's just get rid of him". (File B19: Lines 96-112)

This relates to the sense of invisibility that Black students experience in what they see as an unresponsive school system, which enables many of them to fall through the cracks. Ultimately, it appears to them that there is less impetus to rescue "at-risk" students who are Black:

> ...half the Black guys that I know that used to come here are out there on the streets right now. They all got kicked out somehow or another. The principal is nice, but it's just that some of them he just kicked out. They screw up once and they just don't give them another chance, just kick them out like that. (File W05: Lines 783-792)

Students perceived the system as a little too eager to kick them out. Expulsion, it has already been noted, is often a precursor to disengagement for students who already feel they are being pushed out of a system which doesn't want them or understand their difficulties. Such conscious or unconscious school practices, combined with what has been described as teachers' poor attitudes and teaching styles, lead students to formulate a negative opinion of the educational system, and ultimately to opt out:

> Come on, when you're in class he has statements like, "I don't care if you don't do the work, I'm still getting paid." What kind of statement is that? (File B01: Lines 591-598)

Consequently, students recommended that there be a more sensitive and diverse staff in the schools:

> I'd change some of the teachers... Some of them give you negative vibes, like, say things that are racist, but they don't know that they offend you. I would change that. (File W34: Lines 773-786)

> Okay, make teachers make the students feel like... they're somebody. Like, make them feel like they have a chance in life... give them that feeling of, you know, reaching those stars. (File W14: Lines 783-790)

> They have to have more Black teachers... because mostly they'll understand more than any White teacher will understand, saying, "Okay, this is where you're coming from," and things like that. (File B03: Lines 468-473)

This recommendation for diversity holds true for the formal curriculum, which is seen as Eurocentric and thus exclusive of the contribution and achievements of non-Whites. Therefore, there is seen the need to rethink and challenge a curriculum limited in its scope and representation of historical fact:

> I would change all the textbooks in not only history [but also] in other subjects like science and math... when you look through the science textbook and it's like all these White people invented everything, and even one science teacher said, "Every civilization has contributed to science except African." He actually said that! (File O9: Lines 840-869)

The restructuring of education along these lines it is felt, would provide Black students a clear impetus to remain in school:

> Well, I have this friend that dropped out because they're not learning what they want to learn. And, a lot of it comes down to the fact that they want to learn about their history and they're not getting it. They're getting only that Blacks were slaves and that's not what they want to hear. They want to be able to identify with their roots... if the school could show it that way, then... a lot of Blacks would feel a lot better and probably stay in school. And... don't make them feel like they're stupid either... (File W33: Lines 791-806)

In terms of the roles of various school agents in the educational and personal life of students, it is interesting to note that students have very little interaction with the guidance department. Few of them could even figure out the role of a guidance counsellor. There is no indication in student responses that counsellors facilitate a process of joint decision-making. Of the few students who had had contact with a counsellor, only a couple recounted a positive experience. More often, students encountered a heavy top-down lecture (eg. student responsibility to attend class). Others had had an experience that was neither comfortable nor helpful:

> I went to find out about a course and he's just, like, "Not right now." And, I had an appointment!... So I came back a couple of times and, like, "No, no, no. You can't take it" and that was the end of the conversation. But, why can't I take it? They made me feel like I wasn't smart enough to take the course... (File W33: Lines 514-522)

> Yeah, they just kind of shove you off... just, you know, throw a class in there [and say], "Okay, go back in now." (File O30: Lines 776-780)

Consequently, this negative image of the counsellor begins to circulate in the student population. Moreover, it creates a sense of mistrust and a lack of respect among students towards counsellors. Hence, students rarely consider counsellors as a source of help when they need career advice or when they are experiencing personal problems. The result is that schools are fragmented -- all

parts of the system are not working together, which is creating dysfunctional educational institutions.

Students advocate a better system of tracking to help students "at risk" re-engage in the system, but they make the point that such positive support may not be well received if these agents are unable to share the social and cultural vantage points of the student. This is true of both non-Blacks as well as Blacks who may be from different social strata:

> I think they should have, like... a social worker... that goes to their house... like, if they see [that students] are not going to school... and, not bring them but, like, stay on them, stay on them... Of course, [their race] would matter. Why would I want some White talking to me, like, "You could do it!" It's like get outta my face... But... you don't also want the Black person who seems to have it all... [they] don't even know where I'm coming from... (File 01: Lines 1797-1818)

Similar to their view of counsellors, students also saw principals in a mostly negative light. Principals are seen more as icons of authority and discipline than as people who are on students' side as a source of support. Those students who had tried to elicit help from their principal mainly encountered resistance. This again fosters an "us" and "them" feeling which results in an antagonistic institution of education that is far from student-friendly. However, when principals do visibly support their students, there is a great opportunity to build a caring and positive learning environment:

> The principal's like a father to me, like a second father. Sometimes I have no home, I'm hungry. He finds me some place to stay. He tells me... he doesn't want me to be hanging around the streets at midnight, drinking and all that stuff... (File A01: Lines 1558-1567)

In this instance the school, and in particular the principal, became a surrogate family for a student who lacked such support structures at home. Success for many students, therefore, is contingent upon the ability of school agents to adapt to the changing needs of society.

Dropouts:

From their experience, dropouts had learned that the role of the school is to perpetuate social inequality. To move towards a school system that actually serves to foster a progressive learning atmosphere, they recommended that the school provide race relations training for school staff, hire more Black teachers and counsellors and include Black History and other achievements in the overall curriculum. In addition, they suggested that the school initiate a tracking system targeted towards people who seem to be disengaging from the school. In this way, the school

would be aware of those who need help and thus be able to efficiently deploy its resources to find ways to intervene and reverse the disengagement process.

Non-Black Students:

Non-Black students basically saw the role of the school as an institution in which they can get an education which will eventually lead to a good job. They felt that the school was fulfilling this function in a somewhat adequate manner. However, they did suggest that improvements could be made by hiring teachers who have better teaching styles and attitudes and who are more sensitive to students' needs. These students further suggested that changes need to occur within the student population itself. For example, they cited the need for better school spirit in order to improve community relations in school. This, they advised, could come from a change in student attitude and effort.

Teachers:

A few teachers gave the impression that they thought that a fundamental duty of the school is to "kick out" those students who do not want to be there. Students who "choose" not to succeed only hold back others:

> We've got a great deal we can do within the school setting and that's what we have to decide to do... no matter what colour, race or anything the kids are... we are living in a society of choice, and... what we have to do is provide a quality education for the kids who chose to be here. We can't just say to society, "Give us all of your kids and we will turn them out to be brilliant and adjusted,"... I mean, we have to say to the kids, those very small minority of kids, who have no business being here, "Get out." (File T04: Lines 1043-1067)

Although schools cannot be expected to solve all social problems, some teachers fail to see the interconnected nature of elements in society -- that schools perpetuate certain problems that reinforce problems in the wider society, which in turn reproduce problems in the school. No one system works in isolation. Perhaps the lack of insight on this matter stems from a general reluctance to accept the responsibility of helping students for whom the system is not working. Instead, some teachers tend to blame individual students for their lack of motivation, thereby negating the need to change the system.

Some teachers, in fact, emphasized the need to maintain an ethnocentric world view as the catalyst of a working system:

> ... it's... a means of maintaining the same old thing... a means of ensuring that a Eurocentric curriculum exists at the centre, because

> that's known and it has been proven and, see, it's worked so well before. Like, why fix it if it's not broken? (File T21: Lines 1116-1136)

However, this view fails to interrogate just whom, in fact, they presume the system to be working for and how this correlates with the structures of power which privilege certain forms of knowledge and subordinate others. The following quote is also critical of rupturing the status quo:

> Very often I think that what's happening today is... that the objective of some educators in power is to create a curriculum which is designed to produce a politically correct automaton. It's designed to brainwash students to think a certain way. (File T12: Lines 334-362)

Other teachers also seemed resentful of having to accommodate the needs of a diverse student body, and, in fact, question whether immigrant students should expect to be accommodated. One teacher observed:

> [Some teachers] just want to [teach]: "This is Canada, and it's English and French. And if you come from Afghanistan or you come from Uganda, this is Canada. You learn our way. We don't have to learn your way back. We don't even know your way." (File T01: Lines 243-249)

Another teacher commented on the views of certain colleagues:

> They say, "We live in Canada. We teach Canadian history," or "We should teach them the Canadian way." I'm still having difficulties defining what the "Canadian way" is, and I am a born Canadian! (File T21: Lines 1116-1136)

This further outlines the need to renegotiate the Canadian identity so that it is inclusive and representative of all members of society.

Still, other teachers felt that schools should focus on the "3 R's" rather than delving into social issues. Again, this fails to understand that discussing these issues is an integral part of student development and creates a valuable awareness of human rights and inequities. This group of teachers felt that the school was fulfilling its role as a provider of education. For this reason, they felt that no changes are necessary within the system. They add, however, that the quality of education could improve if the students themselves just tried a little harder.

Other more progressive teachers stressed that the role of the school is to promote learning for *all* students, and that many changes need to occur in order for this to happen. Their recommendations called for more diverse teachers, even though in some cases it would jeopardize their own job security:

> ... if you're into affirmative action, and I mean if you're white and you're dominant, you don't want to give up a penny of your position. Well, no, I feel there should be a complete overhaul, and I could be one of the first to go, you know, I mean I know that ... and it's hard, it's very, very hard to realize that if I were in a competition with someone else and then affirmative action was in place and it was not around gender then, then I'm going to lose out, and that's tough. Yeah. (File T33: Lines 233-247)

As well, changes in teaching styles, curricula and learning environments were recommended by teachers. They also suggested an increase in peer counselling, community and parental involvement and resources (e.g. money, staff). One teacher emphasizes the vigilance required and the importance of parent-teacher linkages:

> ... and just be very vigilant about what is happening with the kids in school because, you know, by and large I still think Black kids get the short end of the stick, particularly through, I think Black kids on a whole, I mean as a generalized statement, but they do not like to deal with the guidance department, and I can understand why. They'll come and tell me, you know, Miss, you know, I couldn't get this course, they're telling me to take this instead of computers. So you go down there and you tell them, you know... they'll sign up for general level classes because it's easy, and I'll say I'm not signing it until you change that G to an A, you know, and you have to be watching out for them. And I think parents need to become a little more astute about what the kids are doing in school. And you know, when they find a teacher who is working with the kids, to really link up with the teacher. You know, in high school those parent-teacher links get very strained and kids will literally sabotage communication. But in this day and age I think with so many issues being so pertinent that it's really the responsibility of Black parents to be very well-informed and as much as their time and personal commitments will allow to be involved in the school somehow, even if it's just attending the regular parent-teacher nights and, you know, making yourself seen, you know, just being there. (File T27: Lines 1365-1405)

These teachers also saw a need to develop a more effective method of tracking students who begin to disengage from the system and to find more ways to connect students to their school (eg. anti-racism education, Black Heritage clubs). Finally, they suggested that schools actively consult with students who have dropped out so that they can gain some valuable insight on what it is they can do to strengthen the system and eventually render the word "dropout" obsolete.

Black Parents/Community Workers:

Parents had a variety of ideas on what the role of the school entails. Not surprisingly, many of these ideas have as their base the formation of a strong partnership between parents and school staff:

> I see a gap between parents, teachers, principals, directors, and other sources that are very important to the welfare of the child. There should be communication between them so that the child knows exactly what is happening in the system and... is able to grasp what is there, [and that] the teacher knows the child and the child knows the teacher, and [that] when a problem arises, the child know who to turn to... and why... [T]here should be someone specifically paid to... find resources, [to go] door-to-door to invite parents to come out... to let the parents see that the child is learning or what help that parent should be able to give to that child. So, educating the system [means] educating the parents and [having] other goodwill fares for the benefit of the child... And until we get to that type of way of doing this, we will never be able to have the system that we can be very proud of. (File P13: Lines 944-956; 960-976)

Parent associations were seen as one means to facilitate a cooperative relationship between parents and the school:

> If they have parent/teacher associations... it would be a good forum to discuss issues of race or other types of problems that students are facing. Because if the school recognizes these problems and can bring them up in this type of forum where you have parents, it would be beneficial because maybe the students can't... talk to parents about it; it might be the first time they're even hearing about it. So, I think the responsibility of the school is not just to educate the students [but also] parents and [the] larger community... (File F01: Lines 1207-1208; 1211-1225)

Parents, therefore, can serve as a valuable resource for schools to actively participate as stakeholders in their child's education. The school culture, however, must be congruent with

parent involvement and must have mechanisms in place to reach out to parents, particularly minority parents who may have cultural and linguistic barriers isolating them from participation in the school system. Alliances between schools, parents and the community can therefore be beneficial in negotiating the complex issues which face students today.

14.0 SUMMARY OF MAJOR FINDINGS

Many issues have been raised by the various participants of the study. We will reiterate some of the significant issues that have come to our attention throughout the study, reflecting on the general learning objectives. This section, therefore, contains a summary of the research findings as well as significant issues captured in the course of studying the dilemma of student disengagement.

14.1 THE TERM "DROPOUT"

The term "dropout" does not adequately capture the students' experiences of schooling and why they leave school prematurely. "Fade-out" may be a more appropriate term rather than "dropout" because students may be there in body but not in spirit.

It is evident that once students get on the track of fading out, (e.g., skipping classes, sitting in the back of class, hanging out in hallways, "acting up", acts of truancy) schools help them "out the door". These are symptoms of a larger problem that ought to tell us something about the process of schooling rather than individuals per se.

Many students stay to complete their education "successfully," thereby giving the impression they are able to deal with educational problems. Students are successful in spite of genuine educational problems, and some students do, in fact, give something up specifically in terms of their identity in order to "succeed".

No one single factor can explain students' disengagement from school. Dropping out is a process, not a simplistic cause-effect relation. Dropping out is the final act of a series of school and off-school developments/experiences that define the student's ability to engage and disengage in a school's culture. Students drop out of school when it appears everything else has failed them and, in their view, there is no other appropriate recourse or action to take.

14.2 DROPPING BACK/IN

Some of the students who drop out do, in fact, "drop back in" under different circumstances. Some students return to their former schools, but the majority find alternative places for education. Some of the students who returned to school have gone on to receive post-secondary education.

14.3 SCHOOLS AND SOCIETY SHARE IN THE CREATION OF "DROPOUTS"

Schools create the phenomenon of "dropping out" from the distinctive environments, cultures and peoples that form constituent parts of schools.

The social formation, with its segmentation of the labour force and the consequent unequal distributions of rewards, penalties, valued goods and services, knowledge, etc., requires dropouts to flourish and for the economic system to function. There is an increased societal concern with dropouts when they are "on the streets", but not when they are employed in low-paying jobs.

Society reproduces the social conditions for racism, sexism, poverty, hunger and material deprivation to flourish. These conditions have extremely significant consequences for students' educational experiences (e.g., academic achievement). While schools can be part of the solution to these problems, society cannot expect schools alone to solve them.

From the narratives collected, it is apparent that students who have actually dropped out of school tended to develop a more critical consciousness of schools and society.

14.4 UNDERSTANDING DISENGAGEMENT FROM THE SCHOOL

Students, parents, teachers and community workers insist that no one single factor can explain students' disengagement from school. They see "dropping out" as the final act of a series of school and off-school developments/experiences that define the student's ability to engage and disengage in a school's culture. In many ways, these developments are moments/events/shifts in the schooling and educational life cycles of students that gradually and cumulatively lead students to fade out of the school system.

From the vantage point of students, the "dropout" is the student who has enrolled to be at school, but then quit or failed to graduate for many different reasons.

Students expressed many contributing factors to the decision to leave school; teacher disrespect, a sense of being overly visible (i.e., targeted) for misconduct by school personnel, teacher inaccessibility for help, a depersonalized school environment, alienating curricular content, absence of adult encouragement and expectation that they would succeed, a sense of invisibility (that no one would notice or care if they dropped out anyway), teenage pregnancy, a need to help the family financially (which places schooling as a lesser priority), pressure to succeed at home and a feeling of inadequacy in terms of school work.

For students who admit they have considered dropping out of school at one time or another, such revelations are usually followed by a recognition of the importance of staying in school. This is articulated in terms of a desire to learn, an awareness of the state of the labour market and the economy, parents' desire that their children fare better in life, a need for some structure in their day, and an awareness of the need to succeed in life.

Students admit that, by dropping out, the student places himself or herself at a social disadvantage. This view is shared by parents and teachers. However, student criticism of the decision to drop out is frequently muted by the personal knowledge of someone who actually dropped out of school.

Black students' narratives suggest that when the student is considering leaving school, it is often the existence of one caring adult in his or her life that makes the difference. Many students who dropped out and then dropped back in, accept individual responsibility for some actions. But these students, at the emotional level, feel the pain of neglect. These youth share the aspirations, hopes and dreams of many Canadians to achieve the best for themselves and their families. There is a yearning for respect and acknowledgment by family, school and society. Many of them have high educational aspirations and life goals. However, there is a feeling of dissonance as students question whether these aspirations are attainable at all, particularly if things remain the way they are. This is, in part, because everyday messages and common-sense ideas conveyed to youths by various institutions of society make students feel peripheralized in society.

While many Black parents and teachers stress that the causes and solutions to the "dropout" problem lie with the school, society and the home, the majority of Black parents assert that the structures of schooling and education have to be transformed in order for society to resolve the dilemma of students' disengagement and fading out of school.

14.5 THE ECONOMICS OF SCHOOLING

Students, parents and teachers generally acknowledge the impact that economic hardships have on schooling. Black students, in particular, feel that the school environment "favours" rich students and that rich and powerful parents have much influence at school.

Current harsh economic realities mean that students who find jobs want to hang on to them and continue to work while going to school. While it is possible that the current unfavourable economic climate may influence a few students to stay in school longer or drop back in, there are other students who find deplorable economic conditions as legitimate grounds to question the relevance of education.

The issue of poverty impacts significantly on the educational success of students as they negotiate between satisfying immediate economic survival needs and receiving an education that has no immediate or apparent material gratification. Concerns about economics are a powerful distraction from successful education for Black youths coming from particularly low socio-economic family backgrounds.

14.6 DEALING WITH SCHOOL AUTHORITY AND POWER STRUCTURES

All students have "problems" dealing with school authority. However, it is apparent that Black/African-Canadian youths are generally having a "tough time" dealing and/or coming to

grips with authority structures in the school system because they perceive these power structures are intended to subordinate them further.

Students find the lack of effective discipline to be a major problem in their schools. For example, suspending students for skipping classes was not considered to be an effective means of discipline. Students also complain about the lack of respect in the school system, whether between teachers and students or among students. Black students, in particular, articulate a position that the discussion of discipline cannot be conducted outside the context of a mutual respect between those who wield power and authority and those who do not. They generally perceive the school system to be more interested in exercising authority and power arbitrarily than in providing education. In such a context, students are less co-operative with teachers who are disrespectful to them and appear disinterested in their welfare.

Students react negatively to the institutional power structure of the school and its rationality of dominance. Some students employ behavioural tactics that constitute part of a "culture of resistance" which is anti-school. It is not coincidental that many of the students who fade out of school also exhibit what school authorities also see as "problem behaviours" (e.g., truancy, acts of delinquency, or even disruptive behaviour).

In talking about what they like about their schools, student narratives suggest that the feeling of belonging, community, mutual respect and appreciation of each other's contributions go a long way to engage students in the educational processes. Among the students' list of valued aspects of their schools are: the friends they make at school, the diversity of the school, the extra-curricular activities which provide opportunities for them to celebrate and appreciate their sense of self-worth and group accomplishments. When asked to recall their most memorable school experiences, students generally refer to occasions or events that have to do with the school progress or their peers recognizing that they had achieved something.

Conversely, students' dislikes about their schools generally have to do with the use of school authority and power, consciously or unconsciously, to put students down, silence, deny or negate their self-worth and group and cultural identities, and their pressing concerns.

14.7 LOW TEACHER EXPECTATIONS OF STUDENTS

Black students believe that some teachers do, in fact, care about their students. But students generally are of the opinion that a small number of teachers exist in their schools who make attending school worthwhile. The most popular courses for these students tend to be the ones which are taught by these teachers.

Clearly, if there is one area in which students show much emotion and anger when discussing unfavourable school experiences, it is the low expectations by some teachers of Black students' abilities. Students explain such low teacher expectations as part of the deeply held beliefs about people who are non-White. In interviews students would cite particular teachers making fun of

students and making students "... feel dumb." Low teacher expectations add to the bitterness that students feel about the negation and devaluing of their experiences, histories and knowledges, as well as the contributions they bring to the school.

14.8 LABELLING AND CATEGORIZATION OF STUDENTS

Students, particularly those born in the Caribbean, complain about the social stereotyping of the Black male as a "trouble-maker," "violent" and "criminal." They blame the media for this. Black female students also believe their male colleagues have it tough within the school system.

Parents are worried about the labelling and social stereotyping of Black youth and the consequences for their success at school. Many are troubled by classifications, including streaming in the school system and what they perceive as the steering of the male youth into sports and music. While most Black parents laud the decision to destream Grade 9, the majority of parents we spoke to wanted to see streaming abolished throughout the school system. Parents also argue that the provincial government should go further and directly involve parents and communities in monitoring students' academic progress. Conversely, the vast majority of teachers were opposed to the concept of destreaming.

Black parents believe in the need for more appropriate standards of measuring students' academic achievement. They generally recognize the value and relevance of standardized testing in mathematics and literary skills. They believe it is essential to know what their children are learning if it is one way to make the schools accountable to their communities and "taxpayers." However, they caution educators and administrators about the importance of ensuring that these standardized tests and measurements are fair, and take into account all relevant facts in the assessment and evaluation of students.

14.9 RACISM, SEXISM AND HOMOPHOBIA IN SCHOOLING: INTER-AND INTRA-GROUP CONFLICTS.

Students generally perceived some teachers and administrative staff as making racially offensive remarks. When asked to elaborate on their assertions, Black students would recall specific incidents. In many cases, students do not complain to school authorities. This creates the impression in the minds of many that the school environment is not seriously poisoned. There is also the failure to distinguish between individual racist acts and institutional racism.

While many teachers cannot directly attest to students' complaints about racist remarks, they nevertheless admit there are some red herrings around and a few point out that the school is not immune to the sentiments of the wider society. In fact, many teachers do not see any problems with articulating a 'colour-blind' approach to school.

Parents point out the existence of self-denial on the part of some authorities when it comes to admitting racism in the schools. Many parents see this as a stumbling block to undertaking proactive anti-racism measures in schools.

Clearly there is considerable sexist and discriminatory behaviour in the schools. Black female students, in particular, point to very offensive language often directed at them. They refer to name-calling and sexist jokes conveyed by their male peers, sometimes through the use of a non-Canadian vernacular/dialect which many school authorities may not easily comprehend. Female teachers interviewed attest to this charge and are frustrated about the problem. Language code switching becomes a powerful tool to engage in sexist and homophobic conduct.

A few Black/African-Canadian students also complain about prejudiced and negative comments from their peers. They speak of the myriad forms of intra-group racism, one which has to do with distancing between self and the other, and between us and them. This discriminatory culture is influenced in large measure by the specificity of students' locations in the school. Language use and the fact of having different and distinctive accents again become powerful markers.

The net effect of the inability of school authorities to deal effectively with these students' perceptions and lived realities is to further alienate the youth from the school system. These students' concerns are also sources of emotional and psychological conflicts and other health distress.

14.10 CULTURE, RACE, IDENTITY AND REPRESENTATION IN SCHOOLING

The issue of Black representation in the school curriculum is fundamental to developing an inclusive school environment. It is no exaggeration to say that Black students and parents are generally critical when discussing their reflections on the Canadian school system, particularly the fact that not all world experiences are represented in classroom instruction, discourse and texts.

At the core of the issue of Black identity is the well-articulated concern that there are gaps in curricular content. Black contribution is not included with enough sophistication and centrality to reassure Black students that their race and the achievements of their forebears are respected.

Black youths talk about the fact that classroom discourses occasionally speak to their lived experiences, the fact of being Black, a Black woman, poor, or any form of a minority living in Canadian society. Students want their schools to reflect the communities in which they live. They want to be taught about their ancestral histories and cultural heritages. They also want a greater connection between what they learn in school and actual lived experiences. Students who perceive a dissonance between their education and their lived experiences are more likely to disengage from the system.

At another level, and additional to these pressures and frustrations with the school system, there is also the constant struggle for Black students to maintain their individual self and group cultural identities. Many times students' actions do come into conflict, even with their peers. This is revealed in students' discourses about "acting white," "what it means to be "Black" or "African," "Black male," "Black female," as well as contestations about who is Black or not Black enough.

Students attribute the struggle to negotiate their individual self and group cultural identities to a very narrow school curriculum. There is some acknowledgement that an event like "Black History Month," while appropriate, is still a piecemeal approach to addressing questions of "inclusivity." The history of Blacks in Canada is discussed largely from the "victim's stance," as in slavery. Few educators highlight the moments and sites of political resistance in the history of enslavement. Furthermore, in the celebratory approach to Black History Month, when exceptional attention is paid to African-Canadian achievements, Black students and parents complain about schools ignoring the centrality of these experiences to Canadian history. It is little wonder that many non-Black students see Black History as being for Black students only.

Many Black youths and parents make a simple connection between the problem of student disengagement and the lack of representation of Black role models in the schools. Students and parents want to see more Black and other minority teachers, guidance counsellors and administrators in the school system. Many Black students and parents see the Black teacher as an important role model, and students in particular speak about the likelihood of such a teacher having a social perspective they could identify with. Parents see a representation of Black teachers as essential in helping students connect and identify with the school. However, a few students and parents are quick to add that having Black teachers would not necessarily make a major difference unless it is accompanied by other fundamental changes in the school system. Although non-Black students and many teachers feel that a teacher's race should not be an issue in education, many nevertheless see it as a good idea to have teachers from different racial backgrounds.

Black/African-Canadian parents and students want Black History and Black Studies to be fully integrated into the schools' curriculum. Teachers see the importance of such studies. Black parents make a connection between learning about one's history and cultural heritage and the eventual academic well-being of students. These parents talk about the importance of rooting students' learning in an appropriate cultural context.

14.11 BLACK-FOCUSED/AFRICAN-CENTRED SCHOOLS

Discussions about the need for Black teachers usually lead to some Black students expressing a desire for "our" school. A few students have said, "We need a Black school." Not all students are in favour of "Black schools"; in fact, a good number of Black students are strongly opposed to the idea. There are ambiguities in students' articulations of what such a school would look like or should be. But there is a basic understanding that the "Black school" would definitely be different from mainstream schools. A critical analysis of students' views on this subject

reveals a yearning for a school with which they can identify, in terms of both the official and the hidden curriculum, including the school culture, classroom pedagogy, learning styles, and the composition of the teaching and administrative staff.

Most Black parents and educators who are aware of a recent call by some community workers and educators for a "Black-focused school" appear to understand and sympathize with the spirit and motivation behind such an advocacy, even though they may disagree, and argue that it will be "segregationist". Black parents are also not unanimous on the merits of such a school. A few even wonder if the idea of a Black-focused school could generate other ideas to feed unfairly on societal stereotypes of Black people.

Generally, non-Black students and teachers are opposed to the idea of Black-focused schools. Most students feel it would be separatist and that all students should try to get along with each other. This, it is argued, is possible if they are together every day. Non-Black students see official sanctioning of a Black-focused school as another "special treatment" for Black students. It is interesting that, in their opposition to a Black-focused school, many non-Black students fall back on stereotypes and social imagery that suggest there is bound to be "trouble" whenever Black youths congregate.

14.12 ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES: THE FAMILY AND THE COMMUNITY

Black youth and parents/guardians do not see the school as the sole source of concern about school disengagement, nor do they see it as the only site for political action and social response. Students understand the importance of the family and, particularly, parental guidance in their schooling. Students also discuss why relationships in their homes may not permit them, sometimes, to seek or receive help with school work from their parents. Some students simply do not want to bother already busy parents or feel their parents would not be able to help, because they (parents/relatives) did not reach the students' educational levels. Others would prefer not to share work with parents in case it gave rise to parental pressure for high academic excellence.

While students understand the structural realities of their parents, they also want parents to take a more proactive engagement in their children's schooling. They do not want parents to wait till problems arise before responding or getting involved. Students feel that parents could help by listening more and by becoming "sounding-boards" to their children as the young people work through their problems.

Unfortunately, for some students there is actually no "home" in the conventional sense of the word. They have been physically and emotionally abused by a parent/guardian/caregiver, or their families have actually disintegrated or have been decimated by the harsh economic realities of today's society.

Black parents know that they have roles and responsibilities in the education of their children. A few parents are critical of their peers, who, they claim, renege on their responsibilities, or are falling into the trap of the materialism and consumerism of contemporary society. Parents point out that regular parental visits to schools can be helpful to the child and to the school. However, they question conventional social definitions of the "family" and a "parent." They argue that conventional definitions have tended to favour and accord powerful voices to certain groups in society. It is these parental voices that are often privileged and highlighted in current debates about school reforms. Parents believe that schools have not reached deeply enough into the local communities to assist parents overcome some of the structural barriers and constraints to meaningful partnerships. They call for a more meaningful partnership, based on respect for the knowledge, ideas, rights and responsibilities of all stakeholders in the educational system.

14.13 PARENTS AS ROLE MODELS

The majority of students see their parents, particularly their mothers, as role models. The role of motherhood and the struggle for education are acknowledged in discourses about why students stay in school. The home is in fact one of the reasons assigned by students for not dropping out (e.g., "My mother would kill me.").

14.14 COMMUNICATION BETWEEN PARENTS AND THE SCHOOL

Parents are concerned about the nature and structure of the communication lines between the school and the home, and point out that the school is not always forthcoming, but is quick to lay blame on parents. This gap in communication is pivotal in that students facing problems cannot be quickly identified and assisted before they fade away from the system.

Many Black/African-Canadian parents are also concerned about the social construction of school violence, and the fact that some in society make it out to be "a Black issue." Most students do not see violence as a major problem in their schools. But they point to the occasional fight or dispute among students as examples of violence. Students claim to feel safe at their school, although many report that they have heard of other schools in the city where violence was more prominent.

14.15 LISTENING TO THE YOUTH AND MAKING PARENTS HEARD

Many of the youth feel that neither society nor the school listens to them and it makes them wonder if people actually care. This is exhibited in their frustrations when asked repeatedly to "speak out" for the sake of academic research. In their minds, much research has brought no fundamental change to their lives, and yet they have been speaking about the problems "for years."

Generally, Black/African-Canadian parents decry what they perceive as the lack of action to address their expressed concerns about the schooling process in Canada. While parents believe there are good intentions out there, some wonder if good intentions alone are enough.

It is conceded that all parties have roles and responsibilities in the educational system. But teachers, students and parents all feel powerless in influencing educational policy and goals. Teachers feel that they are seen to have more power to influence the processes of schooling than is actually the case.

14.16 ISSUES OF LANGUAGE AND RELIGION, PARTICULARLY FOR CONTINENTAL AFRICAN STUDENTS

For students who are immigrants from Africa, particularly those from Somalia and Ethiopia, the issues of language, culture and religion are of utmost concern. These students are anxious to acquire English language skills in order to interact and communicate effectively in Canadian society.

A few students assert that they have good language skills but nevertheless are put into English-as-a-Second Language (ESL) classes because they have non-Canadian accents. Some students from the Caribbean also point to the decision to put them into English Skills Development (ESD) classes because of their speaking skills. A few so-called 'immigrant' students assert they have been held back a grade because of their language skills. For these students, language and accents are sites for discrimination at school.

Muslim students expressed a need for space in their schools to practise their religion, specifically to pray.

14.17 SOCIAL CONCERNS AND LIMITS

The fear of police brutality is a major concern to Black males. This adds to the many things on the minds of students that affect their schooling and education. While Black youths perceive structural impediments to their social success, they nevertheless are optimistic about the future through education and a desire to work hard and overcome any societal barriers and limitations.

15.0 DISCUSSION:

The question is: What is the societal and institutional context in which school disengagement and dropping out occur? Student experiences are, for the most part, the products of ideological conditioning. Dropping out is related to the structure, culture and politics of schooling in our society. To understand this phenomenon, we have to critically explore the intricate linkages between the social and historical forces of institutional power and how these forces intersect with the social differences of race, class, gender, language and culture in the school and society.

The way students behave in school reflects their lived realities. The dynamics of culture, race, ethnicity, and gender influence the way students think and act. The complex personal stories of Black/African-Canadian youth reflect how race, class, gender, and social structure shape the processes and experiences of schooling and dropping out of the system. Among Black youth, dropping out is one of the manifestations of how social difference has an impact on educational outcomes.

The school system as a whole is afflicted with dominant group norms and values, stringent policies and codes of conduct that emphasize student subordination to authority power structures. Powerful economic, political and ideological forces influence the schooling processes of subordinate groups in society relegating them to marginalized social statuses (see also Apple, 1989:207). Mainstream society imposes both positive and negative sanctions to induce patterns of behaviour that support social and economic systems of inequality. The behaviour demanded by the school's social norms sometimes clashes with the behavioural patterns which emerge transpersonally from students who do not identify with the school system.

Some Black students react negatively to the institutional power structures of the school and the rationality of dominance. They employ behavioural tactics that constitute part of a "culture of resistance" which is anti-school. It is not coincidental that many of the students who fade out of school also exhibit what the school system sees as "problem behaviours" (e.g., truancy, acts of delinquency, or even disruptive behaviour). These students perceive the school system as more interested in maintaining authority and discipline than in providing education. In such contexts they are less co-operative with teachers who are disrespectful to them and appear disinterested in their welfare.

Multiple social forces and processes are implicated in Black students disengaging from school. Dropping out is not a single event. Furthermore, no single cause adequately explains the phenomenon of "dropping out" for Black youths. In fact, the experiences of these youths suggest that we cannot simply fit into neat theoretical boxes the contextualized accounts of their off-school experiences, school interactions, and the socio-environmental forces and processes that create students' disempowerment and disengagement in the public school system.

Students' narratives provide us with alternative perspectives on why some youth easily disengage from school. For Black students, the dynamics and intersections of social difference: race, class, gender and culture and language present the additional challenges of schooling and education. Black youths continually struggle in varied ways to negotiate and contest their intersecting marginalities.

While Black parents may have internalized the folk theory of education, the oppositional cultures which Black students engage in may be contradictory to the optimistic view of the school and the occupational futures entertained by adults (see Klugel and Smith, 1986; Ogbu 1978; Solomon 1992:94). To many Black youths and school "dropouts," the idea of leaving the school system

must be reconceptualized from the marginalized resistance viewpoint, as well as from the point of view of an incessant struggle to identify with mainstream public schooling.

Black youths who disengage from school are questioning how teaching, learning and administration of education take place in the public school system. They are questioning what and how teaching materials are chosen, who makes the decisions, who is included, whose experiences count, who is teaching students, how and why? Black youths have developed alternative sites of learning and engaging the world, outside the confines of the public school. By talking to the students themselves and understanding their forms of resistance to public schooling, we are able to move away from pathologizing 'resistance' itself, and to engage the public school system from students' points of view, that is, the standpoint of the schools' clientele.

Black youths' narratives suggest the need for alternative teaching and learning practices in the schools as a possible solution to the problem of students' marginality in the schools. Students' narratives also acknowledge the pedagogic need to confront the challenge of diversity and difference in Canadian society and the urgency for an educational system that is more inclusive and is capable of responding to minority concerns about public schooling.

Our research findings question pathological explanations of the Black "family" or "home environment" as a source of the "problems" that Black youths face in the schools. Such explanations only serve to divert attention away from a critical analysis of the institutional structures within which the delivery of education takes place in the schools. The family/home is important for youth education. But we should be able to make a distinction between asking families to take on their responsibilities and blaming families for the failure of the system.

The study challenges some commonly held ideas about the schooling of Black students. It problematizes psychological and pathologizing explanations of "a lack of self-esteem" as a major problem facing many Black youths. The study also questions conceptualizations of the "at-risk" student. It is a form of social labelling that some students may find difficult to shed as they are consigned to a social category of low academic expectations. The "dropout" or the "disaffected student" is not a "problem" child. In fact, he or she has a clear sense of direction and understanding of society. "Dropping out" is a very traumatic experience for students. It is not something they "enjoy." It is the last resort when many things appear to have failed the student.

The study also challenges the myth that somehow all "dropouts" and "disaffected students" are irresponsible. When questioned as to what their roles and responsibilities are, as students in their schools, students expressed a sense of being responsible for improving themselves, helping others to improve and being allowed to contribute to the improvement of the school atmosphere and spirit. Finally, the study reveals the pressure to assimilate to the majority school culture as a pre-condition to school success for many students.

16.0 POLICY IMPLICATIONS

Canadians today have different, and sometimes conflicting, expectations of the public school system. Students do not share similar concerns and they do not have the same voices. In order to address the challenge of making the educational system serve the needs of an increasingly diverse, multi-ethnic community, educators and policy-makers should pay particular attention to the multiplicity of voices and concerns emanating from those "under the sink."

The narrative discourses of Black/African-Canadian students and parents reveal deep concerns about the structural processes of schooling that tend to engage some students, while disengaging others. The problem of Black students' disengagement from school cannot simply be laid at the doorstep of the home (i.e., parents) without a critical examination of the structures within which the learning, teaching and administration of education take place in our schools.

Students' expressed concerns have far-reaching policy implications. Effective measures should be devised to deal with the structural conditions of schooling that may discriminate against or disempower minority students.

Education must equip every student to deal with the issues of global and national economic restructuring, a redefinition of the rights and responsibilities of citizenship, the paradox of conflicting social and moral values.

There is need for a critical evaluation of the relationship of parental involvement to students' school success. Student learning must be grounded in an appropriate cultural context. For example, teaching students their ancestral culture and history, beginning in the home and then continuing into the schools, is relevant to the eventual educational success of the students.

The educational challenge for us all is to move beyond the parochial and often circumscribed concerns for our own children to a larger concern in the interest of the common good. Educational reforms must be informed by the common good of society. It is this conviction that leads to a proposition for a new vision of education that places the idea of the community and social responsibility at the centre of public schooling in Canada. While individual rights are important, we also think the insistence of rights should be matched with a strong sense of social responsibility. Introducing the notion of responsibility into public schooling allows for the necessary connections to be struck between groups and individuals. It also calls for subordinating individual interests and wishes in favour of the common good.

The vision of public schooling for the future is one in which there will be many recognized, legitimate shareholders. Students should be able to own and control their own knowledges at school so that their contributions will be valued, and they will feel that their self-worth is beyond reproach. Teachers' knowledge and expertise must be valued and shared. Parents, on the other hand, have to be part of the running of the schools, based on a recognition that parents and

community workers have a great deal to offer within the school itself, and not simply in the home and youth agencies.

It is important for educational policy-makers to understand and evaluate the differences between school perspectives and expectations and those of the minority communities. An alternative vision of education for the future is to develop a school system which would recognize the legitimacy of all knowledge and see the existence of a multiplicity of perspectives about our social world as fundamental to the understanding of our humanity. There must be some recognition of the many and diverse talents that exist in our varied communities and we should be prepared to tap the wealth of expertise to serve the cause of social justice and equity in education.

We must improve the channels and forms of communication between schools and communities. This will be feasible only if we do not delegitimize the knowledge and experience that every stakeholder in the educational process brings to the table. Students, teachers, parents, community workers and school staff should all feel part of a "community of schooling," in which each is accountable to the other.

Learning and education must be an emotionally felt experience for the youth. We need to pay attention to the spiritual and psychological aspects of teaching.

A new vision of public education has to recognize that the issues of academic excellence and quality education cannot be tackled without a simultaneous emphasis on educational access and social equity for ethno-cultural minorities. This is an important way to ensure that excellence is not only accessible but equitable to/for all students. There must be a commitment on the part of administrators and public officials to finance the cost of educational reforms that address the issues of educational inequities in the system. There is a social and economic cost to every form of educational inequity.

We should also explore ways to effect school reforms which would simply require effort on the part of educators, with no financial cost.

We must have a new vision of schooling for the future, in which diverse and different criteria/measurements are in place for assessing our students. All stakeholders must be part of a process to devise a more comprehensive approach to evaluate and assess our students. The task should not be left to the schools alone. Teachers, parents and community workers must be involved, and in partnership with students. This is in keeping with a new vision of schooling that seeks to break down the thick walls of the schools and de-mystify the false separation between the home, the school and the community.

Strategies to address Black youths' concerns/experiences in the schools would have to include both short-term and long-term intervention measures. These strategies must refer to and implicate both the stipulated practices and procedures governing the delivery of education, as well

as the unwritten practices and procedures that influence student activities, behaviours, perceptions and outcomes (e.g., school calendars, celebrations, food services, assemblies, concerts, athletics, bulletins, hallway displays) (see Mukherjee and Thomas, n.d.:7). As Bhyat (1993) also points out, the latter constitute the things that give a school its character, and which present students with the values and standards of the school. We must also have effective strategies in place for resolving conflicts at school.

A new curriculum should be devised, aimed at providing students with group learning skills, cooperation and group bonding, and the skills and ability to identify and solve social problems. The curriculum must allow students to set priorities for their own learning. It should be adaptable to the local environment and the interests and activities of students. The emphasis should also be on "curriculum mastery," rather than sheer "academic excellence." There is a need for a redefinition of educational practices of "inclusion" to vigorously promote the school success of Black and minority students as well as students from working-class backgrounds.

17.0 RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings of this research project, we are able to make several recommendations to the Ontario Ministry of Education and Training. Some of the following recommendations pertain more specifically to responsibilities which should be taken up by individual boards of education and schools, however, we see the MET as responsible for guaranteeing these changes through policy development and initiatives at the ministerial level. We acknowledge that some schools/boards of education may already be implementing a few of these recommendations.

17.1 STUDENT DISENGAGEMENT/SCHOOL DROPOUTS

17.1.1 Re-entry Programs in Some Selected Schools to Help Fade-outs/Dropouts Return to School

Re-entry programs should be designed to reintegrate students into the regular program. They should establish a certain time-frame for students to be integrated into the regular school program and focus on *why* individual students have dropped/faded out to avoid this from recurring. Counselling, focusing on these particular needs, must be available to students re-entering the school system.

17.1.2 Stringent Tracking Systems Based on Attendance in All Schools

Students not attending class on a regular basis need to be flagged by classroom teachers and reported to guidance counsellors or school administration. A set of procedures for following up with students demonstrating problems with truancy must be established with positive measures for encouraging students to attend. Suspension is not considered a positive strategy in this case. School procedures should include counselling to provide students with understanding and workable solutions for attending school.

17.1.3 Measures to Ensure Accessibility and Relevance of Guidance Counsellors

There is a need to clearly articulate the role of guidance counsellors in the school and create defined practices for familiarizing students with the role of guidance counsellors and making counsellors accessible to students. A revised role for guidance counsellors should involve a team approach such that they are also trained in life management, education and planning, and work and employment counselling in order to respond to the varied needs of the students. Counselling must be made relevant to all students, and not take on particular standards according to race, gender or class.

17.1.4 "Bridge Programs" for Transition Years

The MET should commit funds to help schools institute "bridge programs" for students in the transition from elementary to high school. These programs should involve a group of teachers and students from feeder school to set up student mentors for the incoming elementary students. Meetings should occur throughout the Grade Eight year. Grade Eight students, accompanied by their mentors, should meet their future teachers, administration and guidance counsellors and be familiarized with the expectations, routines and processes of the high school.

17.1.5 Study Centres, Remedial Programs and Recruitment Strategy of Teaching Assistants

Study centres should be established where students could get tutorial help with their homework after school hours. Unemployed teachers and teachers with foreign credentials could be hired at these centres. As well, voluntary parental involvement should be explored as an important resource. Tutorial sessions of this sort could be organized by department heads, where such help is offered to students by subject and grade level or simply by topic. Every school should provide remedial programs outside of class hours and should attempt to create flexible hours to meet the needs of students who have other responsibilities and/or limited timetables. Schools should create an awards system or an incentive program to encourage students' participation in these programs.

17.1.6 Community Mentoring Partnerships

Tutoring and mentoring programs should be established in all schools to pair Black youths with mentors from the community who would assist them in setting academic and career goals. There is a need to create partnerships with existing mentoring programs such as "Each One Teach One", to create an in-school mentoring program with volunteer mentors from the community

17.1.7 Apprenticeship/Trainee Programs

Apprenticeship/trainee programs should be made available in <u>all</u> schools to provide students with hands-on skills that reflect future job skills.

17.1.8 Shelters/Co-Op Residences for Students

The MET should work in cooperation with the appropriate government bodies and agencies of social services to establish community shelters or co-op residences as boarding houses for high-school students who are experiencing problems at home. Within the schools, guidance counsellors should be made aware of local community shelters and co-op residences in order to refer students to such facilities if students are unable to live with their parents or in their present living arrangements.

17.1.9 Career-School Linkages: Guest Speakers

Each school should provide students with a guest speaker series, allowing various professionals to talk to students about career options. Boards would be expected to organize a committee to establish a list of guest speakers that could rotate through the schools in various areas. Guest speakers should reflect the student population and represent different cultural groups.

17.1.10 Means to Dismantle School Hierarchies

Teachers, administration and staff should be encouraged to engage with students, for example, in sporting, entertainment, academic contests and events, in an effort to break down the current rigid hierarchical power structures.

17.1.11 "Positive Peer Culture" Program

Each school should be required to institute a "positive-peer-culture" program which would pair students who are experiencing academic problems with academically successful students.

17.1.12 Scholarship and Monthly Award Events

Schools should institute yearly scholarships and monthly award events to recognize and honour the varied achievements of students (e.g. civic/community responsibility, community service, school attendance, academic achievement).

17.1.13 Flexibility as a School Policy

Flexible class schedules that would allow adult students to combine school with community service and employment are needed by students in the school system who face various and changing demands on their time and ability to participate in school life.

17.1.14 Commitment to Summer Job Placement Program

There is a need to expand the MET's commitment to the summer job placement program to provide for every high-school student. As part of the jobs program, students could provide

community service and have it count towards the completion of their high-school programs. The program could be a form of "provincial service" and would provide effective use of the summer holidays. Guidance counsellors could set up job fairs, advertise job postings in addition to keeping track of those students who are in need of employment and those who are employed.

17.1.15 Commitment to Youth Counselling Services

Government funding for off-school youth counselling services needs to be extended. Counselling services off-school should be made available at local community centres. There should also be an alliance between schools and certain community services so that students could be directed to such services or book their own appointments through the school and guidance counsellor, who could match students to particular counsellors to deal with needs which the school cannot meet.

17.1.16 Commitment to Levelling the Playing Field

The MET should expand funding and resources to schools with a high percentage of working-class and racial/ethnic minority students.

17.1.17 Advisory Committee of Black Learners

An Advisory Committee of Black Learners should be established to assist schools in developing pedagogical strategies and curricular resources for educating Black youth.

17.2 EDUCATIONAL COMPLAINTS

17.2.1 Position of Ombudsperson for the Education System

The position of ombudsperson for the education system would serve to investigate public complaints about the educational system. Such a person should be given the power to investigate matters of concern and would report directly to the provincial Minister of Education.

17.2.2 Position of Ombudsperson for Each School Area

The position of ombudsperson in each school area would serve to hear grievances from students with regard to racism and human rights abuses. The ombudsperson would report directly to the MET.

17.2.3 Position of Anti-Racism Coordinator/Equity Officer

The position of anti-racism co-ordinator/equity officer would be given a broad mandate to examine complaints of racism and other forms of harassment and discrimination in schools. This individual would report directly to the director.

17.2.4 Open Forums in Each School for Students to Discuss Concerns

Each school should be required to institute regular open forums to allow students the opportunity to discuss their concerns with school staff, administrators, and parent groups. These concerns should be recorded and a plan of action should be developed to address them. The student concerns, along with the plan of action, should be distributed to the community/parents and the director.

17.2.5 Complaint and Suggestion Boxes in Schools

Each school should be required to provide a complaints and suggestion box so that students can anonymously submit their complaints about school staff and practices, as well as ideas on how to improve the school. Student councils, in cooperation with a school equity officer, could be delegated the task of reviewing these suggestions and bringing them to the attention of school authorities, with an agreed-upon system of follow-up.

17.2.6 Outreach Programs

Schools should receive support from the MET in creating outreach programs to link schools with parents (e.g. home visits, regular telephone calls).

17.3 ACCOUNTABILITY AND GOVERNANCE

17.3.1 Peer Evaluation and Self-Evaluation

Boards of education should be required to institute measures to promote peer evaluation and self-evaluation among students and teachers.

17.3.2 Clearly Defined School Policies and Practices

Boards of Education should be required to devise clearly defined and well-publicized school procedures so that parents and students can give their input and opinions on teachers and school practices.

17.3.3 Commitment to Involving Students in the Decision-Making Process

Schools should be required to develop and institute mechanisms to consult students on all matters affecting student welfare. Schools should also develop guidelines to increase the responsibilities and role of student councils in meaningful decision-making processes (e.g., hiring of teachers, development of new courses).

17.3.4 Commitment to Involving Parents in the Schools

Schools should take concrete steps to involving parents in the decision making processes and general running of the schools. There is a need for the creation of space to allow parents input in the schools (e.g., representation in hiring of teachers, school policy development). Schools should be required to allocate a space for use by parents, patterned after teacher/staff common rooms.

17.4 REPRESENTATION AND ANTI-RACISM INITIATIVES

17.4.1 Equity Action Plans and Policies for School Boards

School boards should be directed to provide equity action plans with policies that would ensure that Black educators and other minorities are fairly represented in teaching and administrative positions. The appointment of qualified Black and minority teachers should be given high priority by MET and the school boards to supplement the implementation of anti-racist educational policies in the schools.

17.4.2 Race Relations and Anti-Racism Education Training

Race relations and Anti-Racism Education (A.R.E) training must be identified as a priority. Funding must be available for teacher-training, support material and resources for teacher training in addition to support material and resources for teachers.

17.4.3 Guidelines for Broader Input Into School Hiring Processes

School guidelines for hiring procedures should be established to allow students, parents and community input into teacher/staff hiring processes.

17.4.4 Courses on Race and Anti-Racism for Students

It should be a priority that all high schools offer required courses on race and anti-racism studies.

17.4.5 Anti-Racism, Anti-Sexism and Anti-Classism Courses in Faculties of Education

Faculties of education should be required to offer courses in anti-racism, anti-sexism and anti-classism education. The programs should focus on all aspects of the formal, hidden and deep curriculum in addition to examining teacher expectations and how this can thwart or encourage the educational opportunities of their students.

17.4.6 Recruitment of Black and Other Minority Candidates at Faculties of Education

Faculties of education should be required to actively recruit Black and other minority candidates, taking into account both their academic and community experiences.

17.4.7 Linkages Between Faculties of Education and Local Boards

Faculties of education should work with local boards to provide training to teacher candidates and to ensure the revision of past and present classroom practices with regards to A.R.E.

17.4.8 In-Service Training in Anti-Racism and Equity Issues

In-service training in anti-racism and equity issues should be provided for all trustees, teachers and administrative staff. An annual report of professional development activities must be submitted to the MET by each school board. Such training would include all facets of the formal, hidden and deep curriculum so that trustees, teachers and administrators develop a true understanding and awareness of racial and social issues. This training should reflect what participants already know about race and take them to a more advanced understanding of race and the political and social construction of race in our society, so that the participants can make A.R.E a true part of the pedagogy of the school. Where possible, the community should also be involved in A.R.E. training of educators, administrators and trustees. Those involved in training educators in the principles and practices of A.R.E. and race relations must have the appropriate background, knowledge and/or certification in A.R.E. and race relations training in order to provide sufficient support in these areas.

17.4.9 Consultative Program Development

The MET should assist boards of education in providing release time for school department heads and other staff to work with a select group of students and parents on program development for their schools.

17.4.10 Anti-Racism and Race Relations Committees in Each Board

Boards of Education should ensure that schools develop a committee to study the area of race relations and create dialogue about race issues in the school. This committee should also provide an annual report to the director on the status of race relations in the school.

17.4.11 Compulsory Inclusive Canadian History Course

A compulsory Canadian History course, which would include a variety of peoples' contributions to the building of Canadian society, should be developed.

17.5 DISAGGREGATING SCHOOL DATA BY RACE

17.5.1 Databases for the Study of Student Participation, Experience and Progress

School boards should be directed to establish databases which would facilitate a study of participation, progress and other academic experiences of students by race, gender, culture and linguistic group. This is intended to establish accountability of boards to their constituents. Steps must be taken to ensure that such information is not used for purposes other than to promote student learning. There must be procedures set up to ensure that any violations of confidentiality and misuse of such information do not occur without penalty.

17.5.2 Confidentiality of School Records

All schools should be required to keep their student-record database confidential, to be released only to parents and those researchers whose projects have been approved by the board of education.

17.6 MULTICENTRIC CURRICULAR CONTENT

17.6.1 African-Centred Curriculum

Canadian educators, well-versed in Black education, should be actively commissioned to develop an African-centred curriculum for incorporation into the school curriculum. The focus should be on affirming the centrality of African-Canadian experiences to Canadian history, culture and development.

17.6.2 Promotion of Local Community Knowledge

Local community knowledge should be actively promoted as part of the process of integrating Black Studies into the school curriculum.

17.6.3 Resources for Studying Community Contributions

Resources should be made available for isolating and studying specific community practices and responses that influence and promote school performance of students.

17.7 BLACK-FOCUSED/AFRICAN-CENTRED SCHOOLS

17.7.1 Action Plan for Alternative Educational Environments

The MET should take concrete action towards the establishment of alternative educational environments for those Black students who would opt for or benefit from such arrangements.

17.7.2 Action Plan Responding to the Proposal by the "African-Canadian Community Working Group"

There is a need for the MET to act on the proposal by the "African-Canadian Community Working Group" which suggests that one predominantly Black junior high school should be set up in each of the six Metropolitan Toronto municipalities. The emphasis should be on how best to serve the educational interests of students. This goal can first be approached as a pilot scheme for a Black-focused institution with particular (but not exclusive) emphasis on Black Studies.

17.7.3 Black-Focused Schools as Enrichment Programs

Plans for Black-focused schools should also include the use of these facilities as an enrichment program for both Black and non-Black students and teachers. There should be mechanisms in place to ensure connections are made between African-centred schools and mainstream schools.

17.7.4 Community Consultation

There is a need to proceed with Black community consultations, stressing the importance of choice and control to parents and students.

17.7.5 Program of Support for Community Curriculum Development

The requisite tools should be provided to assist local communities develop their own curriculum, and to explore how this curriculum could fit into the school system.

18.0 DIRECTIONS FOR FUTURE STUDY AND RESEARCH.

18.1 BEST PRACTICES OF INCLUSIVE SCHOOLING

Future research should be directed to the investigation of exemplary/innovative strategies of inclusive schooling. For example, the examination of "best practices" of schooling in selected schools and local communities, that is, strategies (both in and out of the classroom) which make for genuine inclusion of all students by addressing equity issues and promoting successful learning outcomes, especially for students of racial/ethnic minority and working-class backgrounds.

18.2 EXAMINATION OF MOTIVATIONAL STRATEGIES

In-depth studies of how teachers have motivated Black/African-Canadian students to do well in other educational and recreational endeavours (e.g., sports and athletics) with the view of learning from these strategies.

APPENDIX 1

SOCIO-DEMOGRAPHIC PROFILES

Introduction:

In the following profiles we attempt to examine the salient socio-demographic characteristics of students lost to the educational system. Specifically, we look at all of the students who left four Toronto schools during the September 1992-June 1993 academic year. As these schools do not keep data by race the information is a composite of student demographics who left school during the academic year, prior to completion. We have designated the four schools profiles One, Two, Three and Four. The two school boards that participated in this study are also referred to as Boards A and B. Profiles One and Two were taken from Board A and Profiles Three and Four from Board B. The data presented here were taken from information collected either by independent tabulators commissioned by one of the boards of education, as is the case with Board B, or by the school administrators themselves.

In two schools, from Board A, we were given student data cards that contained a snapshot of information. It is a summary of these data cards which is shown in two of the profiles to follow. How often the data cards were taken from the "drop-out" files to the "in-school" files or at what point this was done we are unsure. This leads us to speculate that at any given time the number of drop-outs is likely to change. Students who attend sporadically in the course of the year and eliminate classes periodically pose difficult problems for administrators and researchers trying to determine "in-school" students from "drop-outs". This is perhaps part of the reality of drop-out students. As research with credit accumulation is beginning to show, students who leave school begin to fall behind early in their academic career. It is also this reality which gives significance and meaning to the term "fading out".

Perhaps one of the most consistent critiques from researchers who have worked with data from Metropolitan school boards is the contentious question of what constitutes a "dropout". For example, students who change schools versus students who leave schools are often not differentiated, both being considered "no-shows" until such time as their correct status is determined. Similarly, some students who complete their Ontario Secondary School Diploma (OSSD) and who go on to continue at the Ontario Academic Credit (OAC) level are also included in the file of "dropouts"; yet, many studies would categorize these same students, having completed their OSSD, as graduates. We noted that some students born in the Caribbean listed their language spoken at home as patois and some students from the same country listed their language as English. This type of codification renders the verification of a student's status and characteristics problematic. Apart from the problems of definition and student-tracking, there have been legitimate concerns around statistics and race.

While there is always the potential for data to be used to support "negative" ends (eg. stereotyping) or a particular agenda, there is also a clear need to obtain information to help make educational institutions more responsive to the diverse needs of its student population. In order to eradicate areas of inequality and marginalization, we must gauge the nature and severity of problems within these institutions. Of course, students will inevitably have different school experiences; however, these experiences should not be damaging socially, psychologically or intellectually. Statistics of dropouts and statistics by race are ways to monitor the different experiences of student populations. It aids in our ability to analyze the treatment of groups and to recommend ways to improve the outcomes of their educational years.

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* This appendix was compiled by Bobby Blanford and George Dei

Academic Year: September 1992-June 1993
Socio-Demographic Profile One

Summary

- Total School Population: 775
- Total Females: 331
- Total Males: 474
- Annual Dropout Rate: 13%

Gender

- In Board A the distribution of gender according to Interface October 1992 was 52% male and 48% female.
- The gender distribution for the total school population of this profile was 60% male and 40% female.
- Of the students who left school, 60% were male and 40% were female.

Age

- The mean age of students leaving school was 18.
- Comparisons with students under the age of sixteen was not available.
- Of the 142 students aged sixteen, 5% dropped out.
- Of the 141 students aged seventeen, 16% dropped out.
- Of the 120 students aged eighteen, 23% dropped out.
- Of the 79 students aged nineteen, 20% dropped out.
- Of the 26 students aged twenty, 50% dropped out.

Family Status

- 42% of dropouts resided with both parents.
- 28% of dropouts resided in a female-headed household.
- 4% of dropouts resided in a male-headed household.
- 3% of dropouts resided with a legal guardian.
- 14% of dropouts resided in settings described as "Other".
- Missing information = 9%

Region of Birth for Dropouts

- 57% of the dropouts were born in Canada. The next largest regions were the Caribbean and Asia.

Years in Canada

- 9% of the dropouts had been in Canada 2 years or less.
- 14% had been in Canada between 2 to 5 years.
- 6% had been in Canada up to 13 years.
- 3% had been in Canada up to 18 years.
- 10% of the information was missing on student years in Canada.

Language

- For 65% of the dropouts English was the primary language spoken at home.
- Italian was the next most common language at 6%.

Reasons for "Leaving" School

- 79% of dropouts left to enter the workforce.
- 5% were completing school at night or through correspondence.
- 4% were labelled as having dropped out due to illness or non-attendence.
- 2% were pregnant.
- 10% of the information was missing.

Socio-Demographic Profile Two

Summary

- Total School Population: 590
- Total Females: 275
- Total Males: 315
- Annual Dropout Rate: 12%

Gender

- The gender distribution for the total school population in this profile was 47% male and 53% female.
- Of the students who left school, 64% were male and 36% were female.

Age

- The mean age of students leaving school was 18.
- Of the 180 students under sixteen, less than 2% dropped out.
- Of the 116 students aged sixteen, 7% dropped out.
- Of the 107 students aged seventeen, 16% dropped out.
- Of the 76 students aged eighteen, 16% dropped out.
- 22% of nineteen year old students dropped out.
- 40% of the twenty year old students dropped out.

Family Status

- 48% of dropouts resided with both parents.
- 23% of dropouts resided in a female-headed household.
- 6% of dropouts resided in a male-headed household.
- 3% of dropouts resided with a legal guardian.
- 20% of dropouts resided in a setting described as "Other".

Region of Birth of Dropouts

- 47% of the dropouts were born in Canada. The next largest regions were Central and South America at 21%, Asia at 16% and Europe at 10%.

Years in Canada

- 22% of the dropouts had been in Canada 2 years or less.
- 18% had been in Canada up to 5 years.
- 6% had been in Canada up to 9 years.
- 10% had been in Canada up to 18 years.

Language

- For 56% of the dropouts, English was the primary language spoken at home. • Urdu and Italian were the next most common languages at 23% and 15%, respectively.

Reasons for "Leaving" School

- 23% of the dropouts left to enter the workforce.
- 29% left for a variety of reasons such as to complete school at night or by correspondence.
- 22% were labelled as having dropped out due to non-attendance.
- 17% were "no-shows", "out of the country" or were out due to illness.
- 9% of the information was missing.

Socio-Demographic Profile Three

Summary

- Total School Population: 1013
- Total Females: 341
- Total Males: 672
- Annual Dropout Rate: 15.4%

Gender

- In Board B, the distribution of gender according to the 1991 Every Secondary Student Survey was 53% male and 47% female.
- The gender distribution for the total school population in this profile was 66.4% male and 33.6% female.
- Of the students who left school, 65.4% were male and 34.6% were female.

Age

- The mean age of students leaving school was 17.4.
- Of the 263 students under the age of sixteen, 6% dropped out.
- Of the 202 students aged sixteen, 16% dropped out.
- Of the 215 students aged seventeen, 8% dropped out.
- Of the 183 students aged eighteen, 23% dropped out.
- Of the 150 students aged nineteen, 30% dropped out.

Family Status

- 43% of the dropouts resided with both parents.
- 22% of the dropouts resided in a female-headed household.
- 10% of the dropouts resided in a male-headed household.
- 24% of the dropouts resided with a legal guardian or in a setting described as "Other".
- 5.8% of the information was missing.

Region of Birth of Dropouts

- 11% of the dropouts were born in Canada. Four regions had an even more significant proportion: Europe at 27%, Asia at 22%, the Caribbean at 15% and Central and South America at 13%.

Years in Canada

- 40% of the dropouts had been in Canada for 2 years or less.
- 22% of the dropouts had been in Canada for 3-5 years.
- 29% of the dropouts had been in Canada for more than 5 years.

Language

- For 45.6% of the dropouts, English was the primary language spoken at home.
- Portuguese was the next most common language at 11.4%.

Reasons for "Leaving" School

- 29% of the dropouts had left to enter the workforce.
- 25% of the dropouts had stated that they were "tired of school".
- 15% of the dropouts had reached adult age (18+ years).
- 5% were classified as "no shows" or left because of health.

Socio-Demographic Profile Four

Summary

- Total School Population: 1116
- Total Females: 585
- Total Males: 531
- Annual Dropout Rate: 4%

Gender

- The gender distribution for the total school population in this profile was 48% male and 52% female.
- Of the students who left school, 41% were male and 60% were female.

Age

- The mean age of students leaving school was 17.35.
- Of the 390 students under the age of sixteen, less than 1% dropped out.
- Of the 246 students aged sixteen, 1.2% dropped out.
- Of the 242 students aged seventeen, 5% dropped out.
- Of the 186 students aged eighteen, 11.6% dropped out.
- Of the 52 students aged nineteen, 5.8% dropped out.

Family Status

- 43% of the dropouts resided with both parents.
- 24% of the dropouts resided in a female-headed household.
- 8% of the dropouts resided in a male-headed household.
- 18.9% of the dropouts resided with a legal guardian or in settings described as "Other".
- 6% of the information was missing.

Region of Birth

- 24% of the dropouts were born in Canada. Two similarly large regions were Europe at 24% and the Caribbean at 28%.

Years in Canada

- 31% of the dropouts had been in Canada for 2 years or less.
- 46% of the dropouts had been in Canada for 5 years.
- 23% of the dropouts had been in Canada for more than 5 years.

Language

- For 69% of the dropouts, English was the primary language spoken at home.
- Portuguese was the next most common language at 16%.

Reasons for "Leaving" School

- 92% of the dropouts left to enter the workforce.
- 8% were equally distributed among categories such as "tired of school", "no show" and "reached adult age (18+)".

APPENDIX II

LETTER OF INFORMED CONSENT

Dear Sir/Madam:

I am a Professor in the Department of Sociology at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education. I am conducting a study about black student experiences in the Ontario Public school system. Your child could be among a group of at least 40 students that I would like to include in this study.

My intent is to hear from the students themselves about their school problems and experiences. I am likely to ask students questions about what they see as contributing to the problem of dropout in the schools, and how they want the problem to be addressed. During the course of the study I will also be observing school and classroom interactions that your child engages in. The interview itself will take about one hour per student and another hour for the group. I will ensure a minimal disruption in the normal daily activity of your child.

With your permission the interviews will be taped and transcribed. At any time I will turn off the tape recorder to respect the participant's wishes or that of his/her guardian. The identity of any participant will remain confidential. Participants can withdraw from the study at any time. Confidential tapes and transcripts will be kept in a locked filing cabinet.

Thank you for considering this request for your child's participation in this project. If you agree that s/he should be part of the study, please read and sign the attached letter. If you would like to receive more information about the study, please contact me at office: (416) 923-6641, ext. 2513; or home: (416) 539-8551.

Sincerely,

George J. Sefa Dei, Ph.D.
Assistant Professor

Professor George J. Sefa Dei
Department of Sociology in Education
Ontario Institute for Studies in Education
252 Bloor Street West
Toronto, Ontario
M5S 1V6.

Dear George :

Re: The Study of Black Students' Experiences

I have read the attached letter describing the research project you plan to undertake, and I agree to allow my child to become a participant. It is clear to me that s/he is free to withdraw from the study at any time.

DATE **SIGNATURE**

_____ _____

Student Name:_____

APPENDIX III

SURVEY QUESTIONS (BLACK/AFRICAN-CANADIAN STUDENTS)

Note: You may choose not to answer any of the following questions.

1. Name _____
2. Gender _____male/female
3. Age or Date of Birth _____
4. Were you born in Canada? _____Yes/No
5. If not born in Canada, where? _____
6. When did you come to Canada? _____
7. What languages do you speak other than English?_____
8. Which school do you attend?_____ What grade are you in ?_____
9. Are you in **general/basic/advanced** level program?_____
10. How long have you been going to your present school? _____
11. If you have brothers or sisters attending school what grades are they in? _____(brothers) _____(sisters)
12. What work do your parents do?_____
13. Do you live at home with both of your parents?_____Yes/No
14. Do your parents help with your schoolwork/assignment?_____Yes/No
15. Do you have any input in decision-making at your school? _____Yes/No
16. Has the school done enough to make attending school a worthwhile experience for you? _____ Yes/No
17. Does the school discuss with students the consequences of dropping out? _____Yes/No
18. Do you know anyone who has dropped out of school? _____Yes/No
19. Have you ever considered leaving school? _____Yes/No
20. Would you say that you are treated fairly at school by the authorities? _____Yes/No

APPENDIX IV

INTERVIEW GUIDE FOR BLACK/AFRICAN-CANADIAN STUDENTS:

For an in-depth, open interview we probed students' responses to some of the following pilot-tested questions:

1. When you hear the phrase 'school dropout' what does it mean to you?
2. Can you think of any reasons why people drop out of school?
3. Have you contemplated dropping out of school? If yes, why?
4. Did you discuss your intentions with someone?
5. Why did you decide to stick around and stay?
6. What do you like the most about going to school?
7. What do you dislike about your school (if any)?
8. Who is your favourite teacher and why?
9. Who do you discuss any problems you have at school with?
10. Do you think your experiences at school would be different if you were male/female?
11. Do you think your experiences at school would be different if you came from a wealthy/poor family?
12. Do you think your experiences at school would be different if you were White?
13. Please describe the ways you are able to express who you are while at school?
14. What school activities are you involved in?
15. Who are your best friends at school?
16. Who do you look up to in society and why?
17. What are your future aspirations in life?
18. How do you hope to accomplish these goals?
19. Do you think that you can still accomplish these goals if you were to drop out of school?
20. What do you think about those who drop out of school?
21. Tell me about what your school has been doing to encourage you and other students to stay in school?

22. In what ways could school be made more interesting for students so they will be more likely to finish rather than dropping out?
23. What do you know about the roles and responsibilities of your school's guidance counsellors?
24. How often do you see a guidance counsellor?
25. How often do you see the school principal?
26. What are your roles and responsibilities as a student in your school?
27. How do you contribute to the decisions that affect your life at school?
28. Tell me about your most pleasant experience at school.
29. Tell me about the most unpleasant experience at school
30. To what do you attribute some of the bad experiences you have recounted to me?
31. If you were given a magic wand to change something at your school, what would that be?
32. How do your parent(s) help with your school work/assignments?
33. What do you think parents can do to prevent students from dropping out of school?
34. Do you see any role for the business community in helping students stay in school?
35. What do you want to see the government do about the dropout problem in the schools?
36. As a black youth living in Toronto, what four things worry you the most?
37. How hopeful are you that these concerns/worries will be resolved?

APPENDIX V

FOCUS GROUP INTERVIEWS WITH BLACK/AFRICAN-CANADIAN YOUTH

INTERVIEW GUIDE

1. What are your views about the Black male(s)/female(s) at your school?
2. What are your views about the Black male/female in today's society?
3. Describe any Black male/female inter-relations that you are aware of at school.
4. Describe any Black male/female intra-relations at school you are aware of (i.e., social relations with others of same gender).
5. Do you think your experiences at school would be different if you were male/female?
6. What is your understanding of sexism in the school?
7. What are your views about an all-Black male/female school?
8. What are your views about a Black-focused school?
9. Who do you discuss any problems you have at school with?
10. Describe the ways you are able to express who you are while at school?
11. What school activities are you involved in?
12. Who are your best friends at school?
13. Who do you look up to in society and why?
14. What are your future aspirations in life?
15. How do you hope to accomplish these goals?
16. As a Black male/female in today's society what are your greatest concerns or worries?
17. In what ways could school be made more interesting for students so they will be more likely to finish rather than dropping out?

APPENDIX VI

SURVEY QUESTIONS (NON-BLACK STUDENTS)

Note: You may choose not to answer any of the following questions.

1. Name _____
2. Gender _____male/female
3. Age or Date of Birth _____
4. Were you born in Canada? _____Yes/No
5. If not born in Canada, where? _____
6. When did you come to Canada? _____
7. What languages do you speak other than English?_____
8. Which school do you attend?_____ And what grade are you in?_____
9. Are you in **general/basic/advanced** level program?_____
10. How long have you been going to your present school? _____
11. If you have brothers or sisters attending school what grades are they in? _____(brothers) _____(sisters)
12. What work do your parents do?_____
13. Do you live at home with both of your parents?_____Yes/No
14. Do your parents help with your school work/assignment?_____Yes/No
15. Do you have any input in decision-making at your school? _____Yes/No
16. Has the school done enough to make attending school a worthwhile experience for you? _____ Yes/No
17. Does the school discuss with students the consequences of dropping out? _____Yes/No
18. Do you know anyone who has dropped out of school? _____ Yes/No
19. Have you ever considered leaving school? _____ Yes/No
20. Would you say that you are treated fairly at school by the authorities? _____ Yes/No

APPENDIX VII

INTERVIEW GUIDE FOR NON-BLACK STUDENTS

For an in-depth, open interview we probed students' responses to some of the following pilot-tested questions:

1. When you hear the phrase 'school dropout' what does it mean to you?
2. Can you think of any reasons why people drop out of school?
3. What do you like the most about going to school?
4. What do you dislike about your school (if any)?
5. Who is your favourite teacher and why?
6. Who do you discuss any problems you have at school with?
7. Do you think your experiences at school would be different if you were male/female?
8. Do you think your experiences at school would be different if you came from a wealthy/poor family?
9. Do you think your experiences at school would be different if you were Black/African-Canadian?
10. Do your parents help with your school work and how?
11. Please describe the ways you are able to express your own personal and cultural identity while at school?
12. What school activities are you involved in?
13. Who are your best friends at school? **(probe racial/ethnic/gender background)**
14. Who do you look up to in society and why?
15. What are your future aspirations in life?
16. How do you hope to accomplish these goals?
17. Do you think that you can still accomplish these goals if you were to drop out of school?
18. What do you think about those who drop out of school?
19. As a youth in today's society what are your greatest concerns or worries?
20. Tell me about what your school has been doing to encourage you and other students to stay in school?

21. In what ways could school be made more interesting for students so they will be more likely to finish rather than dropping out?
22. If you had a magic wand to change something about the school system, what would that be and why?

Other Issues of Further Investigation:

1. Students' views about discipline in the schools.
2. Students' accounts of racial incidents at school.
3. Students' accounts of sexism in the school
4. Who do students associate with at school and why?
5. Students' responses to Black/African-Canadian students' observation that 'they are always put under the microscope'.
6. School/Students expectations of the Black/African-Canadian student
7. Students' views regarding the importance of Black teachers in the schools.
8. Students' views about Black/African History Month.
9. Students' views about Black-focused schools.

APPENDIX VIII

INTERVIEW GUIDE FOR TEACHERS AND SCHOOL ADMINISTRATORS:

For an in-depth, open interview we probe teachers and school administrators' responses to such questions as:

1. How does the teacher view dropping out from school, and what reasons can s/he assign as to why some students drop out?
2. How would the teacher describe his/her philosophy of teaching?
3. In the teacher's view, how do such factors as race/ethnicity, gender, and class influence schooling and education?
4. In the teacher's view, what pedagogical styles facilitate learning for Black children in particular?
5. What does the teacher see as his/her greatest challenge in teaching Black/African-Canadian students?
6. What are the special contributions that Black children bring to the classroom?
7. What are some of the lived experiences of the teacher that have significantly impacted on his/her educational and teaching career?
8. How would the teacher describe a typical day at school?
9. What specifically should be done to keep students in school?
10. What changes would the teacher want effected in the school to improve upon Black students' learning, and their sense of connectedness and belonging in the school?
11. What measures have been taken to encourage students to stay in school?
12. What is the teacher's view regarding the suggestion by some parents and community leaders that the introduction of anti-racist, and specifically Afrocentric, education would assist in dealing with Black students' alienation and vulnerability in the schools?
13. The teacher's views about the call for Black-focused schools?
14. The teacher's views about Black/African History Month?
15. What are the teacher's views about streaming/destreaming?
16. What are the teacher's views about standardized testing?

17. What are the teacher's general views about the current school system?
18. Is the teacher happy with his/her current job?
19. What reforms are needed to improve upon the current school system?

APPENDIX IX

OBSERVATION GUIDE FOR SCHOOLS

A. SCHOOL:

1. A day in the life of the student (e.g., time of reporting to and leaving the school premises; activities during class sessions; nature and conduct of recreational activities).
2. The nature and conduct of student-peer interactions.
3. The nature and conduct of student-teacher interactions.
4. The scheduling of school activities.
5. Work roles, division of labour, gender roles.
6. Content of teacher and student workloads.
7. Ethos and culture of the school, including the observance/practice of rules and regulations, school norms and values.

B. CLASSROOM:

1. Classroom seating arrangements.
2. Subject matter discussed.
3. Students' note-taking and attention to the teacher.
4. What questions students ask and in what manner.
5. Time classes begin and end.
6. Amount of classroom discussion.
7. Terms of reference between teacher/student and among students.

APPENDIX X

BLACK/AFRICAN-CANADIAN PARENTS

LETTER OF INFORMED CONSENT

Dear Sir/Madam:

I am a Professor in the Department of Sociology at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education. Since May 1992, we have been interviewing Black/African Canadian youths in high school about their experiences in the Ontario public school system. Now, we would like to hear from Black/African-Canadian parents as well. I would therefore like to include you in this study.

My intent is to hear from parents about the problems they have experienced with the school system and how the system can be improved to serve the needs of all students. I am likely to ask parents questions about what they see as contributing to the problem of dropout in the schools, and how they want the problem to be addressed. I also want to hear from parents about how their own personal and educational experiences influence the schooling of their children.

The interview itself will take about one hour. With your permission, the interviews will be taped and transcribed. At any time I will turn off the tape recorder to respect your wishes. The identity of any participant will remain confidential. Participants can withdraw from the study at any time. Confidential tapes and transcripts will be kept in a locked filing cabinet.

Thank you for considering this request for your participation in this project. If you agree to be part of the study, please read and sign the attached letter. If you would like to receive more information about the study, please contact me at office: (416) 923-6641, ext. 2513; or home: (416) 539-8551.

Sincerely,

George J. Sefa Dei, Ph.D.
Assistant Professor

Professor George J. Sefa Dei
Department of Sociology in Education
Ontario Institute for Studies in Education
252 Bloor Street West
Toronto, Ontario
M5S 1V6.

Dear George :

Re: The Study of Black/African-Canadian Parents and the Ontario Public School System

I have read the attached letter describing the research project you plan to undertake, and I agree to be a participant. It is clear to me that I am free to withdraw from the study at any time.

DATE **SIGNATURE**

_____ _____

APPENDIX XI

SURVEY QUESTIONS FOR BLACK PARENTS/GUARDIANS AND COMMUNITY WORKERS

Note: You may choose not to answer any of the following questions.

1. Name _____
2. Gender _____male/female
3. Age or Date of Birth _____
4. Were you born in Canada? _____Yes/No
5. If not born in Canada, where? _____
6. When did you come to Canada? _____
7. What languages do you speak other than English?_____
8. Which school do you attend?_____and what grade level was reached?_____
9. Do you have children attending high school?_____Yes/No
10. Do the children live at home with you?_____ Yes/No
11. Do you help with their schoolwork/assignment?_____Yes/No
12. Do you have any input in decision-making at your children's school? _____Yes/No
13. Has the school done enough to make attending school a worthwhile experience for your child? _____Yes/No
14. Do you know any child who has dropped out of school? ____Yes/No
15. Would you say that your child is treated fairly at school by the authorities? _____Yes/No

APPENDIX XII

INTERVIEW GUIDE (PARENTS/GUARDIANS/COMMUNITY WORKERS)

For an in-depth, open interview we probed parents/guardians/community workers' responses to some of the following pilot tested questions:

1. When you hear the phrase "school dropout" what does it mean to you?
2. Can you think of any reasons why students drop out of school?
3. What do you think of those students who drop out of school?
4. Do you discuss your child's school problems, and if so with whom?
5. Do you think that a child's experiences at school would be different if s/he was male/female?
6. Do you think your child's experiences at school would be different if s/he was white?
7. Do you think your child's experiences at school would be different if you were wealthy/poor?
8. What school activities are you involved in as a parent?
9. How often do you go to your child's school, and for what?
10. How often do you talk to your child's teachers?
11. What do you think teachers can do to facilitate learning for Black children in particular?
12. As a Black parent what do you think are the special contributions that Black children bring to the classroom?
13. What are some of the daily experiences you go through that you think significantly impact on your child's schooling?
14. How would you describe a typical day for you?
15. What do you think are your child's aspirations in life?
16. What is your greatest concern/worry for the Black youth in today's society?
17. In what ways could school be made more interesting for students so they will be more likely to finish rather than drop out?
18. If you had a magic wand to change something about the school system, what would that be and why?

19. What can be done about the current public school system to improve upon Black students' sense of connectedness and belonging in school?
20. What measures have you taken as a parent to encourage your children to stay in school?
21. What reforms are needed to improve upon the current school system?

Other Issues of Further Investigation:

1. Parents' responses to racism in society and particular racial incidents in the school and how they affect the child.
2. Parents' views about sexism in society and in the schools.
3. Parents' response to the perception of some Black/African-Canadian students that they are always put under the microscope at school.
4. Parents' views regarding the importance of having Black teachers in the schools.
5. Parents' views about the call for Black-focused schools.
6. Parents' views about Black/African History Month.
7. Parents' views about streaming/destreaming.
8. Parents' views about standardized testing.

APPENDIX XIII

BREAKDOWN OF BLACK/AFRICAN-CANADIAN STUDENTS AT FOUR TORONTO HIGH SCHOOLS (N = 150)

GRADE	MALE	FEMALE	TOTAL
9	6	13	19
10	13	23	36
11	9	18	27
12	26	26	52
OAC	4	5	9
OTHER	5	2	7
TOTAL	63	87	150

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