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The Social Context of High School Dropouts and Prevention
Initiatives: The Quebec Case

Daniel McCool

A Thesis
in
The Department
of
Education

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
for the Degree of Master of Arts at
Concordia University
Montreal, Quebec, Canada

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ABSTRACT

The Social Context of High School Dropouts and Prevention

Initiatives: The Quebec Case

Daniel McCool

The high school dropout situation in the 1990s is taking on a greater urgency as society moves into an era in which technology and social organization require higher levels of skills and knowledge. This thesis examines how this social problem has evolved. In particular it explores the factors "pushing" students to drop out, and the responses established to prevent them from doing so. The policies implemented by the Quebec Ministry of Education (MEQ) are examined in light of what has been theorized and/or implemented elsewhere.

A variety of theories are reviewed, many of which argue that dropouts are "pushed" towards their fate by social and institutional factors. Others note the complexity of the problem, with its myriad of interacting variables.

An illustrative study of a program instituted under the MEQ's dropout prevention initiative is presented. This serves to allow for greater elaboration of the types of problems that are encountered in setting up and running a dropout prevention program.

The study concludes with an analysis of the MEQ's dropout prevention strategy, considering its strengths and limitations. Suggestions for improvement of the strategy and suggestions for further research are proposed.

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DEDICATION

To Sandra and Brian McCool in appreciation for much support
and understanding over many years.

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION: THE HIGH SCHOOL DROPOUT QUANDARY

High school dropouts are attracting a large amount of publicity in North America in the early 1990s. Educators, officials and administrators have implemented new initiatives in the schools which should counter increasing dropout rates. In order to develop effective programs, however, the factors leading to the student's dropout decision must be well understood. This study proposes to examine how the dropout problem has evolved, why it is of concern, what are major factors perpetuating the problem, and what are the effective responses. Once an understanding of the problem and some of the responses has been established, this knowledge will form the basis for a critique of the 1992 policy on dropout prevention adopted by the Quebec Ministry of Education (MEQ).

To develop a better understanding of the dropout problem, the first chapter will outline the nature and seriousness of the problem. The historical factors raising the current level of alarm regarding this problem, and the socio-economic conditions of dropouts are briefly introduced as are the problems associated with investigating the dropout rates. Ambiguity over who should be defined as a dropout has often led to statistical unreliability.

The second chapter deals with the causes of dropping out. Going beyond identifying **whom**, the question asked is **why** do students drop out. A theoretical basis is developed. Reasons external to school as well as those directly related are discussed. These are summarized and reviewed in order to be clear about which issues need to be addressed in the next chapter when the effectiveness of dropout prevention efforts is

examined.

The third chapter reviews various types of dropout prevention programs and projects. Different types of initiatives are considered on the basis of their target groups.

Chapter four examines in some detail the MEQ's plan of action. The likely effectiveness of the strategy is compared with programs in place elsewhere, including my experience developing and coordinating a peer tutoring program under the auspices of the Joining Forces initiative.

Chapter five summarizes the thesis. It concludes with a discussion of the implications of this paper for both action and further study.

1.1 HISTORICAL BACKDROP

Historically, dropout rates have been in decline over the past century. Industrialization and urbanization have meant that agricultural employment has steadily declined, thus eliminating opportunities for unskilled employment. As labourers organized and obtained political power, they cooperated in the implementation of child labour laws; compulsory schooling legislation provided that children were kept out of the workplace, off the streets and in the classroom, working towards a school leaving certificate [LeCompte, 1987]. One study undertaken in 1913 by a Chicago factory inspector showed that of 500 child labourers questioned, 412 preferred factory labour to the monotony, humiliation and even cruelty of the schools of the time [Wehlage et al., 1989]. A tendency for working class youth to prefer the culture of the sweatshop over that of the schoolhouse has not entirely disappeared, as some researchers have noted [Willis, 1981].

In the U.S. in 1900 approximately 90% of students did not graduate secondary

school, and in 1920 it was 80%; only in 1950 did the rate fall below 50%. By 1967 it seemed that graduation rates peaked at 88%. U.S. rates of graduation have since fallen [Wehlage & Rutter, 1986].¹ The peak year of 75% graduation rate was reached in Canada in 1975; it seemed that raising it any higher than that required immense efforts for diminishing returns [Morris et al., 1991].

As somewhat of a backlash against more student centred educational practices of the early 1970's, the 1980's has seen a "back to basics" movement take root. This implies less attention to remedial and alternative programs which might benefit marginal students, and more of a focus on raising standards and increasing technical abilities in mathematics and the sciences. The ideology of "relevance" of education, the battle cry of the seventies reformers, has been appropriated by the new right [Aronowitz & Giroux, 1985]. That relevance, however, consists of teaching skills and orientations most suitable to serving a capitalist economic structure. These technical/administrative rather than humanist educational orientations have led to poorer success rates; marginal students have become even more inclined towards dropping out [Hamilton, 1986; Archer & Dresden, 1987].

The political nature of the issue is highlighted when statements from United States administration officials (instrumental in instituting the Equity and Excellence reforms which raised graduation standards) described out-of-work youth as the "industrial reserve of America". Their under-education did not seem to elicit much concern. By 1984, 29 of the 50 United States had established new academic enrichment programs for gifted students, whereas virtually nothing had been done to assist those not meeting the newly

¹ Temporarily higher graduation rates in the U.S. in the 1960's seem to be linked to a lowering of graduation requirements [Mann, 1986].

imposed higher standards [Mann, 1986]. U.S. Assistant Secretary of Education C. Finn has been quoted as viewing reforms directed at at-risk students as ill-conceived [Wehlage et al., 1989]. He explicitly saw remedial programs as undermining his "Excellence in Education" initiatives. He blamed the underachieving students for their shortcomings and not the system. Recent literature indicates that such cavalier attitudes do not persist, and programs to deal with dropouts and potential dropouts are increasing.

As the mid 1990s approach, any trend towards increasing numbers of dropouts warrants serious attention. Society and the economy are becoming more and more technically complex. For those unable to manipulate information, new specialized equipment or new orders of social organization, employment opportunities are fewer. Often the needs of such individuals seem to be overlooked. While some skills can still be learned outside of school (ie. sales, entrepreneurship, entertainment), in general the opportunities for those abandoning their education are increasingly limited.²

1.2 INDIVIDUAL AND SOCIAL COSTS OF DROPPING OUT

According to MEQ statistics [Lessard, 1992], the loss in lifetime earnings to the

² When most people don't need to go to school at all, either because they can survive economically without being literate, because literacy can be acquired without going to school, or because there is no pressing civil or ecclesiastical body of knowledge that people should be compelled to master, then the percentage of the population that fails to acquire a terminal degree from school is not critical. However, in a society that requires literacy for economic well-being, and that postulates that literacy be acquired in a formal governmentally supervised or sanctioned school, it becomes critical that as large a portion of the population as is possible attend school and complete the required course of studies. When, as has become the case in the western world, the possession of the certificate that one obtains as a consequence of completion of studies is equated with literacy skills themselves, graduation becomes imperative for the entire school aged cohort. When this does not occur--that is, when people drop out--it is indicative that the institution is itself somehow out of synchronisation with its cultural context. [LeCompte, 1987]

yearly cohort of 30,000 Quebec dropouts totals 15 billion dollars, or \$500,000 per student. Beyond dollar figures, the decreased opportunity to profit from the current technological information explosion alienate and frustrate those who are "left behind". Statistics from a study undertaken in the United States as long ago as 1972 showed high school dropouts as having reduced intergenerational mobility, poorer health, increased demand for social services, increased crime rates, and reduced political participation.³ In another more recent American study, estimates of the loss to individual status in terms of forgone income were calculated (in U.S. 1981 dollars) to be in the range of \$266,000 for men and \$199,000 for women spread over an average lifetime (figures come from U.S. Census Bureau data⁴). Lower income seems to be linked to employers reluctance to hire or advance dropouts; this has been tied to the early leaver's greater difficulty in being trained for more demanding (and thus better paid) tasks and responsibilities.

Social costs of dropping out have been calculated in the U.S. as amounting to the gross loss of the total forgone wages of the dropouts, plus the costs of social programs responding to their greater needs. Figures in the range of \$228 billion dollars per year in the U.S. have been estimated for forgone income alone; the loss in tax revenue per year is put around \$68 billion. The cost of prevention programs seems likely to run at less than

³ Levin 'The costs to the nation of inadequate education' 1972. Quoted in Rumberger, 1987.

⁴ "Lifetime Earnings Estimates for Men and Women, 1979" (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, CPR Series P-60, No. 139) As quoted in Catterall, 1985.

one tenth of the cost of dropouts.⁵

One reason perhaps for not addressing the problem more promptly is the distance between the site of the dropout occurrence and the impact of its consequences. Schools are relieved of the "problem" once the dropout has left. The negative reverberations upon society are widely dispersed, and no cause-effect (or perhaps more reasonably, no complicity-effect) relations can easily be observed. Yet statistical studies show that dropouts are a burden to social programs and form a disproportionate part of prison populations and health system users [Catterall, 1985; Levin, 1972]. With the decreased need for unskilled labour in the 1990s, preparing youth with the skills needed to articulate with the rapidly transforming labour market of today is a challenge which we must face, and to which significant resources must be allocated.

1.3 RESEARCH PROBLEMS AND CONCERNS

As will be shown, despite the apparent urgency, research and policy making in the field of dropout prevention have not yet led to conclusive solutions. This social problem, complicated as it is, is not susceptible to easy solutions. In fact experts do not even agree on who the actual dropouts are, as well as which are the best responses to the problem.

One of the problems with examining the extent of the dropout problem is the lack of consensus regarding who should be counted as a dropout. The statistics are inconsistent and unreliable. Much discussion has taken place in the literature concerning the poor quality of the available statistical information due to inconsistencies [Clements, 1991;

⁵ Estimates for dropout prevention programs have been randomly assigned a supplementary cost equal to that of regular costs of educating the proportion of the student population identified as potential dropouts [Catterall, 1985].

Hahn, 1987; LeCompte & Goebel, 1987; Barber, 1987]. In addition, once the dropouts have withdrawn from the school, the leaver's activities are much harder to monitor. Alienated from the school, dropouts tend not to identify themselves as such; rather they might claim to be entering the military or a trade school, etc., or else will (most often) simply say nothing. The school will generally have few resources to devote towards following up on such students, who may in fact give false forwarding addresses, further hampering researchers' efforts. "Guestimates" must be used to determine how many students should be considered dropouts. Depending upon the means of calculation used, rates have shown differences of magnitudes of up to 400% [Morrow, 1986].

The most common standard measures in determining dropout rates consist of:

1. Census statistical measurement, which states which students neither graduate nor still pursue their studies, if they are below a certain age;
2. School data, which compare cohort group rates, checking numbers of graduates with numbers of entrants four (or five) years prior; and
3. Again school data, this time annually recording "event" dropouts- those who during a given year cease to attend [Clements, 1991].

The case of the first measure, which relies upon census data, implies that comparisons can be made across different groups within the population. However, these comparisons are not always appropriate, as conditions in one area will not be the same as in another. Regions where there are limited employment opportunities after education will produce fewer graduates as a result of weaker pull factors.

The second and third measures rely upon statistics gathered within the school

districts. These can vary depending upon the differing definitions of the term dropout, thus leading to inappropriate comparisons of statistics. The fact that discretion is left to school boards in defining who is a dropout allows for important inconsistencies [LeCompte & Goebel, 1987]. The incentives for tinkering with the statistics are significant. It is common practice for school districts to receive funding on the basis of enrolments. Furthermore, being too quick to acknowledge their having quit complicates the students' (unlikely yet possible) return. Finally, high dropout rates are not a good reflection of the educational system's success. It is generally up to the school board to determine, for record keeping purposes, when it is that students' unexcused absences constitute their having dropped out. This flexibility leads to attempts to mask large numbers of truants and dropouts, particularly in schools where funding is already insufficient [Morrow, 1986].⁶ Statistical calculations can be based upon different formulas, making comparisons over time illegitimate, in the same way that "poverty" thresholds and unemployment levels are manipulated statistically to reinforce a point that one wishes to make.⁷

A further means of avoiding acknowledgment of high dropout rates is that of

⁶ Hammack [1986] reports one case of a school which, under pressure to reduce rates of dropping out, listed a significant number of students as having 'transferred to private schools' or moved from the district; when sceptical researchers from the district central office investigated, they found that the reported 1.9% dropout rate should indeed actually have been 58.3%. It apparently occurs without being considered significant in at least one Lakeshore School Commission high school (Montreal) as well, where students are kept on the class list long after they have ceased to attend [Personal communication, June 29, 1993].

⁷ If the average daily membership is used as the denominator rather than average daily attendance (which would be normal), then we will have a smaller percentage. Likewise, if we broaden the population to include lower grade ranges where dropping out is less frequent, we will again arrive at a smaller dropout percentage [Morrow, 1986].

closing the enrolment books in the summer and reopening them in the fall, thus not considering those who fail to return. This will particularly invalidate cohort studies attempting to follow a specific age group.

Another problem is that of transfer of enrolments. If students are considered to have transferred to another educational institution, then the first school is absolved of responsibility for their subsequent education (or dropping out). Transferring also complicates the statistics on dropouts. If transferees are counted as having dropped out in cases where no request for transcripts is received, then if the new school did not request the transcripts, or if the student obtained and forwarded them "unofficially", a student would be wrongly classified as a dropout [LeCompte, 1987]. In one case, an independent investigator in Chicago found that of 121 students listed as internal transfers, 42 (or 35%) never reregistered- seemingly a deliberate statistical manipulation [Lefkowitz, 1987].

If the new institution does not offer a high school diploma (eg. armed forces, prison, mental institution, hospital, vocational training program), is it then reasonable to consider that students have dropped out since they are not proceeding with their education? In certain U.S. school districts, such institutionalization is considered dropping out, while in others it is not [Clements, 1991].

Finally, in the United States, a series of "equivalency" certificates are being developed which imply an alternative measure of success in high school. While this is not a significant development in Canada, alternative certificates will raise the question as to whether these candidates should be qualified as graduates. If they were, would they not

simply obtain the same certificate as everyone else?⁸

Clearly, the statistical evidence available does not indicate the extent of the dropout problem either for comparative or expository purposes. Using such data as is available for anything more than merely the most general identification of trends seems unjustified. Using this data to fine-tune programs or evaluate the effectiveness of such initiatives cannot be considered sound. However, the existence of such dissonance seems to demonstrate that the dropout problem is indeed an area of policy research in need of reflective analysis, as much for the benefit of those on the front lines performing interventions as for those attempting to develop effective policy guidelines.

Research has mainly taken place in those parts of North America where the problem is the most easily recognizable. These areas include the urban concentrations of the United States east coast (notably New York, Boston, Miami and Philadelphia); Chicago, and Southern California. Statistics of 40% to 70% dropout rates have been reported for these central cities [Fine, 1991; Wehlage & Rutter, 1986]. As researchers from the different universities have often received grant funding to do research in areas of concern to either governments,⁹ charitable foundations¹⁰ or political formations, the time

⁸ Morrow [1986] speaks of Special Education (mentally handicapped) certificate holders as well as students who have passed proficiency examinations and/or the required number of years, but not the required courses.

⁹ This seems more common in Canada than in the United States ie. Morris et al., 1991; Le Ministère d'Éducation du Québec, 1989, 1991, 1992 A, 1992 C].

¹⁰ ie. the Aetna Life and Casualty Foundation which provided funding for a special issue of Equity and Excellence (the University of Massachusetts School of Education Journal); the American Can Company Foundation which sponsored the National Working Conference on Holding Power and Drop-outs at Columbia University Teachers College in February of 1985; the Lloyd A. Fry Foundation which funded a study on dropouts from Chicago Public Schools. While not wishing to sound cynical, one cannot help but be reminded of the manner

has come where this issue is receiving greater attention.

Beyond measuring the extent and meaning of dropout rates, it would be more significant to policy makers to have access to information concerning the reasons for and conditions of students dropping out. Defining who is a dropout for comparative purposes is not a simple matter. At a more subjective level, the personal perceptions and experiences that lead to dropping out are complex and multi-layered. To help understand the issues related to dropping out, the next chapter explores some of the dynamics prompting the dropout to give up.

in which the Rockefeller Foundation funds research which leads to new markets in petroleum, and deducts such expenses from taxable income. These foundations are apparently linked to corporations who wish to see their manpower better trained, and want to see the average taxpayer pay for it. It is most likely a worthy investment.

Chapter Two

THE SOCIAL CONTEXT OF SCHOOL DROPOUTS: RELATED FACTORS

As mentioned earlier, there are many causes affecting a student's decision to drop out. To have a basis for examining some of the more common and significant reasons for stopping school, it is first necessary to provide a theoretical framework for understanding students' dropout behaviour. Then within that perspective, the particular factors leading to dropping out can be considered.

2.1 WHY DROPOUT? SOME THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVES

The phenomenon of dropping out is a social act. If it is desirable to prevent this act on the grounds that it has negative consequences for both the individual and society, then the motivation for dropping out must be analyzed where it originates. From there preventative interventions can be formulated.

As a social phenomenon, dropping out of school will undoubtedly have numerous causes. Most individual dropouts have several reasons for having quit school. A broadly-based perspective is necessary in order to have a realistic understanding of the nature of the issue. In looking at issues correlated with dropping out, falling into the trap of blaming the victim must be avoided. Despite being beyond the reach of educational policymakers, structural and socio-economic factors are of significant importance and need to be addressed [Fine, 1986].

One of the most comprehensive investigations into the subject of secondary

schooling has been that of the Study of Excellence in High School Education, funded by the U.S. National Centre for Educational Statistics in 1983. This included a longitudinal analysis relating growth and development of 1980 secondary II students to their schooling experience over the period 1980-1982 [Ekstrom et al., 1986]. The data from this study have been sufficient to allow for an investigation into causal relationships between school and student characteristics linked to dropping out.

Of course analysing the study's data is not a simple task. Reasons given by students for dropping out provide some insight into their decision. Yet these self reported reasons are not always enlightening about how these became valid bases for quitting. The degree to which students are in fact in control of their own educational destiny is itself in dispute amongst sociologists of education. Three differing perspectives include:

(1.) A structuralist view, which sees actors as being constrained by structural features of society, thus preventing their being self-directed (based on Althusser's work and popular with neo-Marxists). This perspective views social actors as acting in response to the social environment; their perceptions and reality are dictated by dominant social forces. The only means for real change would seem to be through social revolution.

(2.) The "pushed from behind" view concedes free choice, but points out that in reality it is mostly an illusion. As social choices are limited, reproduction of actual social class relations is most common and students are often not sufficiently conscious of the implications of their decisions. They seem to be "pushed" towards their destinies by powerful institutions, the influence of which they are not always aware.

(3.) The "pulled from up front" view sees choices as being based upon enticements of rewards and implying free will (the neo-classical position). In this perspective, each student is responsible for his or her level of accomplishment in a liberal democratic system [Gambetta, 1987].

The second theory appears the most realistic compromise between the two extreme positions. An analysis of the literature shows that causal factors in the dropout decision fit best with the second case, a combination of the strong points of all three major sociological traditions.¹¹ Such a formulation in which individual self-directedness is mediated by institutional forces justifies looking at the socio-demographic and institutional factors in dropping out in the latter part of this chapter.

The incorporation of a model permitting more than one contributing factor allows for a more accurate portrayal of reality, and thus a more comprehensive analysis. Ekstrom et al. [1986] have developed a complex model using path analysis, which seems quite appropriate. This method involves constructing a representation that allows for multiple variables as codeterminant factors. In a model such as this [see Appendix I, p.94], there is less specific certainty of the absolute impact of one determinant as being the most significant factor. This is more reasonable, since it more closely approximates the reality in which it is not one specific, but several combined factors that lead to the dropout decision. As shown in the model, a "path" is followed leading to the decision to

¹¹ The three major sociological traditions consisting of: a structural (conflict) perspective based upon opposing class or status group membership as the determinant factor in social organisation; a functionalist perspective showing reproduction of current relations, which are somehow most suitable; and an interactionist perspective, with change being effected as individual actors break through class and status barriers.

stay in or drop out of school. In moving along this path, insight is gained into which of the different variables might provide a greater or lesser impetus for the final outcome.

Numerous factors have been found to be correlates of higher than average dropout rates. Both Eckstrom et al. [1986] and Morris et al. [1991] break the factors in the path analysis down into groups of categories. The groupings can be divided into students' demographic characteristics; family-related or personal-psychological issues; and school institutional factors.

2.2 DEMOGRAPHIC CHARACTERISTICS OF DROPOUTS

Demographic issues include racial, ethnic, socio-economic, regional, linguistic, and gender characteristics. It would be simplistic to consider any of these elements as having a direct cause/effect relationship with dropping out of school. The different categories of factors constitute significant confounding variables. Nevertheless, it is generally the interplay of numerous factors which leads to dropping out (hence the path analysis).

2.2.1 Socio-Economic Status, Race and Ethnicity

Poverty has been found to be closely associated with high rates of dropping out [Rumberger, 1987; Fine, 1991; Eckstrom et al., 1986]. Officials in Montreal have concluded that dealing with poverty is a priority if higher graduation rates are wanted.¹²

A factor that is of declining though still some importance is the economic need

¹² Jacques Mongeau, chairman of the Montreal Island School Council claims that the MEQ needs to put another ten million dollars into programs to feed poor children in order to have a hope of reaching its dropout reduction target [Wells, 1994].

that leads to students dropping out to earn money to support themselves and their families. One study has shown [Mann, 1986] that students working between 15 and 21 hours a week have a 50% higher dropout rate; those working 22 hours or more drop out twice as often as those working fewer than 15 hours a week. Generally these are dead-end jobs that compete for time against their studies. Fine [1991] found that in many cases the students who dropped out to work were not necessarily the weaker students, but in fact were often well equipped to go further in their studies. She concludes that they deduced that the effort being demanded of them and the false hopes being generated did not warrant their continued efforts. She also points out that the objective of the high school diploma as a ticket to success was in fact a misrepresentation to minorities and the poor. She quotes one study that shows dropouts in the wealthiest areas of New York City as having a 42.4 % employment to population ratio compared with a 31 % ratio for high school graduates in the poorest neighbourhoods.¹³ One's connections seem to be more important than how far one goes in school. Nevertheless, poor graduates did have lower unemployment rates than their peers who had dropped out.

Racial and ethnic minorities in North America generally have higher than average dropout rates (though in specific cases they have lower ones¹⁴). On those rare occasions where the Canadian literature has focused on minorities, it has mainly looked at

¹³ Taken from E. Tobier, Changing Trends in New York City's Population in Poverty, 1960-1990 Community Service Society, New York 1984 as Quoted in Fine, 1986.

¹⁴ Certain minority groups, often new to North America, will be found to succeed much more readily than will those long established. Asian-American students' dropout rates have been reported to be about 3% [Rumberger, 1987], while in Quebec the drop-out rate is lowest for allophone students (those whose mother tongue is neither French or English) [Beauchesne, 1991].

aboriginal peoples. The dropout situation amongst first nations peoples is so acute as to be considered of crisis proportions [Ministère de l'Éducation, 1992 A; Morris et al., 1991].

Culture and socio-economic status are not easily separated. Research into minority schooling issues seems to imply that cultural differences between groups can be reflected in poorer success rates for those of cultures alternative to that of the school. If we consider the culture of the school to reflect certain practices, standards and values (usually those mainstream, middle class values of the teaching and administrative staff), we must consider the contrast that these "norms" may have with those held by both the minority and poor or working class students. Research by Bourdieu and Passeron [1977] indicates that "cultural capital" already attained by children before commencing school affects their capacities to adapt to the institution's methods. Lacking sufficient familiarity with specifically validated cultural concepts and artifacts, minority and poor students are at a significant disadvantage once immersed in a system where many such notions of cultural awareness are expected to form the basis of conceptual development.

More recently there have been theories developed to take into consideration the adaptive responses frequently witnessed among immigrant minority groups which often are not seen among so called non-voluntary minorities [Foley, 1991]. In the work of John Ogbu¹⁵ we are presented with the concept of a caste system in which minority groups are assigned status, more or less permanently on the basis of their race or ethnicity. The status position that they may possibly achieve is often contingent upon whether they are voluntary or involuntary minorities. This implies that for the newly arrived (voluntary)

¹⁵ John Ogbu, 'Variety in Minority School Performance: A Problem in Search of an Explanation' in *Anthropology and Education Quarterly* Vol.18, 1987 as quoted in Foley, 1991.

minorities, traits brought with them are valid and need not interfere with their adaptation to the new school culture. On the other hand, traditional minorities (such as aboriginals, and blacks and hispanics in the United States) have secondary traits which have arisen in response to their oppression, and only serve to prevent their advancement in the majority culture. For such groups, success in the system is seen as a denial of one's heritage. As well, a history of despair often leads to their self-fulfilling prophecy of failure [Foley, 1991].

In a review of sociological theories of minority failure, Payne [1984] observes a tendency towards what he refers to as "denial theories" which have evolved out of the gradual rejection of functionalist theories of the 1950's. These theories do not clarify, but rather further mystify interracial relations. Payne explains that the poor quality research which allows such inadequate theorising is due to limited longitudinal studies. Using observation, interviews and questionnaires does not allow for historical causal factors to be imputed. Thus, illegitimate cause and effect relations effectively blaming the victim, amorphous "structures", lower class rivalries or no-one at all are constructed [Payne, 1984].

Payne recommends using dialectical inquiry focusing on the present actors, and how inequalitarian institutions historically have evolved so as to maintain legitimacy in spite of their inherently unjust nature. He is critical of simplistic explanations for exceedingly complex phenomena. It would seem that his position would favour an interventionist stance, be it intensive remediation, social intervention and/or affirmative action programs.

Although dropout rates for minority groups and the poor are higher than they are

for middle class majority group members, the intention here is to present a profile of who drops out and why. The membership in a minority group certainly does indicate higher dropout rates in the U.S.; however, extrapolating that data to our situation in Quebec may or may not be valid.¹⁶

2.2.2 Regional Disparities

Numerous researchers have gone to great lengths to emphasize the inter-regional and intertemporal variability of dropout rates [Natriello, et al., 1986; LeCompte, 1987, Morris et al., 1991]. Comparisons are made difficult by both pull and push factors which can vary. Ready availability of unskilled employment, or a complete lack of both skilled and unskilled positions both seem to encourage dropping out. In Quebec, urban dropout rates seem to be higher than suburban. However rural areas seem to have the highest dropout rates of all [Ministère de l'Éducation, 1992 A]. Statistics from urban areas may be skewed. Private schools, which are not included in public school dropout figures and which are less common away from urban areas, will draw away many students more prone to finishing. This leaves more at risk students to raise the averages [Ministère de l'Éducation, 1991]. Quebec statistics seem to show that there is an evening out tendency. Whereas in 1981 there was a 28% difference between the rates of the highest and lowest retention commissions, by 1991 that difference had dropped to 19% (this is excluding the far north, where conditions are quite distinct) [Ministère de l'Éducation, 1992 A].

¹⁶ The ministry of education breaks down dropout statistics according to language; thus it is possible to determine that the dropout rates for aboriginal students, at 70% (for 1981 cohort) are significantly above average, while allophones have the lowest dropout rates of all [Ministère de l'Éducation, May 1992].

Nevertheless, the implication is, according to Morris et al. [1991], that descriptions of dropout situations need to be localized in order to provide valid starting points for policy development (a major pretext of the Quebec education ministry's initiative, to which we shall return later). Orr [1987] notes that the most successful programs for dropout prevention consist of a few enthusiastic individuals working intensively with a limited number of adolescents. Narrowly defined province-wide programs will not likely be effective.

2.2.3 Linguistic Minorities

According to American research, linguistic minority children also have higher than average public school dropout rates. In a major study on the issue, Laurence Steinberg and associates [1984] found that the highest dropout rates amongst distinct linguistic groups were those of the Hispanic minority.

In contrast, the dropout rates for linguistic minorities in Quebec are the lowest of three categories (French, English and other).¹⁷ American findings do not seem to be borne out; however, one might conclude that the Quebec linguistic majority seems to have some things in common with the U.S. hispanic minority. Being awash in a numerically and financially superior anglophone society seems to work, in combination with other cultural factors, to the detriment of many linguistically distinct high school students. Meanwhile, students who already have difficulty succeeding in school may find their difficulties exacerbated if, as in Quebec, they are expected to learn a second language

¹⁷ For the Secondary I cohort who were registered as attending as of the 30th of September, 1981, the breakdown was: 21.3% overall dropouts; 22.6% Francophone; 15.0% Anglophone; and 14.8% Allophone, as of September 30th, 1986 [Beauchesne, 1991].

when they may have a low level of competency in their mother tongue.

2.2.4 Gender Differences

Nearly all studies undertaken recently indicate that boys have a higher dropout rate than do girls. In Quebec that difference seems to be widening. Whereas in 1975-76, 55% of dropouts were boys, in 1988-89 the percentage was 60% [Violette, 1991]. The reasons for such differences are linked to several variables.

In data collected by the Centre for Human Resource Research at Ohio State University,¹⁸ we are given various reasons for each gender having dropped out. The chart [Appendix II, p.95] taken from Rumberger [1983] shows that boys reported greater frequency of poor performance, dislike for school, suspensions, and desire to work, while girls showed pregnancy and marriage as the main reasons for dropping out. The significance of these divergent reasons needs to be explained.

An extensive attitudinal survey of 796 Australian adolescents regarding their values as they related to schooling found gender to be a significant determinant of the dropout decision [Poole & Low, 1982]. The findings indicated that socialization to the norms of the school was more effective amongst females than males. This seems to agree with the above statistics, which show greater rejection of the schooling process by the males (ie. higher rates of poor performance, dislike, expulsion, choosing to work). Socialization into the feminine role however seems to imply resignation as opposed to resistance to one's fate. Socialization of the females seemed generally to allow for their lower self esteem- high achieving females dropped out at a proportionally higher rate than

¹⁸ As quoted in Rumberger, 1983.

did high achieving males [Poole & Low, 1982; Rumberger, 1983; Karp, 1988]. With expected income returns of on average 40% of those of equally qualified males [Fine, 1986], it is not surprising to find that females hold lower anticipation of rewarding future careers than do males. Thus a complicated grid of factors implies that the payoff for women (as with minorities) is lesser, albeit still better than that obtained by those lacking the diploma or degree [Poole & Low, 1982].

Somewhat of a paradox seems to have been reached. While young women are more likely to persevere and be successful in their schoolwork, young men seem to develop greater benefits from the overall socialising process, despite on average their lesser success in their studies. This seems to imply that females leave a system which does not work for them, while males drop out more out of resistance to conformity, knowing that on a certain level, as young men they will still enjoy advantages over women graduates. This may imply that there is a need for distinctive approaches to the female and male potential dropout. In analysing the Quebec government's policies for dropout prevention, it needs to be asked whether such considerations are recognized.

2.3 FAMILY RELATED OR PERSONAL/PSYCHOLOGICAL REASONS FOR DROPPING OUT

Family related factors leading to a student's decision to drop out include parents education level, integrity of the family, and, supportiveness of the family. Morris et al. [1991] note that in past American studies, an almost direct correlation could be found between lower parental education and the early withdrawal of the student. One study concludes that the lack of the parents' diploma leaves them indifferent to the child's

decision to withdraw, thus reinforcing the failure to link higher education with potential later gain, and looking only at the immediate gain of remunerated labour [Howard & Anderson, 1978]. Trends seem to show that poor educational achievement is indeed passed on intergenerationally in most segments of society.

Whether the family has remained intact or not has been found to have a large correlation with the tendency of students to drop out. Zamanzadeh & Prince¹⁹ found at the time of their Montreal study that while 90% of their control group lived with both parents, only 54% of the dropouts did. In Lefkowitz' U.S. study [1987] it was found that teenage respondents named family breakup as their most traumatic experience. Some researchers claim the greater stress is economic, as the single provider is less well rewarded monetarily, especially since she is usually female.

The extent to which the family is supportive of the educational progress of the student seems to have an impact on the student's tendency to dropout. If the parents take an interest in the student's future plans, discuss their school progress, and generally have open communication regarding their child's experiences, then the student seems to be more likely to persist and succeed [Poole & Low, 1982; Ekstrom et al., 1986; Morris et al., 1991]. Students who were more peer oriented than family oriented showed higher dropout propensities.²⁰ Karp [1987] found that children from families which were openly critical and sceptical of the value of education in and of itself had a lesser propensity to

¹⁹ Zamanzadeh, D. & R.Prince, 'Dropout Syndromes: A study of individual, family and social factors in two Montreal high Schools' in McGill Journal of Education Vol.13, No.3 pp. 301-318, 1978 as cited in Morris et al, 1991.

²⁰ Knudsen, D.D. An Investigation of the Social and Familial Relationships in the Life of a High School Dropout, Unpublished doctoral dissertation, University of North Carolina, 1964 as cited in Morris et al, 1991.

hold theoretical education in high regard, and were more inclined to dropout.

Personal or individual reasons for dropping out have been indicated as including poor self-esteem, low educational and occupational aspirations, alienation from peers, fear of gangs, negative attitudes towards school, and marriage and pregnancy [Karp, 1987; Fine, 1991; Howard & Anderson, 1978]. These data and viewpoints provide the psychological dimension of this social problem. However the definition of the problem as a social one means that the individual nuanced differences between individuals' needs have to be met on a broad scale.

Egoism and anomie, resulting from the growth of mass society (and mass-schooling) seem to manifest themselves through the above problems. Certainly there will be individual pathological problems based in unique circumstances. However these shall need ad hoc responses, personalized through guidance counselling services. While not wishing to dismiss the significance of the above problems, rather than being considered as causes of dropping out, it would be more appropriate to count these as symptoms of greater problems. Some of these problems may be linked to social breakdown and the lack of a stable family and community.

In adopting an individualist stance, one accepts that social institutions, serving as they do to perpetuate a certain system, should not be themselves questioned. If credence is being lent to the theory that the tendency of dropouts is to be pushed from behind, then it would be useful to look at the phenomenon which are doing the pushing. Apart from the already examined demographic and family factors, we need to turn to the institutional factor looming largest in the life of the student, and the one that is most subject to policy reforms: the school.

2.4 EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTIONAL FACTORS IN DROPPING OUT

In the previous sections we have looked at various categories of social phenomena which encourage students to drop out of school. This section will look at institutional features of the school, and how they contribute to maintaining high dropout rates.

Over the past century, since the institution of compulsory education has become fairly widespread, more and more responsibilities have been imposed upon educators. In addition to teaching basic academic skills and transmitting general cultural knowledge, teachers are also expected to provide students with job training and personal coping skills [Hamby, 1989]. The general public seems to accept handing over additional tasks from the family to the schools since many years. How well are the educators and schools equipped to deal with the increasing burdens placed upon them, many of which do not seem altogether appropriate considering the inherently bureaucratic nature of the institution.

The categories of school features to be looked at include: the climate of the school; streaming, destreaming and vocational education; class and school size; the role of the teacher; curriculum relevance; and grade repetition. There is some overlapping, as these categories are mainly a device to allow easier reference back in the next chapters, where these issues are considered in terms of how dropout prevention programs respond to them. One factor which is not looked at is that of the at-risk students' poor performance. Numerous studies indicate that students with poorer grades have a greater likelihood of dropping out [Rumberger, 1983, 1987; Eckstrom et al., 1986; Barber & McClellan, 1987]. In this section however, we are interested in the institutional factors

rather the individual student's performance characteristics. As well, poor achievement is an inextricable result of many of those same social and institutional factors which contribute to dropping out.

2.4.1 School Climate

School climate is somewhat of a vague "catch all" category for those aspects of the school that do not constitute firm policy, but rather the manner in which school business is conducted. Although one cannot generalize, it seems safe to describe the average high school as being a fragmented, confusing and depersonalising place, particularly for students who are not especially gifted [Conrath, 1989]. Moving from classroom to classroom, facing five or more different teachers per day, and having a bell or buzzer signal the change of period are some characteristics of a normal high school which are not always easily adapted to. While it is important that demands placed upon students should be challenging, they must still fall within the realm of their capabilities [Wehlage & Rutter, 1986]. It is especially disheartening for students to experience failure at this stage in their lives when they need very much to affirm their competencies.

A competitive atmosphere may do little to augment the sense of wellbeing of the lower achieving students [Wehlage & Rutter, 1986]. The anxiety and alienation suffered by many high school students might be addressed in part by critically examining the prevailing norms and values ensconced in the culture of the school. One writer [Gatto, 1992] portrays the school "community" as being in reality a less benign form of "networking" in which egoistic needs are fulfilled by way of establishing acquaintanceships and a good rapport with the strategically important individuals (in

common parlance, social climbing). While perhaps part of the hidden curriculum²¹ involves teaching people how to get ahead in bureaucratic institutions, an overly competitive atmosphere will further alienate those students who see the rewarding of "brown nosers" as another grounds for critique of the education system.²²

An important part of the mission of the school is that of promoting responsible citizenship amongst all of its students. A climate of distrust wherein favouritism is suspected will lead to alienation on the part of those students who do not wish to play the game of currying favour. Ideally what is needed is the promotion of a school culture where children and adults share common values about respect, intellectual achievement and caring for one another [Cuban, 1989]. Teachers are not likely to form long term mentor relationships with many of their students. In promoting a healthy climate for learning, the actual truth about the sorts of relationships that are possible between staff and students needs to be clear. Candidness is needed in order to establish a climate of confidence.

The much higher retention rates of the U.S. catholic high schools seem to rest upon certain characteristics which they do not have in common with the large public high schools. The perception of their work as a ministry leads to teachers being concerned not only for the academic, but also the spiritual development of their charges. The work of the teachers in developing the sense of membership in the school community seems to

²¹ The hidden curriculum consists of that socialisation to norms which is not part of the official curriculum, and is not subjected to open scrutiny, but which nevertheless has a great impact on students' developing values and perceptions.

²² Quebec researchers have referred to a 'dropout culture', wherein those who succeed are labelled 'nerds', while peer pressure encourages indifference to one's studies [Hrimech et al, 1993; Beauschesne, 1991].

draw from a deeper commitment, as well as their unity of purpose,²³ generally lacking in other schools.²⁴ It is perhaps not plausible to look to the public school system to adopt such a mode of comportment; multiculturalism implies renouncing the imposition of common values and purpose. We need to seek some common ground, and find means by which to foster a cooperative school atmosphere which enables more widespread achievement and success. The issue of the teacher's role is discussed in a subsequent section (2.4.4).

2.4.2 Streaming, Destreaming and Vocational Education

Streaming is the process of separating students according to ability and behavioral criteria as opposed strictly to age. Destreaming is the opposite of this. Streaming can occur both between and within schools. Wehlage et al. [1989] point to evidence in the Chicago school system which indicates a form of educational "triage", wherein the stronger students are attracted to magnet schools offering special programs. This results in the concentration of weaker students in schools located in the poorest neighbourhoods, as middle class parents place their children in separate schools or programs (both public and private). Fine [1991] has discussed the same occurrence in New York City schools.

Streaming occurs within schools in terms of separate programs. This can be

²³ One problem in schools is a fragmented staff which sends out conflicting messages regarding expectations. This fragmentation can interfere with individual teachers' attempts to reach out to students in difficulty, when their colleagues undermine their efforts [Personal Observation, 1993].

²⁴ Despite often enrolling at-risk students, the dropout rates from Catholic high schools were significantly lower than those of public or other private schools, generally one third to one fourth of rates at other schools [Wehlage et al, 1989].

explicit or implicit.²⁵ In the province of Ontario, streaming had been much more of an institutionalized policy. Students selected between vocational and academic programs, and were divided into groups which pursue different courses of three, four or five years depending on whether or not they planned to attend college or university. Since the election of a liberal provincial government in 1988, this policy is being gradually phased out [Radwanski, 1987; Allison & Paquette, 1991].

The debate over streaming versus destreaming has led some researchers to conclude that weaker students suffer by being grouped together apart from the stronger students [Wehlage et al., 1989; Nelson, 1985; Cuban, 1989; Radwanski, 1987]. Students in lower tracks tend to respond to a "self-fulfilling prophecy" of failure, as the hidden curriculum tells them that they are third rate [Persell, 1976].

Can this problem really be solved by destreaming? Other researchers [Natriello et al., 1984] suggest that destreaming disadvantages both the weaker and the stronger students since it leads to failure for those who are weak, and frustration for stronger students who are "held back". The damage to students' self images as they come to consider themselves failures is hard to measure. Keeping weaker students in a core curriculum that results in their experiencing failure seems to be counter-productive [Wehlage & Rutter, 1986].

Rather than denying that ability grouping occurs justifiably, it may prove worthwhile to examine more effective ways to group students that might help discourage dropping out. It may be that the destreaming movement is simply a means for

²⁵ Explicit streaming would be by means of testing and placement; implicit could be voluntary, as in French immersion or accelerated programs for college science preparation.

governments to decrease costs. In eliminating special classes and the hiring of special educators and social workers to deal with learning, emotional and behavioral problems, short term savings are represented as "progressive measures". If destreaming of the students occurs more in a sense of dumping "special cases" into the regular classroom, educators who are unprepared will often be unable to cope with the additional burden. This imposes a greater impediment on teachers working to reduce drop out rates and lowers the quality of the majority of the children's schooling.

In the U.S., and to a certain extent in Quebec, the movement towards "excellence in education" has meant a greater focus upon narrowing standards, and reducing options in a core curriculum stressing technical competence [Aronowitz & Giroux, 1985; Personal observation, 1993²⁶]. In a system based upon liberalist²⁷ principles, the weaker students' suffering is deemed less important than stronger students' meeting higher standards.

The logical response to such issues would be to improve access to vocational programs, which entail some form of streaming. Researchers seem to agree that there is a place for vocational programs in the high schools [Wehlage et al., 1989; Saba, 1985; Cadotte and Noël, 1993]. Yet the stigma attached to "blue collar" labour results in many

²⁶ The Quebec Ministry of Education has instituted a new mathematics curriculum for level Secondary I based purely upon using 'scenarios' or, as are commonly known, story problems. It is commendable that a new relevance is to be found in the maths program which will hopefully increase students' appreciation of the applicability of mathematics to the work world and domestic life. However the introduction of such challenging innovation at this level ignores the poor preparation that the elementary program seems to have given for such a level of performance.

²⁷ Please note that the terms 'liberal' and 'liberalist' are used in their original economic sense of unshackled by personal obligation - what is perhaps more commonly called neo-liberal.

students, whether capable or not, enrolling in the academic stream [Natriello et al., 1984]. While it may sound anti-democratic, can we in fact say that it is better to subject poorly prepared students to the experience of failure in a core curriculum based program than to force them to face up to their competence levels? We might perceive greater egalitarianism in the North American versus European system, where streaming takes place at a certain point [Howe, 1987]. It may simply be that the **perception** of equality is what is sought to be retained by pursuing a policy of destreaming. Destreaming only addresses the perceptions and not the actual root problem of varied capability levels. Responding to serious issues in a cosmetic fashion only forces the problem to manifest itself elsewhere.

If we were to decide to make massive, sustained interventions on behalf of the weak preschool, kindergarten and elementary school children, then a common curriculum at a later stage would be feasible. Until then, abruptly instituting a common core curriculum in high school will probably impede the weaker students' progress. Furthermore, narrowing the range of core courses would likely imply the elimination of those elective areas in which the academically weaker students have in the past been able to experience some positive results [Natriello et al., 1986].

There are no simple answers regarding issues of streaming and destreaming in regards to dropout prevention. However, special programs and alternative schools based upon different structural organization have, to some extent helped students who might have failed otherwise.

2.4.3 Class and School Size

The actual number of students in a school and in each class seems to have an impact upon the drop out rate of the particular school. In the Canadian case, Morris et al. [1991] found that the smaller schools had the best retention rates, followed by the largest schools, while the medium sized schools fared the worst. Wehlage and Rutter [1986] also speak of the benefits of a small school. These include its being more conducive to individualized attention and personalization of the programs; facilitation of clearer objectives and prompt feedback; a familiarity with the majority of the staff and other students; a sense of probably being treated more fairly; and a greater sense of a supportive environment. Disruptive behaviour is seen as being better dealt with; indications are that problems can be maintained at a much more manageable level if school size is below four or five hundred students [Cuban, 1989].

The largest schools have the advantages of diverse programs which offer options for the less academically inclined students. In one study it was found that a one hundred per cent increase in school size seemed to only lead to a seventeen percent increase in curriculum variety ; furthermore, it was mainly the best students, and not the at-risk ones who benefited from the increased variety.²⁸

Class size in high school is less straight forward. Certain studies show it as being less significant an issue than school size [Morris et al., 1991]. It has been shown that in the early years of kindergarten and primary one to three, smaller class sizes do make a significant difference.²⁹ In high schools oversized classes may be linked to high dropout

²⁸ Gump, P.V. Big Schools, Small Schools Chronicle Guidance Publications, Moravia, New York, 1966. As quoted in Morris et al, 1991.

²⁹ Bledsoe, 1959; Wittebols, 1986; Altieri, 1990 - in Morris et al, 1991.

rates, however the link is not direct, since other factors such as linguistic difficulties seem to be the more significant issue.³⁰ The stage at which the smaller class size is the most important is that point at which basic reading, writing and computational skills are being taught, ie. in the first cycle of the primary grades. While trimming class size at the secondary level might prove to benefit students at risk of dropping out in combination with other initiatives, in and of itself it may not prove to be the most effective measure for reducing dropouts. In regards to these findings, funding decreased class size makes more sense at the early elementary level.

2.4.4 Role of the Teacher

Generally speaking, high schools seek teachers who are specialists in core subject matter to teach specific courses while guidance counsellors and social workers deal with students' personal issues. This may work to the detriment of at-risk students who come from disfavoured communities, since the guidance counsellors may be unable to respond to the volume of needs for intervention. To respond to this problem, Wehlage promotes what he refers to as a school culture of the "extended role" for the teacher. In this scenario, the "teachers concern themselves about anything that inhibits a student's success, including attention to problems the student brings from the home, community or peer group" [Wehlage, 1986, p.27]. This extended role implies that many of the responsibilities which have traditionally belonged to behavioral specialists (or parents) are being carried out in the classroom at the same time that academic learning is supposedly taking place.

³⁰ Larter & Eason, 1978 cited in Morris et al, 1991.

Here we may encounter some conflicts regarding what it is that teachers see as their principal roles. Many teachers see high school as a preparation for college and/or university. In this view, the preparation of the best students takes on a greater significance than the teaching of those who are at risk of dropping out, or who at best may finish their education with their high school diploma. This issue will be addressed again in the next section concerning curriculum and relevance (2.4.5). At this stage it will suffice to say that teachers' commitment to the education of the at-risk students is affected by a school culture which rewards those seen as most likely to succeed [Wehlage, 1986]. An example of the attitude in one inner city school is the boast of a New York City principal that eighty percent of that school's graduates went on to college; he failed to mention that less than thirty-five percent of beginning students ever made it to graduation day [Fine, 1991].

Working with students in difficulty demands more patience and time, for lesser results. It is students at-risk of dropping out who need the attention most and seem often not to get it (unless they are disruptive, in which case the attention they get is negative). In many studies students, and not only those considered at risk, have reported perceiving that their teachers are not really very interested in them or their problems [Wehlage & Rutter, 1986; Morris et al., 1991; Mann, 1986; Nelsen, 1985].

At least one researcher has linked teacher disempowerment with poor attitudes towards students. In a study of a New York City high school, two thirds of teachers felt that administrators took little interest in what happened in the classroom [Fine, 1986]. The same researcher found that these teachers who suffered little support or respect in turn tended to be most likely to have negative or pessimistic views of the students.

Insuring that teachers feel appreciated and recognized might improve their perceptions of their work, and in turn, their success with students in difficulty.

2.4.5 Curriculum

This study does not intend to delve deeply into the issues surrounding curriculum and its relevance in the lives of the at-risk students. Such studies have been undertaken (see Wehlage, 1986; Fine, 1991) and seem to indicate that students often have difficulty recognising how the curriculum is relevant to their lives. Such a lack of confidence in the legitimacy of the subject matter is a major problem. As it becomes more widespread for students to question the validity of their studies, student disengagement looms larger [Wehlage & Rutter, 1986].

Students' poor performance may imply the inappropriateness either of the material, or the method in which it is presented. Members of minority groups and working class communities suffer from their lack of the "cultural capital" upon which much of the curriculum is based [Bourdieu & Passeron, 1976]. A curriculum which is too difficult for all but the top three students in a class needs modification, or the grouping itself needs to be modified. We are faced with pondering whether it is better to water down the curriculum, or else group the students according to ability to assimilate it. If we are to stream the students, as was previously suggested, there needs to be an effort made to address and transform the stigmatization generally associated with the non-academic vocational streams.

Nelsen [1985] encourages a greater communitarian approach to education, rather than being so bureaucratically oriented towards preparing students as original thinkers.

Schools need to be more responsive to the needs of the poorer students who will not carry on into university. They need to provide career education and work related experiences. Field trips, community liaison, social development courses, and group and individual counselling need to be incorporated into the curriculum [Hamby, 1989]. The evolving nature of the role which school plays in the lives of the students needs to be recognized. For the at-risk students, the extension of the curriculum to include issues such as labour market preparation, sex education, parenting, drug dependence, understanding mass media, and coping with stress and mental illness could elicit greater engagement than do geography, history, ecology or mathematics.

Demographic trends seem to indicate that more and more children will be coming from underprivileged backgrounds. Teachers need to adapt their visions of what schools should be; meeting the needs of these students implies modifying the middle class bias of the curriculum in order to respond more to the realities of the lives of the working class and poor [Wehlage, 1986]. With students often unconvinced of the validity of the process which they are undergoing, it is hardly surprising that they do not commit themselves wholeheartedly, and often drop out at the first opportunity [Wehlage et al., 1989]. The curriculum might better promote learning about culturally pertinent matters by moving back and forth between student experiences and academic subject matter. By exploiting children's natural curiosity about their immediate surroundings, engagement may thus be elicited in more abstract studies [Cuban, 1989].

The issue of curriculum relevance implies a major rethinking of the philosophical underpinnings of an educational program. Later in this paper we will look at how the Quebec Ministry of Education is dealing with the dropout problem through special

initiatives. One recommendation would obviously include curriculum modification.

2.4.6 Grade Repetition

In their review of numerous statistical studies, Morris et al. [1991] found consistently that students who had been retained one year or more prior to high school dropped out at much higher rates- 40% rates for repeaters as opposed to 10% for those not having repeated.³¹ Research carried out in Quebec [Brais, 1992] seems to demonstrate that dropout rates similarly are much higher (there) for those students that have had to repeat a year. This study³² focused on students who had failed to be promoted in the primary grades. Those who had repeated dropped out at a rate of 48.6%, and they made up 49.8% of all dropouts despite being only 26% of the student cohort.

Hammack [1986] concludes that the holding back of students a year is a major contributor to their eventual withdrawal. Yet is retention a cause in its own right or is it merely a symptom of a weak student not able to live up to reasonable demands? Recalling the model presented by Eckstrom et al. [1986], it is likely a combination of both, as well as other factors. The failure of the school to provide appropriate pedagogical practices for ensuring continuous progress on the part of all of the students must be acknowledged.

Extensive grade retention can result in exacerbation of disciplinary problems and greater social conflict amongst students. While maintaining standards is the rationale for retention, routine use of this practice leads to disengagement of retained students, their

³¹Bachman, J., S. Green and I. Wirtanen Dropping Out: Problem or Symptom Institute for Social Research, Ann Arbor Michigan 1971 as cited in Morris et al, 1991.

³² Based upon a survey six years later of all students enrolled for the first time in secondary one in Quebec in September, 1984.

disruption of the classroom, and delegitimising of the schools [Wehlage et al., 1989]. From a strictly economic perspective, keeping students back a year is costly. Quebec figures for one year of schooling are \$5,088 for the 1990-1991 school year [Ministère de l'Éducation, 1992 B]. A bit of prevention might serve better than a year of "cure", and seems likely to cost less.

Several alternatives to failing students have been suggested. Multi-age, multi-level groupings in primary schools would allow for special attention to be given without the stigma of being overage. Allowing for making up of unsatisfactory performance over the year rather than waiting until the last week of year to notify of failure would be more practical. Lastly, biannual promotion would imply that failure means only 1/2 year to be made up [Hahn & Danzberger, 1987].

2.5 CONCLUSIONS

Several different categories of issues that all influence students' dropout behaviour have been presented. This chapter examines various causes of dropping out. It is contended that the student is indeed pushed towards a dropout decision dictated by factors largely out of her or his control. A multiplicity of factors rather than only one or two drive the student towards the decision to quit school, thereby requiring a path analysis in which various factors can be implicated.

If student's socio-demographic circumstances are important determining factors leading to dropping out, modifying those circumstances may then be the best means to intervene on behalf of the at-risk student. Poverty would be best met by providing resources to the poorer communities from which many dropouts originate. Likewise,

minority students should benefit from interventions that recognize their specific cultural capital.

Regions should have discretion over how to intervene to resolve local problems. Linguistic groups should have specific responses to their particular needs. Boys and girls should have separate programs targeting their distinct needs. These demographic groupings have distinctive needs requiring specially tailored responses.

Family support initiatives should promote assistance to keep families intact and encourage their realistic and positive expectations from the education system. Personal problems should be met with reasonable access to social services. All of the above considerations need to be addressed in organising appropriate interventions. Whether these demands are met, however, is subject to political approval. Since it is far from clear that the political will exists to rectify these social injustices, it is necessary instead to look towards modifications of how current resources are deployed.

The institutional features of the schools are obviously more subject to modification by educational administrators and practitioners than are the students' demographic characteristics. Setting up learning situations more conducive to success for the at-risk students may involve readjustments that are unfavourable to competitive college-bound students. Ability grouping, school and class size, and curriculum may need to be adjusted in the interests of the potential dropouts. Teachers may need to re-evaluate their role as cultural workers as opposed to more narrowly that of preparing a small portion of their students for CÉGEP or university. A path model implies that a strategy must be developed which can address the many different issues prompting the student to drop out. These concerns must be considered in the evaluation of dropout prevention initiatives.

The next chapter looks at what types of efforts have been undertaken, and which of those seem to be the best responses to the above concerns. Some of these involve interventions to modify current practices, while others consist of entirely rejecting the customary schooling routine in exchange for alternative schools and programs. After noting the initiatives that have been undertaken, the subsequent chapter will look at how the MEQ's policies facilitate the implementation of effective programs, and if they do not, what are the problems.

CHAPTER THREE

DROPOUT PREVENTION PROGRAMS

Programs aimed at preventing dropping out vary on many accounts. It is possible to characterize nearly any school initiative whatsoever as striving to decrease dropout rates. The focus here is on programs which are instituted with the specific intention of decreasing the dropout rate, either through prevention or intervention. The eight projects below are examined in light of the variables raised in the previous chapter, and whether or not they are responded to effectively.

3.1 CATEGORIES OF PROGRAMS

To compare dropout prevention and intervention policies, it is necessary to distinguish the levels of categories of policy planners. To do this, initiatives are classified according to where they are implemented. In that way it can be seen what strategies large-scale organizations similar to the MEQ have introduced, as well as how local individual programs are carried out "on the ground". This way it can later be determined what would be feasible under the conditions of Quebec's Joining Forces initiative. The categories are the following:

1. Programs targeting pre-school and elementary schools with preventative measures: these could include Head Start type initiatives, as well as remediation and counselling efforts in the elementary grades. While these are certainly important efforts, this study is focused on secondary school interventions.
2. Programs that target specific students within a school: these could include targeted

remediation and counselling, and special vocational courses for students with poor academic performances.

3. Programs that are implemented across the school: these can occur in alternative schools that specifically target potential dropouts; or they can occur in schools with high rates of dropping out, but which deliver a standard curriculum. These could include introduction of career orientation efforts, extracurricular esteem building projects and so forth.

4. Programs that have widespread implementation: these can be programs initiated by one or a group of school commissions, a ministry of education, or even a national body.

These types of programs can include generalized curriculum modifications, integrated multi-component strategies, and both broadly and narrowly defined programs aimed at prevention and intervention in cases of potential dropouts. They can also include sensibilization campaigns, attempting through publicization of the dropout issue to affect people's attitudes and behaviour.

3.1.1 Programs Targeting Pre-School and Elementary Students.

It is reasonable to presume that the earlier interventions are made in attempting to prevent high school dropping out, the better. Researchers looking at the various "Head Start" type programs in the United States have found there to have been measurable results from these efforts [Hahn & Danzberger, 1987; Slavin & Madden, 1989]. Smaller classes in primary levels tend to give better results for reading, writing and mathematics.

Ideally interventions to prevent dropping out would be made in the earliest years of schooling in order to remediate weaknesses and work with parents regarding social problems. Rather than examine how this would best be undertaken, however, in this study

focus is on what should be done to help at-risk students already in high school. It is not intended to imply that elementary school initiatives are less valid- on the contrary, they seem the most logical place to begin dropout prevention programs. However the intention here is to consider interventions specifically made at the secondary level.

3.1.2 Programs Targeting Specific Students

Programs aimed at specifically targeted youth generally consist of remediation, counselling or vocational orientation. These occur either in specially streamed classes, or outside of regular class time. Programs often focus on combinations of two or three main issues, these being academic remediation, social and/or behavioral counselling, or employment skills preparation.

Parsons and Meyer [1990] developed a program aimed at improving students' academic performance through working with them on their perceptions of the learning process. In order to improve the students' performances or "study orchestrations", a series of five seminars was given discussing the significance of learning tools. These include the role of instructors, approaching texts, and preparing for examinations. Rather than focusing upon the improvement of teaching, they sought instead to assist the learners in bettering their learning skills. They found that participants in their program showed demonstrable improvement. However, as volunteers, their subjects were somewhat motivated towards learning in the first place. This is often not the case for dropouts, who, if we measure by results, are found to be on average one mark level lower than graduates (ie. "C" rather than "B" averages) [Eckstrom et al., 1986].

Trueba [1988] reports on an intensive summer remediation project targeting

minority potential drop-outs in central California. This program was mainly aimed at remediating the negative effects of racism suffered by minority students, considering such experiences to have had a negative impact upon their learning opportunities, confidence and outcomes. The program involved a summer schooling experience where they studied intensively at a regional college, in closely knit groupings, living in dormitories and having a full-time counsellor/tutor assigned to each small group. The tutors helped (on a one on one basis) in encouraging the contemplation and reinterpretation of the negative past experiences (particularly of a racist character) which had contributed to the negative self-perceptions held by these at-risk students.

Adults had contributed to the poor self esteem of these students. Through intensive remediation with caring teachers and tutor/counsellors, the changed manner of relating to these adults impacted heavily upon the students, improving their self-esteem. Adults capable of inspiring students' positive self-perceptions in terms of schooling abilities can reorient students away from excessive peer group identification, towards prioritizing success in school. An important goal is that of having the students come to hold the values and objectives of significant adults in higher regard than those of their peers.³³ This is obtained in this particular project through increasing individual interactions between students and their teachers and tutors, both on academic and social levels.

A program that incorporates all three components (ie. remediation, counselling and job preparation) was implemented in a south side Chicago high school. The "Job Readiness Program" set up at Dunbar Vocational High School in 1984 targeted students

³³ This reflects similar findings in section 2.3 where we learned that students whose primary socialisation was to their peers are less likely to hold education in high esteem, and are more likely to dropout.

on the basis of their being considered at high risk of dropping out. These students were provided with additional support for basic skills development, self-esteem counselling and development of employability skills [Orr, 1987]. Students in this program are in separate classes from the other students in the school. Together they have counselling and employability classes where activities have involved mock application and interview sessions with visiting personnel managers, visits to companies and talking with personnel staff. Efforts at eliciting a firm commitment included a formal contract pledging the student to the program, and attempts to involve parents in seeing that homework is done. Team-building efforts between parents and teachers included parent education workshops and conferences.

Businesses and industry are involved not only through an on-site visiting program, but also through offering summer and part-time employment to students recommended by program coordinators. These are entry level jobs that the students would normally lack access to. Employers have committed themselves to taking a special interest in these students with the objective of encouraging their continued educational pursuits. This intensive vocational orientation attempts to promote traits which are desired by employers: attendance is a high priority. Job readiness is a focus, and hands-on experience is promoted. This program has shown improvement in the school's retention rates [Orr, 1987].

These three different programs take as their foci different aspects of the students' experiences. The first one considers the student's academic weakness as being the most important issue to target; the second addresses his or her self esteem in regards to negative past experiences; the third focuses on encouraging the student's development of

job skills presuming this will "retain" him or her in the system based on his or her developing pragmatism. All of these programs are commendable. The weaknesses however need to be pointed out.

As was mentioned, Parsons and Meyer's study concertation workshops help those students already motivated towards improving their performance. These students do not seem as likely to be at such great risk of dropping out. Dropout prevention initiatives which target the "marginally" at-risk students may in fact not be dealing with those students whose needs are most urgent. While it is worthwhile to prevent borderline at-risk students from dropping out, it is possible that students with more difficult problems are being neglected.

Trueba's intensive minority intervention program attempts to attack problems of academic weakness as well as poor attitude and/or low self esteem. In this case the provision of caring mentors is used to counter the students' lack of adult guidance and support. In the long term, these students will hopefully serve as agents for change if they are successful in their schooling. Efforts to heighten students' understanding of issues related to racial discrimination will hopefully lead to their contributing to the improvement of conditions in their home communities. Unfortunately upward mobility usually means leaving one's community to go and live amongst a higher status group. Attempts to develop more supportive communities are an uphill battle against such tendencies of wishing to identify oneself with higher status communities.

The "Job Readiness Program" dealt with the numerous concerns raised on the levels of remediation, counselling and job preparation. Students are being directly socialized into the characteristics of the ideal employee. The needs of the students for

success are being met through conditioning them to conform to the exigencies of business and industry. This may imply later financial security as they find that they are part of that minority that is fortunate enough to find work. In the long run such vocational education may prevent them from contributing to the redefinition of the social institutions which will define their communities and futures. This may be too demanding of such a program. It is nevertheless important to consider that if education is to become strictly vocational training, it may ensue that citizenship and the responsibilities that it implies will continue to decline. This will feed back into our flow chart of factors leading to dropping out for the next generation.

The fact that these programs were each implemented for one distinct group has meant that their administration has been flexible enough to respond to the immediate concerns of those students in light of the circumstances of that particular school, the surrounding community and its actual employment situation and prospects. Once a broader segment of the student population is targeted, a certain amount of flexibility is lost. As it will be shown in the next section, dropout prevention interventions are often made on a broader basis.

3.1.3 School-wide Programs

Alternative schools have been set up in many places in order to deal with students who do not "conform" to the standards of the mainstream schools. These students are often considered to be at-risk for dropping out. They have difficulties with their coursework and their behaviour does not generally comply with the rules set out by the regular schools. Alternative schools implement educational practices which attempt to

respond to the needs of these children and adolescents. Rather than being simply "interventions" on a schoolwide level, these are rather alternative programs which are schools in their own right. Along with looking at two alternative schools, a look is also taken at a schoolwide program set up in a more traditional setting. This points to some practices modifying the standard traditional school structure, aimed at improving outcomes for at-risk students in schools with especially high dropout rates.

Wehlage et al. [1989] describe an alternative school in Oakland California called "Media Academy". Here the curriculum includes a variety of hands-on experiences such as publication of a school newspaper, and frequent contacts with local professionals in radio, television and newspapers. Students are expected to make a serious effort to improve their communicative and critical thinking skills. The academic dimension is underscored by the vocational aspect of the program. Students are better motivated and engaged in their studies because they see the subject material as being more focused, and more valid in the "real world" as opposed to much school work which seems merely to be mental gymnastics. Despite perhaps not all finding employment in the field of communications media, the experience of succeeding in this field hopefully opens up the students' eyes to what sort of effort is required to succeed elsewhere. These students are selected because they seem to have the latent abilities to succeed but lack the motivation. Teachers work towards encouraging the students to strive for their best, unlike in the regular stream in which these same children tended to be alienated, getting by doing the least work possible.

A significant factor of the structure of the Media Academy is that the program is organized to promote group work. This demands involvement and motivation of the

students. Students are taught that this is more the norm of most work sites and they learn to accept that their efforts are a social rather than individual phenomenon. A communal approach to the learning task has been shown to foster the engagement of learners whom the traditional individualistic competitive schooling setup has failed to inspire.

Orr [1987] describes an alternative high school set up in a department store in downtown Atlanta, "Rich's Academy". Here the vocational aspect is clear; the students' classes take place in the department store, in conference room space donated by the store. Students are paired with employees of the store who are given flexibility in being allowed to tutor students during their actual work hours. Most of the students have parents who have never held regular jobs; 90% of students are from households which subsist on welfare. Experiencing the routines and rigours of the workplace, with the responsibilities for attendance and a commitment to the program has benefited students who were previously blasé about their schooling. They learn about work and discipline in a context of being able to easily project themselves into an employment situation. As well, twenty-five other businesses in Atlanta participate in career information and exploration sessions, along with providing part-time and summer employment.

The central tenet of the Rich's program (Rich's is the name of the department store) is the development of self-esteem. Instilling motivation and confidence in the students is accomplished through a comprehensive counselling design. Mondays begin with a personal development motivating session. The rest of the days of the week begin with a twenty minute "rap session" in which group building is stressed. Counselling pervades all of the activities. Everyone working in the program, including the store's staff/tutors, serves as counsellors, and strives to deal with students' problems as soon as

they arise. If students display symptoms of problems requiring professional attention, the staff are encouraged to discuss these cases with the program director who will arrange for their referral to the appropriate agencies.

Results have been quite impressive. Seventy percent of the students have graduated from this program while a further fifteen percent have gone back into the regular system. The employment rate for students graduating from the academy is quite high.

Marockie and Jones [1987] report on a project that was undertaken in Wheeling Park High School in Wheeling, West Virginia. The main goal of this project is to involve parents to a greater degree in the educational perseverance of their children. To this end a comprehensive attendance monitoring program was instituted, with a school counsellor being assigned full time to monitoring potential or actual dropouts. This person inquires into the situations of students who had stopped attending, or who were referred by other counsellors, administrators or teachers as potential dropouts. The primary action of this counsellor is that of making home visits to conduct exit interviews with those students set to drop out. The goal is to involve the parent(s) in seeking to identify the immediate cause of the student's disaffection with the school. An attempt to dissuade students from carrying through with their decision to drop out is made based on modification of the learning environment.

Other responsibilities of this counsellor include: working with targeted potential dropouts referred by teachers, administrators and other guidance counsellors; working at reintegrating returning dropouts; and organising a project targeting at-risk students in the primary and intermediary schools. In working with potential dropouts and those

"intercepted" dropouts convinced not to quit, the counsellor organizes counselling for personal problems, arranges program modifications as well as follow-up home visits in order to maintain support of the parents. In 1987 the success rate of the home visitor's clients was 57% retention.

Two aspects which are less within the scope of this study but nevertheless interesting are the reinsertion program and the early intervention program. The reinsertion program involves intensive counselling support for returning dropouts in order to prevent their dropping out twice. They are encouraged to limit their course work and to communicate as soon as possible regarding difficulties. Regular counsellors as well as the home visitor serve as resource persons for these students.

The early prevention program involves targeting students early on who are seen as likely to be at-risk later- ie. going upstream. This particular project involved setting up a volunteer program staffed by retired teaching professionals who would make "caring" calls to the homes of primary and intermediate school students who were absent, inquiring into the causes and as to what the school might do to assist in improving the students' attendance. In so doing, the "Care Callers" might also serve to link the family up with a network of social services such as the welfare bureau's special programs department, public health services, charitable and social organizations, alcohol and substance abuse programs and so forth.

The results of these initiatives seem to have been successful. Dropout rates which were approaching 30% at the time the program was instituted (1979-80) have dropped to between five and eleven percent six and seven years later. This is determined by the authors to be linked to the direct, personal, immediate and caring intervention with the

parents and the students. The simple act of communicating seems to have been effective in a substantial proportion of cases. This seems to reinforce the need for a sense of community between the school and the home in order to promote a situation where the resources of both institutions can work towards a common goal of the child's educational success.

All three of the above initiatives have turned to resources not traditionally employed in the educational system. In Media Academy, the program is based upon linking students with journalists and researchers already working in the field of communications media. This added dimension of authenticity inspires students to persevere, by avoiding the students' perception that their learning is irrelevant. Rather than being broad and shallow, their studies are focused and in depth. The vocational and the academic aspects of this program seem to be ideally fused. The group work also helps to retain students who resent an overtly individualist learning atmosphere.

Rich's Academy has access to a particularly generous benefactor in the form of the owner of a department store, who has made a major commitment of his time, accommodations, staff and financing in order to maintain a high level of services to these students. In running the program inside the department store, again the vocational aspect is stressed. Students become accustomed to a workplace atmosphere, and begin to project themselves into roles of employees succeeding on the labour market. Their self esteem is enhanced by the support of their mentor/tutors to persevere in spite of adversity. This added support network seems to help retain students who would otherwise probably drop out out of resignation to a fate similar to that of their parents.

Wheeling Park High School has chosen to bank upon the presumed commitment

of parents to their children's education and has endeavoured to broaden and deepen this commitment. Staff attempt to sensitize the parents to the importance of the children's staying in school, and in so doing have succeeded in overcoming some of the apathy amongst the families of the students at-risk [Marockie & Jones, 1987]. By involving the parents, the school has brought an important force to bear that seems to have had a positive impact in improving graduation rates.

All three of these projects have in common an attempt to broaden the support structure of the school community by adding resources that will keep the children focused upon learning and succeeding. By networking amongst parents, counsellors, business and possible employers, a support structure comes into place which can act quickly in response to the needs of a potential dropout. Such a community of support may be harder to establish in a broader context. In the next section we will look at what has been done at the level of the (Boston) school commission and the (New York State) ministry of education.

3.1.4 Multi-school Programs

Across North America ministries of education and school commissions have mounted major initiatives in attempting to stem the flow of dropouts. These have been worked out in some cases in collaboration with business and industry in order to formulate vocational programs which serve the interests of the specific private partners. In Canada and Quebec, as has been previously mentioned, governments have been willing to commit funding to such programs. We will next look at some examples of comprehensive dropout prevention initiatives.

In the state of New York, Governor Cuomo declared 1989 the beginning of the "Decade of the Child", and committed his government to giving high priority to the needs of youth. One of his stated goals was that of reducing the dropout rate by half over the subsequent five years.³⁴ New York was reported to have a dropout rate of 34% in 1987, ranking it as forty-sixth poorest amongst the fifty United States and the District of Columbia.³⁵ In confronting this problem the government of New York has been quite forthcoming in increasing the amount of resources it is ready to devote to education in general and this problem in particular [see appendix III, p. 96]. The programs listed in the second table are of several types.

The principal targets of the dropout prevention strategies have been the students enrolled in what have been referred to as the "Big Five" urban school districts. These include New York, Buffalo, Rochester, Syracuse and Yonkers. Programs particularly targeting these cities include Early Grade Intervention, Pupils with Compensatory Needs Grants, and Student Information Systems. Early Grade Intervention is aimed at (1) reducing class size in grades one, two and three; (2) increasing individual attention to these same children; and (3) improving educational strategies for those students having difficulties with basic learning skills [Curley, 1991]. This program targets especially the poorest areas of the cities. Pupils with Compensatory Needs grants provide funding for basic remedial efforts in such areas as reading, writing and mathematics. These funds need to be approved on a project-by-project basis, and are combined with other programs.

³⁴Cuomo, Mario 'State of New York Annual Budget Message 1988-1989' as quoted in Curley, 1991.

³⁵Hodgkinson, H.L. New York: The State and its Educational System The Institute for Educational Leadership, Inc. Washington D.C. 1987 as quoted in Curley, 1991.

Student Information Systems is a management information system which allows for information regarding the students' backgrounds to be easily available for purposes of determining their eligibility for specialized programs. Information such as attendance patterns, test scores, course grades and family breakdown indicate the need for particular interventions. It also allows for following students who leave one school, confirming whether or not they actually enrol elsewhere.

Other programs not specifically targeting the Big Five systems include Parenting Education grants, Attendance Improvement/Dropout Prevention aid, Support Services aid, the Schools as Community Sites program, and the Youth at Risk program. These will be briefly discussed below. Parenting Education grants are aimed at preparing students to be parents, but also at improving the parenting skills of adults caring for school children. The intention is to encourage greater support for education in the home. Monies are spent on having teachers and professionals work individually and in groups with parents and students. Attendance Improvement/ Dropout Prevention (AIDP) aid targets those school districts with high levels of absenteeism and dropping out. This money is spent on funding attendance officers and supplementary counsellors, and to a certain extent to facilitate integration with networks of community support organizations. This program dates back further than the others; positive results have been obtained, with districts implementing this program actually having their dropout rates fall below the state's averages [Curley, 1991]. Support Services aid is available to supplement counselling and psychological, social, health, attendance and other services to students. These services are aimed at improving the students ability to adapt to the schooling situation, and hence not drop out out of resignation to failure or maladjustment. The Schools as Community Sites

program involves having the school serve as a centre for social, health and recreational services to the community as well as its primary purpose of education. In some schools activities continue into the evenings, on week-end days, and during the summer. The objective in making the school the focus of community life is that of having students who regard it as irrelevant come to see it as a vibrant place for them, where they can focus their energies on completing their educations. For students with poor quality home lives or lack of safe recreational options, this program is a good means of reaching out to them. The Youth at Risk program provides funding aimed at coordinating the efforts of educational, social service, private and community agencies which offer services to potential dropouts. Funding is available which is to be used to purchase specific services from local agencies to assist at-risk students. There is also a matching requirement- funding is not offered on a 100% basis.

These several different initiatives' objectives are the prevention of dropping out. By attempting to deliver a better quality service to the students, and/or by attempting to better target the student at-risk, each of these programs intends to improve chances for success in completing their high school.

Some of these programs were promoted by the Republican majority in the state senate; others by the Democratic majority in the state assembly; others by the governor, the board of regents, the teachers union, and other interested parties [Curley, 1991]. With many different levels and groups involved, the administrative requirements for proposal review and program monitoring are monumental. With projects receiving overlapping funding, they are often required to submit several annual operating reports. A further criticism is that those schools and districts having access to the best writers of grant

proposals may end up with a greater amount of funding than their situations or projects deserved. A streamlining and combining of the programs seems appropriate, especially to avoid unnecessary duplication of services [Curley, 1991; Orr, 1987]. It appears that resources which might be used to finance innovative programs may well be used instead mainly for administrative support.

In the case of the Boston School System a strategy was instituted several years ago which coordinated with the private sector in developing a comprehensive regional initiative to confront the dropout problem. The immediate prompting had come from businesses in the 1982 recovery from the previous recession. At that time there was found to have been a shortage of skilled and trainable labour [Hargroves, 1987]. However, as far back as the early 1970's businesses had forged close links with the schools in anticipation of, and in response to the upheaval of the 1974 desegregation decision. With the withdrawal of many middle class students from the public system, the dropout rates had subsequently climbed [Orr, 1987].

The first agreement was signed between 350 Boston businesses and the Boston Public School System in September 1982. The working relationship between the schools, business and city government already dated back several years at this point. The Boston superintendent of schools had strong support amongst employers, who agreed to provide jobs for a certain number of public school students. The school in turn agreed to guarantee basic reading and maths competency levels for all graduates by 1986 (an example of outcome learning)[Orr, 1987]. In 1983 a second agreement was signed between Boston's 23 colleges and universities to increase by 25% the number of ninth grade public school students who would eventually go on to post-secondary studies.

Businesses helped again in offering scholarships to those students qualifying. In 1985 a third agreement was signed with trade unions to make available more apprenticeship positions.

In the period between 1982-86, businesses provided increasing numbers of jobs. However, the dropout rates actually appeared to have increased. This seems to have been attributable to at least three factors. First there had been implemented stricter accounting procedures for determining the number of dropouts. Second, with the improved economy, the pull of jobs may have contributed to some students having left school. Third, the raised standards for reading and writing meant two percent of students failed graduation examinations, and often did not continue [Hargroves, 1987].

While attendance and performance improved, dropout rates still increased. In 1986 it was determined that the more specific objective of the "compact"³⁶ should be dropout prevention as opposed to employment placement. To accomplish this two initiatives were put in operation. One was the Dropout Prevention Task Force, aimed at altering school practices in order to better encourage student perseverance, including development of alternative programs. The other was Compact Ventures, a series of interventions specifically targeting first year secondary students categorized as potential dropouts.

The proposals made by the task force included:

1. Evening school for working students and young parents;
2. Financial incentives for effective schools, and sanctions for ineffective ones;
3. After school tutoring in basic skills;
4. Developing a team strategy for social agency professionals;
5. Promoting staff development opportunities;
6. A first year high school parent outreach program;

³⁶ That is the written agreement between the schools and the businesspeople.

7. Improved career planning programs for fields displaying growth locally;
8. Additional alternative schools; and
9. Greater coordination of social services available, including referral services [Hargroves, 1987].

The Compact Ventures project involved establishing "clusters" of potential dropouts during their first year of high school in order to work intensively with them towards remediating their academic weaknesses. Two experimental projects were set up first to provide prototypes for later implementation. In these programs students receive weekly tutoring sessions on a one-on-one basis. Special youth counsellors are assigned to the clusters to monitor and counsel the students regarding their attendance, behaviour and achievement. Educational contracts are used as motivational devices in some cases. Counsellors promote self-esteem building through group counselling, field trips and group activities. Parents are encouraged to become involved in attending regular meetings. In the two trial schools where the programs were run, dropout rates dropped from 22 to 11 percent in one school and from 25 to 16 percent in the other [Orr, 1987].

Both the New York and Boston programs are collections of numerous initiatives which are aimed at being flexible and supple enough to respond to the various causes of dropping out, but in particular to those causes that are affecting the largest numbers of students. In New York the five largest urban school commissions receive the largest portion of the funding. As well the programs target the poorest districts. Yet with competition for resources, it is possible as was mentioned above that funding might be awarded more on the basis of grantsmanship than need. This seems to be more a problem of administration than constitution of programs. In order to be more effective, the needs must be better able to be determined at a distance. That way layers of bureaucracy will not need to be added which will take away resources from those working directly with the

at-risk students.

In the Boston case the original collaboration with business had led to a greater focus upon the needs of business, with some indication that the students' results were not really improving as much as one would have hoped. This was addressed through modifying the program to promote school success more so than employment preparation, in particular via the Ventures project.

Both systems have also looked for ways in which to implicate other social service agencies in working towards educational success. In terms of coordinating resources, this seems to be a cost-effective means. Yet with the leadership of the interventions somewhat dispersed across different levels of public and private administration, harmonising of efforts may prove difficult.

Attempting to make the schools more responsive to the needs of the weaker students is a major concern of the efforts of both the New York state and Boston authorities. They have responded by increasing remedial and counselling resources to the targeted groups. The issue of community building has been promoted in New York, whereas career preparation has been more of a focus in Boston. Boston has promoted alternative schools and streaming, whereas New York seems to focus more upon early remediation and intervention with parents.

3.2 CONCLUSIONS

The factors leading to dropping out which were raised in chapter two have been addressed in varying degrees by the programs examined here in chapter three. The issue of poverty is acknowledged by several of the programs implemented, in New York in

particular where many programs target poor youth with remediation, counselling and other support. A greater vocational orientation is offered in three programs as a solution to poverty: Job Readiness, Media Academy and Rich's Academy. While vocational education may help to offer students tools to overcome poverty, a side effect might possibly be the deterioration of citizenship education. The Media Academy is the least problematic in that it provides a combined academic/vocational curriculum. Employment preparation as a response to poverty should not override the other functions of the school, such as preparing students to pose questions about the meaning of their world and the usefulness of its established institutions. Trueba's [1988] program was the only one which directly addressed minority issues. Cultural differences seem to go unrecognized in the other programs, or else are seen as handicaps, as in Rich's Academy where parents' lifestyles are seen as obstacles to be overcome, and not necessarily issues to be understood. Improving students' self esteem is recognized as important to raising their chances of finishing school in many programs. Ignoring students' culture is often not recognized as thwarting this goal.

Unlike limited recognition of cultural diversity, regional flexibility is generally acknowledged as important. In the New York strategy, projects were approved on basis of the extent of local need. Readiness to accommodate to differences in localized needs reflects a political system in which territorial affinity is more important than cultural affinity. This leads to politicians responding to the needs of a specific group according to their location as opposed to their cultural characteristics. This is not a problem as long as needs are met; however minority cultures may suffer if they are not concentrated or organized enough in one location to demand that local schools respond to their specific

needs.

Linguistic and gender concerns were never addressed by the initiatives examined in this chapter. In discussing his summer remediation program for minorities, Trueba claims that the emphasis on language has been given excessive attention and that the cultural differences of minority language speakers should be of greater concern than language itself [Trueba, 1988]. This may reflect his bias towards separation of language from culture. In his study Trueba mentions that an English as a Second Language class is available to students in the program, but he does not consider it important enough to mention whether it is used by students or not.

In the eight studies looked at, gender issues are not once raised. In light of the differences in profiles provided of male and female dropouts, it appears that dropout intervention programs respond more to the needs of the male than the female at-risk students [Karp, 1988; Poole & Low, 1982; Rumberger, 1983].³⁷

Support for and inclusion of family were both raised as concerns in most programs, in particular the Wheeling, West Virginia home visit program. Provision of funding for coordination of family support interventions was sought by both New York and Boston strategies. Parenting education also targeted the next generation of parents. Most programs encourage parents to become more implicated in their children's school activities, and their lives in general.

Regarding institutional practices, Media Academy has tried to overcome the traditional competitive orientation of education in making a more cooperative program.

³⁷ Pregnancy and marriage, which combine to form the single greatest reason for dropping out by female students, are never addressed in the eight programs examined in chapter three.

Community building has been a focus of New York's "School as Community Sites" initiative as well. Rich's Academy has also tried to have concerned adults from outside of the educational field take part as mentors and tutors for children living in difficult circumstances. Encouraging closer links between students and educators is also made easier by making programs smaller, and classes more intimate. Greater interaction with adults can help keep students focused on educational goals rather than adolescent social pursuits.

Support to teachers regarding dropout prevention has been provided by the Boston schools through increasing in-service education, as well as increasing access for students to remedial and social services. In nearly all cases smaller, more focused educational programs are also encouraging more tightly knit teams, which offer teachers more support. This will hopefully allow teachers to devote more attention to their at-risk students without having to neglect their college bound students in consequence.

Curriculum relevance is a priority issue at Media Academy. With its narrow focus and involvement of professionals in the field, a suitable blending of academic and vocational curricula is achieved. The Job Readiness program and Rich's Academy focus on vocational preparedness as well. These two programs however may allow academic standards to decline.

All in all many of the programs tend to respond to certain concerns while neglecting others. Comprehensive interventions would of course be expensive, requiring increased funding. A means of having this funding has been that of turning to business and industry subsidization as in Rich's Academy, the Job Readiness program, and the Boston Compact. This funding entails other concerns; however such concerns go beyond

the scope of this work.³⁸

Meeting the multiple needs of the at-risk students means having several types of mechanisms established to combat the many impediments to at-risk students' educational success. Coordination of the various initiatives is a priority. Understanding how dropout prevention measures should work together is a major concern. The following chapter examines the government of Quebec's efforts to set up a comprehensive strategy to meet this challenge.

³⁸ Major corporations and financial institutions have often tried to set the agenda for public education. These efforts seem however to imply a greater socialization to the norms of industrial production rather than a better grasp of academic matters. A common perception of employers is that weak educational institutions are to blame for economic stagnation, and that schools should be reorganized along the lines of industry. Many educators see the problem as the reverse. Lack of employment opportunities discourage students from taking their schooling seriously. The truth is somewhere in between. For discussions of business and its role in defining education see Ray & Mickelson [1993], Persell [1977] and Aronowitz and Giroux [1985].

CHAPTER FOUR

THE JOINING FORCES INITIATIVE: THE QUEBEC MINISTRY OF EDUCATION'S COMPREHENSIVE DROPOUT PREVENTION STRATEGY

With much publicity, the Quebec Ministry of Education unveiled its dropout prevention strategy on June 8, 1992. A \$42 million envelope was earmarked to finance entirely new initiatives to be set up [Lessard, 1992]. The objective of the Joining Forces initiative (actually *Chacun ses devoirs* in French but most commonly known as the Pagé initiative) was to bring the dropout level in Quebec down from the 35% rate of 1990-91 to 20% by 1996-97. That is a goal of a 3% decrease a year for the five years beginning 1992-93.

The MEQ's plan of action features many new emphases and approaches to promoting educational success. The nature of the new initiatives is listed in the next section (a more detailed description of the 13 points of the plan can be found in Appendix IV, p. 97). The tendency is that of trying to make the system more supportive to at-risk students, without making any radical departures from the status quo. Extra remedial and counselling help are offered by staff hired temporarily. Certain programs and courses are initiated or expanded, and sensitization of parents to the problem is promoted in several ways. The implications of these propositions will be discussed in light of what has been presented in the previous three chapters. The chapter will finish by looking at the circumstances of one specific project, a peer tutoring project set up at Argyle Academy, an inner city high school within the Protestant School Board of Greater Montreal.

4.1 THE PLAN OF ACTION

The main priorities of the plan of action are listed below as they are laid out by the ministry of education:

1. Stable classroom groups;
2. A homeroom system;
3. Personalized professional support;
4. Informed choices- career counselling as a priority;
5. More access to vocational options;
6. Increased remedial measures;
7. Diversified instructional approaches;
8. Enhanced extra-curricular activities;
9. Measures to reintegrate returning students;
10. Early intervention in pre and elementary schools;
11. Setting up a resource network for school success programs;
12. Promoting parents' commitment to education;
13. Organising publicity efforts emphasising the importance of education [Ministère de l'Éducation, 1992 C].

This dropout prevention strategy was implemented in June of 1992. Eight months later the ministry published a progress report on the program entitled Mise en oeuvre du Plan d'action sur la réussite éducative: Rapport d'étape Février 1993. This document was not provided in English translation. In effect this report shows how resources were allocated under the plan of action of the ministry.

Schools and school commissions implemented 6,059 special projects for the year 1992-93. In terms of popularity of projects, the five categories of measures receiving the greatest funding were the following, in descending order.

1. Remedial and re-engagement initiatives at the secondary level;
2. Services to high school students in personal difficulty;
3. Primary school remedial and motivational programs;
4. Career orientation programs in high school; and,
5. Secondary school extra-curricular activities.

Other significant initiatives were implemented as well which involved lesser allocations of funding. Overall the implementation of the strategy did not, in the first year at least, diverge greatly from the original plan of action.

4.2 EVALUATING THE JOINING FORCES INITIATIVE

Many of the concerns raised in the previous two chapters have been addressed by the government's strategy. This section will discuss these concerns in light of how they are addressed by the Joining Forces initiative.

4.2.1 Joining Forces and Underprivileged and Minority Students

Research coming out of the education ministry and the Université de Montréal confirms that in Quebec rates of dropping out are higher amongst those students with lower living standards than those who are from wealthier backgrounds [Ministère de l'Éducation, 1991; Hrimech et al., 1993 A]. To respond to this situation, the ministry has attempted to target specific regions and populations in the province to benefit from the proposed initiative.

A formula has been developed by which to calculate the need for funding of the different school commissions based not only upon the extent of the dropout problem that they experience [Ministère de l'Éducation, 1992 A], but also on the degree of poverty amongst that commission's clientele. As the schools are left to develop proposals regarding their own needs, it is expected that students who suffer economic hardship will be targeted to receive benefits from the new initiatives.

The Montreal Island School Council, which includes the eight school boards of

Montreal, committed \$70,000 to research into who the dropouts are, and how to target them [Hrimech et al., 1993 B]. The research, carried out by the Université de Montréal, aimed at developing a more accurate profile of the potential dropout, as well as updating the education ministry's map of island dropout rates, showing which neighbourhoods have the highest rates based on concentration of poverty. This project did not actually originate within the education ministry. It is nevertheless an example of how one group of actors committed some of these resources towards responding to the needs of possible dropouts, in particular those living in poverty.

Concerning minority issues potentially leading towards dropping out, the two documents published concerning proposals and results make no references to minority issues. In other documents produced by the ministry however, there are references to linguistic minorities, yet no references to racial or ethnic minorities (apart from references to the Amerindian and Inuktitut populations) are made [Beauchesne, 1991; Ministère de l'Éducation, 1992 A; Ministère de l'Éducation, 1991]. The problems of the first nations people are not elaborated upon; they appear to be outside of the purview of this program of the ministry of education. Problems which might appear unique to the black, asian or other minority communities of Quebec do not seem to receive specific attention.

Due to the decentralized nature of the Joining Forces initiative, measures may be undertaken in which minority concerns may be addressed. One example is the attempt by PSBGM administrators to try and employ black role models in positions as social workers, in the hopes of reaching black potential dropouts [Personal observation, 1993]. Whether or not this is sufficient or effective is not clear. The rates of black dropping out are not calculated as compared to the general average; observers seem to agree that the

rates are much higher amongst blacks nonetheless [Norris, 1993].

While making no proposals based specifically upon the race of dropout populations, the decentralized nature of the Joining Forces initiative permits initiatives being based upon such concerns. The strategy can thus be criticized as not being proactive; yet proposals for ethnic, racial or culturally focused interventions can be accommodated within the Joining Forces initiative.

4.2.2 Regional Concerns

Decentralization is a major emphasis of the Joining Forces initiative. Local economic and social conditions affect dropout rates significantly. Thus, the eleven educational administrative regions of the province are each given a portion of the funds for their own programs. They, in turn, distribute this funding on the basis of the concentration of at-risk students considered to be found in the particular commission.

The main feature which allows for localized responses is the fact that projects are locally developed, proposed and implemented. Each school in the commission is encouraged to develop a plan which would respond to their own particular needs. One example is that of secondary students from Saint-George-de-Malbaie attending Polyvalente C.-E.-Pouliot. These students must commute daily 64 kilometres to Gaspé. In response, the elementary school in their village has been transformed into an evening community centre where these students can have access to the library, computers and homework help [School Works... 1993; see Appendix V, p. 99].

The principal document of the Joining Forces initiative has no reference to centrally planned regionalized efforts; on the contrary it emphasizes its decentralized

nature [Ministère de l'Éducation, 1992 C]. The ministry has provided support to the more remote areas. A support team has been developed whose members have travelled extensively in order to assist in the on-site development of isolated local initiatives [Ivan Smith, Educational Success Specialist, MEQ, personal communication, May 5, 1993].

4.2.3 Gender and Linguistic Issues in Dropout Programs

The education ministry makes no mention of differences in tendencies towards dropping out between males and females in its Joining Forces document. Despite it being known that in Quebec boys drop out at a 50% higher rate than girls, the guidelines for the initiative do not urge targeting boys more or differently than girls. The different reasons behind males and females dropping out may however be accommodated in programs being implemented at the local level.

One means of targeting male or female students is through athletic programs which are generally segregated. In this respect the girls or boys can be exposed separately to that specific effort which is intended to target their group. The prevention strategy does in fact make accommodation for extra-curricular activities. These situations would lend themselves to interventions aimed at discussing pregnancy, discouragement, rejection of school values, and other issues which tend to be more gender specific.

No mention of linguistic issues whatsoever is made in the Joining Forces document. It is known that the rates of dropping out are much higher among francophone students than anglophones. Learning of a second language is a problem for many at-risk students. Second language learning is such a politically explosive issue in Quebec, it is possible that it is ignored in the interest of avoiding controversy.

4.2.4 Family Issues and Dropout Prevention in Quebec

The MEQ recognizes the important role that parents play in the success of their children in school. In light of this, the ministry has undertaken several specific initiatives especially targeting parents. Professionally animated sessions designed to strengthen parents' educational skills, using parent-child activities and discussion groups are being made available. A television series has been planned targeting parents and teachers of children five years old and younger, highlighting the role of parents in their children's education. The ministry has asked school commissions to simplify report cards so that parents are more easily informed of their children's progress.

4.2.5 The School Competitive Climate

The Joining Forces proposals include setting up stable classroom groups in the early secondary grades, preferably with the same teacher teaching several subjects. The ministry seems to be backing away from the past ideal of teacher subject specialization. Providing a climate where the student feels more secure now should take precedence over subject expertise. No direct reference is made to a competitive school climate as an issue in and of itself. In fact in one passage of the Joining Forces document it is stressed that awards ceremonies for outstanding achievement are good forms of motivation.

The apathy of poorly achieving students is largely addressed as individual pathology rather than a generalized social phenomenon in need of addressing in the curriculum. Changing the curriculum is discussed, but in the sense of offering alternative technology programs. Initiatives towards community building are encouraged, but in a haphazard sense, such as by increasing extra-curricular activities or offering some vague

recommendations regarding "flexibility". As was mentioned, a task force was called for by the minister which should have addressed such concerns, but it never was actually convened as intended.³⁹

The decentralized nature of the Pagé Initiative allows for strategies which could aim to counter the alienating climate of the school experienced by many of the at-risk students. Nevertheless as an initiative professing to be innovative, it fails to provide a great deal of leadership regarding implementation of change. No mention is made of alternative schools, while extra remediation is touted as the most significant intervention.

4.2.6 Streaming, Destreaming and Vocational Education

Streaming and destreaming are never directly addressed in the Joining Forces document. Issues of different ability levels in the classroom are acknowledged as being part of many students inability to "keep up". Yet there is ambiguity about how to cope with the problems of underachieving students, apart from once again recommending remediation.⁴⁰

³⁹ The subsequent education minister however has since carried out a rather hurried review of the curriculum, Moving Ahead: Elementary and secondary school education in Quebec: Orientations, proposals and issues (Ministère de l'Éducation du Québec, November, 1993). Mme. Robillard had intended to follow this with a consultation of experts, although she has since moved to another ministry and the intentions of the new minister are as yet not clear.

⁴⁰ One problem which is significant is that of whether to make remediation mandatory or not. Optional remediation is often not used by students, especially since many of these underachieving students lack motivation. Mandatory remediation requires the support and consent of the school principal and parents- it is not always clear that this is forthcoming. Furthermore remediation can undermine teachers' efforts when students participating in remediation consider this to be grounds for disengagement in class [Personal observations, 1993].

Vocational education on the other hand is given greater attention. The fact that vocational programs are much more popular amongst adults than high school aged students means that efforts are needed to convince students that such programs are worthy. As was mentioned above, there is a tendency to look down upon such work and hence such programs. The ministry proposes to heighten awareness of such programs, and to expand the co-operative programs in which students study and work part-time in their fields. These efforts may be well intentioned. However it is perhaps up to the employers to make it clear that stable employment is available to students in order to entice them into such programs. It is also possible that the tendency for society to cast scorn upon the trades is more than the education ministry can itself compensate for.

4.2.7 Class and School Size

No direct mention is made of class or school size in the ministry's document. The ministry seems to have no intention of decreasing class sizes, but seems to propose temporarily funding remediation efforts instead.

4.2.8 Role of the Teacher

As was mentioned above, the ministry proposes that teachers focus less upon specialization, and more on monitoring some of the non-academic problems facing their students, at least for the first two or three years of high school. Referring students to social services is to be a greater part of their job.

The ministry also proposes giving the teacher more responsibility in regards to coming up with innovative ways of keeping children engaged in their studies. The

teachers are encouraged to take greater part in extracurricular activities, and in involving parents in the effort to keep their children in school. Yet no real concrete offer has been made of compensation to these teachers for their time. Rather the MEQ hopes that principals will award recognition to teachers volunteering such services.

The ministry is loosening up on certain directives which dictate what teachers should be doing in the classroom, in hopes that this will lead to better retention measures being implemented. However it is hard to see where teachers will be helped in any concrete ways to meet MEQ wishes, apart from increased access to remedial and social services. Teachers are asked to make a greater effort, after years of wage freezes and 1993's one percent wage rollback. We may see teachers being reluctant to shoulder a greater burden under these circumstances.

4.2.9 Curriculum and Grade Repetition

There are a few references to changes in the curriculum which, though of limited impact, may prove worthwhile. Introduction of a full course in career exploration might be a place for students to learn about what is directly relevant to their lives. Vocational education is to be promoted as well, despite its limited appeal. Diversifying of instructional approaches also implies opting for different curricular components than have been standard in the past. Once more the discretion of local actors has been extended to allow for effective local responses.

The issue of grade repetition is never raised in the Joining Forces document. The general tone however implies that the approach being promoted would be that of preventive intervention. Early identification of at risk students would be followed with

intensive remediation to prevent grade failure.

In many of the planned changes, the proposals for improvement or modification revolve around remediation efforts. One specific effort will be described in some detail, in order to have a better idea of how such a project operates and is received. The final chapter will then examine the likely effectiveness of the Joining Forces initiative.

4.3 ILLUSTRATIVE STUDY: THE ARGYLE ACADEMY PEER TUTORING PROGRAM

In the course of researching and developing this thesis, the author was involved in the ongoing development and implementation of two dropout prevention projects within the Joining Forces initiative. A brief summary of one of these projects will be given here, while the proposal submitted for funding and the 1993 year-end report to the PSBGM have each been included as appendices [numbers VI and VII respectively, pp. 101 & 105]. This will be followed with a discussion of the types of results one might expect from such a project, and what might be some of the significant concerns being addressed, and overlooked by such a project.

A peer tutoring program was set up at Argyle Academy high school in the school year 1992-1993 and has continued to operate during 1993-94. With a part-time coordinator (this researcher) working three half days a week, peer tutoring sessions are available three afternoons a week for one hour after school.

The project coordinator works closely with the guidance counsellor and with certain teachers. Students needing extra remediation as well as potential tutors are referred by teachers, and the coordinator organizes and supervises the sessions. Apart

from supervision, the coordinator's primary function is that of consulting with students, teachers, guidance services and to a lesser extent, parents and the administration concerning student participation and performance.

Argyle Academy provides a classroom for this project. Support services and access to equipment are provided, as is the time of administrative support personnel. It is a small high school within the PSBGM, located in the inner city working class municipality of Verdun. This area was formerly predominately anglophone and home to workers in the heavily industrialized area of Montreal's southwestern regions bordering on the Lachine Canal. Over the past 30 or more years, this area has suffered deterioration caused by socio-political influences such as the exodus of many industries to tax havens both in and outside Quebec, the construction of the St. Lawrence seaway, which has diminished Montreal's significance as a port city, and the exodus of mobile (i.e., young and skilled) anglophones from the region. The effect has been generalized sustained high unemployment.

As a result, the population of this high school could be classified as lower income originating from a depressed region. While largely populated by third or fourth generation immigrants of western and, to a certain extent, central European ancestry, the black population would be in the range of 25% to 30%, predominantly of second generation Caribbean ancestry.

A dropout rate for Argyle Academy is not easily calculated, but a rough estimate is 36%.⁴¹ This school meets the description of having a high at-risk population. As such,

⁴¹ A document released in late January, 1994 showed Argyle Academy in the second decile, or the next to highest ten percent dropout rate for the years 1989, 90 and 91 [Hrimech et al, 1993 B].

it is a proper testing ground for such dropout prevention interventions. The greatest challenges facing educators in this circumstance seem to be indifference from many of the students, coupled with compression on the teaching staff in response to dwindling enrolments. Teachers are teaching outside their areas of expertise, and students are failing to become engaged in their studies.

An attraction of the Peer Tutoring program is the use of a peer rather than an adult to draw the student back into a learning context. In recognition of the at-risk student's poor adaptation to the standard classroom model, a strategy is used of making learning something more pleasant, in a situation with individualised attention. Of course this does not work for all students, especially those who resent the intrusion upon their after-school free time. However, making such a program mandatory would imply a coercive element in a situation where students may already resent school. Attempts to involve parents can be helpful in some cases. In others, the parents have little influence over the child's behaviour. This seems more frequently to be the case of the male rather than the female students.

Remediation of the type carried out in the peer tutoring program is effective when there is a high degree of cooperation among the various actors (i.e., forces are joined) in order to reinforce the student's commitment. However teachers, intervenants, administrators and counsellors may find it difficult to negotiate the political aspects of such an initiative. It may be taken as an accusation of weak teaching if the student is seen as needing regular tutoring; thus the project may foster resentment. There may be overlaps of jurisdiction between administrators and program coordinators. The temporary nature of such projects may imply that work done is not seen as being of long term

significance. These factors can and do undermine a project being established in a school. The office politics found in any bureaucracy are not absent from the school. In the case of Argyle Academy, an overworked and discouraged teaching staff can hardly be blamed for scepticism towards an outsider proposing a new initiative. Breaking into an established organization with a proposal for change makes teachers (as it would make anyone) feel threatened. The personality of the person trying to implement a new program is important. Tact, discretion and an ability to appear non-threatening are important qualities. Teachers often feel that ministerial directives are formulated by bureaucrats who have little understanding of how schools actually operate. As a representative of such an initiative, an outsider must defer readily to the judgement of the teachers with whom she or he is working. Relationships of trust can only be built up over time. As the intervenant sees that he or she is only there temporarily, the kind of commitment required for such a job may be less forthcoming. If such a project as Peer Tutoring is to work, it must overcome the interpersonal obstacles to change as well as offer help with the problems that lead to dropping out in the first place.

This brief look at some aspects of a remedial project allows for a better visualisation of a project instituted under the government's plan of action. The last chapter will evaluate the findings and discuss what they imply for dropout prevention policy in Quebec, and where it should perhaps head in the near future. The question of where researchers might best concentrate their efforts towards forming a solid basis for policy development and implementation will also be addressed.

CHAPTER FIVE

ANALYSIS AND CONCLUSIONS

In chapter two the most significant factors leading to dropping out are outlined, and a theoretical framework is developed in which various interlinking social and institutional factors are shown to provoke dropping out. For preventive measures to be effective, the need is greater for them to address complex underlying problems rather than merely the students' immediate crises. In developing a theoretical construct that acknowledges multiple causal factors as "pushing" the student to drop out, this study has shown that the types of interventions necessary for effective dropout reduction must be multi-levelled and multi-faceted.

Chapter three considers eight intervention programs of varying type and profundity, examining whether or not they respond appropriately to the model of dropout causal factors presented. Each strategy has its advantages and disadvantages. In the fourth chapter presenting the Joining Forces initiative, it is determined that certain of the concerns raised previously are addressed whereas others are being ignored. The conclusion is that the MEQ's strategy is ambiguous or, even worse, lacking in conviction in its response to the problem. It is necessary to assess the general orientation of the Pagé initiative in terms of what are its priorities and directives, to determine if the MEQ has really taken an effective leadership role in the fight against dropping out. An overview of the strengths of the initiative will be presented first, followed by a critique of its weaknesses.

5.1 STRENGTHS AND WEAKNESSES OF THE JOINING FORCES INITIATIVE

The emphasis of the Joining Forces strategy is on implicating as many actors as possible in striving to combat the high dropout rates in Quebec public schools. The funding provided is aimed at bringing more professionals in to work with low achieving students and to support the regular staff. Having a system of stable class grouping where teachers specialize less allows teachers to better know individual students and their needs. Thus extra remedial and counselling services can be better targeted for at-risk students. Since services to students are organized at the level of the individual school, needs can be better assessed and responded to most appropriately.

Along with the additional support staff hired in the schools, a greater involvement of parents is sought by the initiative. Heightening parent involvement, as shown in the Wheeling Park example in chapter three makes a difference, improving students' outcomes. The Joining Forces program has developed a series of parenting workshops and has set out to sensitize parents to the urgent need for preventative efforts, through a series of televised documentaries discussing students' needs.

The promotion of a career orientation course in the school provides an ideal site for combatting students' inclination towards dropping out. Here the topic of job qualifications can be addressed, pointing out the limited options of the dropout. As well the relevance of the skills being acquired can be stressed in response to students' scepticism about the pertinence of their studies. Special dropout prevention curriculum materials may be presented in this venue.⁴² Extra-curricular activities as a means of

⁴² Part of the combined Federal Ministry of Employment and Ministry of State for Youth's dropout prevention initiative has been the development of curriculum support materials such as videos and guidebooks to jobs and services available. These can be obtained

retaining student engagement are another strategy receiving the support of the Joining Forces initiative. Again local conditions can dictate the specific initiatives undertaken.

Perhaps the most significant aspect of the program is the flexibility in how resources are being allocated. Various approaches for attacking the problem on several levels are needed for dropout prevention to be effective. Integrating resources is a major concern, in that intertwined causes can best be met by likewise intertwining responses. However, the emphasis one might expect to see on team development and bolstering does not seem to exist. Such fundamentals are not spelled out in the documents. Not everyone shares the view that most potential dropouts are capable of completing the curriculum. For certain teachers and parents, the objectives of the proposed strategy are poorly founded. Not attending to these perceptions can have the result of undermining any efforts at all, no matter how well formulated.

Most of the efforts undertaken are based on locally determined need. In one sense, it seems that no one would be better placed to determine local needs than those currently seeking to meet those needs in the schools. One might take the opposite perspective: the problem could be rooted in a malfunction of the dissemination of educational services at the local level. Thus, allowing further decisions to be made at this level may exacerbate problems. The Joining Forces initiative could then be interpreted as an abdication of the MEQ's responsibilities under the banner of greater decentralization. While educators and administrators employed in high dropout schools may be doing their jobs in good faith, they may need some external inspection and modification to help them supplant ineffective

by writing to Enquiries Centre, Employment and Immigration Canada 140 promenade du Portage, Hull, Quebec K1A 0J9

practices. A delicate balance needs to be found between autonomy and leadership.

A further negative aspect of the format of the strategy is that it is perceived as a temporary measure. This has the effect of only obtaining a short-term commitment from people hired specifically under the initiative. Making such support a firmly entrenched feature of the school system might lead to consistent, long-term improved results for underprivileged and minority students, since problems have been shown to be firmly rooted in their socio-cultural milieu. With governments seeking to cut back on educational expenditures, it is almost certain that this initiative is temporary. Those working under the program are generally aware of its uncertain nature.⁴³ A temporary commitment from the MEQ can hardly be expected to elicit long-term dedication of the intervenants.

The decentralized nature of the program is somewhat of a double-edged sword in that problem areas may not be addressed simply because the problem is not viewed as such by those locally responsible. In low-income districts, involving parents to a greater extent may be seen as inviting greater problems, if educators consider that some parents are the cause of the problems and are best avoided. More concrete measures are needed that seek to change the relationships that parents have with their children's teachers. As discussed in chapter two, cultural and value differences between parents and teachers exacerbate tensions, especially when the lower income parents do not reinforce the school's values. Timid directives encouraging greater voluntary cooperation would probably be effective in middle-class communities. They seem likely to be ineffectual in

⁴³ In the summer of 1993, the Montreal Catholic School Commission cancelled a high profile program funded under the Joining Forces initiative on the basis of funding being uncertain. A lack of assurances on the part of the education ministry at that time led many educators to feel that the axe might fall on the program shortly thereafter; so far it has not [Bonhomme, 1993].

those lower income neighbourhoods with the highest dropout rates, and the widest variety of factors contributing to students' dropping out. The possibility for innovative efforts is there, but overcoming the inertia may be the greatest problem, one which the MEQ does not address.

Improving extracurricular activities may have some benefits. It is possible though that the sports activities organized may do little to reinforce school engagement.⁴⁴ If bonds with teachers are being developed, this may be fine. However, this also could undermine students' efforts if the teacher reinforces the extracurricular behaviour and seems to accept poor academic performance.⁴⁵

Thus the merit of the Joining Forces strategy seems ambiguous. While making these interventions is better than doing nothing, it may be possible that the problems could be addressed more effectively.

5.2 SUGGESTIONS FOR IMPROVEMENT

The idea of identifying at-risk students and then targeting them for special interventions is worthwhile. However, the ministry is imposing additional responsibilities upon educators and administrators. Despite the positive aspects of the project's decentralization, the additional burden may result in teachers and administrators resenting

⁴⁴ Personal observations [1993, 1994] have been that extra-curricular activities **do** elicit enthusiasm. However, they often entail missing classes, and in fact if a remedial program is offered after school (ie. peer-tutoring), it may have difficulty competing with sporting activities. What type of school engagement is being reinforced seems to need discussion.

⁴⁵ This is a common complaint of female teachers regarding male teachers in the school observed [Personal communications, 1993].

the initiative.⁴⁶ Along with greater local discretion come greater administrative responsibilities.⁴⁷ The addition to the workload does not really encourage actors to "join forces".

If the ministry were more intent upon the program being a success, it might have sponsored workshops with substitute teachers who could have used their familiarity with specific schools to develop projects that would meet the needs of those particular schools. This way the workloads of those already working in the school would not have to be increased immediately. The consultation could be carried out by a substitute appointed by the principal on the basis of his or her familiarity with the dynamics of that school. The person could attend workshops held by the ministry, and then take his or her insights back to their school. There the school could have a meeting in which the substitute would address the orientation committee and the staff, and interested individuals could come forth with ideas, questions or suggestions. This may be a more expensive endeavour than merely sending out letters, reports and project proposal forms. However, it might allow for more effective and higher quality programs. In a sense, the rush to come out with a policy on dropout prevention may have reflected political circumstances more than the best interests of the Quebec students.⁴⁸

⁴⁶ At one point teachers were encouraged by their union not to participate in the project in view of the provincial government's 1% wage rollback [Personal Communication, 1993].

⁴⁷ The expenses for the Argyle Academy Peer Tutoring program had to be approved at every stage by the school board, adding several hours per month of administrative tasks unrelated to the actual physical operation of the project.

⁴⁸ Michel Pagé wanted to have this program in place before August of 1992, in time for the new school year. He may also have already been planning his resignation. He left immediately following the referendum on the Charlottetown Accord in order to take charge of a major pulp and paper corporation [Venne, 1992].

The idea of joining forces to combat dropping out is a good one. The repercussions on Quebec society of an undereducated population will be severe enough that they should be considered a genuine crisis in the making. The involvement of more than the educators is needed. If there is a problem with getting working-class parents involved and supporting the efforts of the high schools, then maybe this is where the efforts need to be focused.

Members of the general public who can look forward to paying more taxes to support social programs for maladjusted, unskilled youth should realize that they too have interests at stake. People who want to enjoy peaceful streets where they need not fear violent or criminal behaviour should consider if their support is necessary in preparing youth to obtain the skills obligatory for finding a niche in society. Businesses wishing to flourish with the help of able workers need to question what their roles are. A sustained public awareness campaign concerning dropout prevention must target everyone, not only parents and students. Those who profit from the consumption of adolescents who are skipping school have to ask themselves what their responsibility is in harbouring, and in turn, encouraging children to miss school. Businessmen who employ high school students as inexpensive labour should ask if they are interfering with their education. Producers of entertainment need to ask if they are promoting children's rejection of school. All of these different sectors must question whether they have a role to play. Rather than seeing adolescents as markets, cheap labour or nuisances, the roles of adults who are not parents need evaluating. Mentorship may be one way for concerned adults to become involved, in order to see first hand what types of problems exist, and offer guidance to at-risk students. The MEQ should investigate and, if found appropriate, promote this concept.

5.3 FOR FURTHER STUDY

It has been shown that there are numerous factors contributing to students dropping out that are outside of their individual control, as well as the control of the educational system. As well there is dissension about what should be the priorities of dropout prevention. As North America rapidly moves towards adopting a definition of itself as a high technology society, a hard look must be taken at how students are being prepared to cope with this reality.

In light of these concerns, it would be beneficial to investigate evolving social attitudes towards such issues. Is there a concern on the part of the general public that its future is being jeopardized by short-sighted political decisions that trivialize important educational problems? If that were the case, different forms of educational policy-making processes might need to be explored that would better reflect long-term rather than temporary political concerns. A comparative study of the effectiveness of several types of education systems might shed light on what is the best way to deliver effective programs.

In terms of public policy, it would also be useful to carry out case-study ethnographic research into the on-site dynamics of some of the projects set up under the Joining Forces initiative in order to see how they translate into reality. That way effective measures could be better understood and more widely implemented. Solutions to problems could be worked out before projects are replicated. The use of peer-based interventions, for example, might prove to be one way of getting around budget constraints. If the best means of organizing peer tutors and peer helpers can be found, a well developed manual and workshop series might be developed to cost-effectively promote replication of such a project.

Finally, the access that non-governmental organizations have to participating in the educational system needs to be clarified. Community groups, philanthropic organizations, individuals, businesses and industry need to have information about what sorts of initiatives on their parts are welcome. With this information easily accessible, partnerships could be more easily formed and efforts better coordinated. The potential of groups outside of the MEQ to offer assistance to the educational system needs to be better understood so that forces can be more effectively joined.

In sum, the prevention of dropping out is a concern for all. Joining forces should be more than words heard only in the schools. They should be part of an attempt to face the future with optimal development of society's human resources. To do this the extent of the problem and its causes must be acknowledged, and a depth of commitment must be attained. In the long run, self-sufficiency which is nurtured by education will deliver society from excessive social spending feared by those seeking lower educational spending today. The time to act is now, before an undereducated work force becomes an even greater obstacle to social harmony in the near future.

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Appendix I

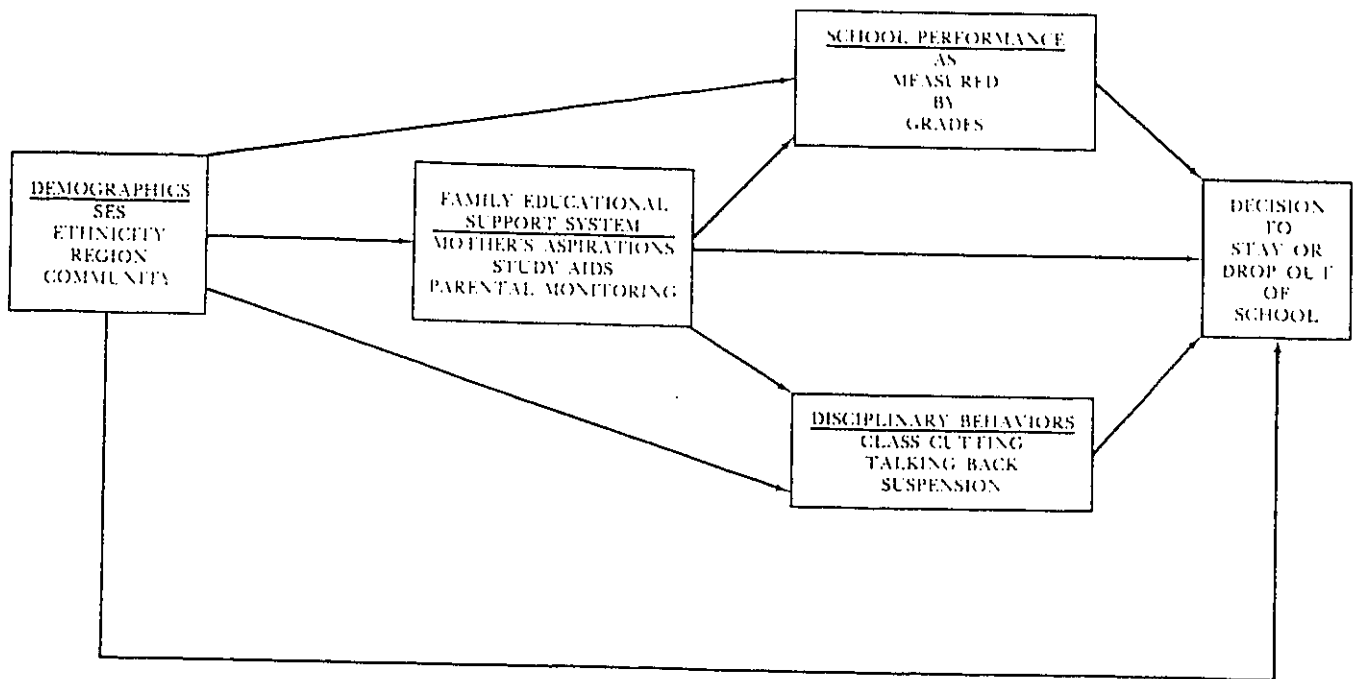


Figure 2. Path Model of the Decision to Stay In or Drop Out of School

Appendix II

Primary Reason High School Dropouts, 14 to 21 Years Old, Left School, by Race and Sex

Reason for Leaving School	Female				Male				Total
	Black	His-panic	White	Total	Black	His-panic	White	Total	
School Related	29	21	36	32	56	36	55	53	44
Poor performance	5	4	5	5	9	4	9	9	7
Disliked school	18	15	27	24	29	26	36	33	29
Expelled or suspended	5	1	2	2	18	6	9	10	7
School too dangerous	1	1	2	1	0	0	1	1	1
Economic	15	24	14	15	23	38	22	24	20
Desired to work	4	7	5	5	12	16	15	14	10
Financial difficulties	3	9	3	4	7	9	3	5	4
Home responsibilities	8	8	6	6	4	13	4	5	6
Personal	45	30	31	33	0	3	3	2	17
Pregnancy	41	15	14	19	0	0	0	0	9
Marriage	4	15	17	14	0	3	3	2	8
Other	11	25	19	20	21	23	20	21	19
Total Percent	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100

Note. Source: National Longitudinal Survey of Youth Labor Market Experience. Distributions are percentage.

Appendix III

TABLE 1.
Total Expenditures and State Aid for Schools in New York by School Year

School Year	Total Expenditures	State Aid	State Aid as Percent of Expenditure
1988-89	\$17,666,000,000*	\$7,987,470,000*	45.2*
1987-88	16,617,500,000*	7,356,100,000*	44.3*
1986-87	15,461,097,106	6,663,860,747	43.1
1985-86	14,456,668,228	6,001,342,481	41.5
1984-85	13,244,994,555	5,483,139,256	41.4
1983-84	12,414,761,043	4,876,658,568	39.3

Source: Education Statistics for New York State, Albany, NY: The State Education Department, January 1989.
*Estimated.

TABLE 2.
State-Aided Education Programs in New York Related to Dropout Prevention and Appropriations by School Year

Program	Appropriations (in Millions of Dollars)				
	1984-85	1985-86	1986-87	1987-88	1988-89
Prekindergarten	7.0	17.0	22.0	27.0	33.0
Early Grade Intervention	—	12.9	12.9	13.6	13.7
Pupils with Compensatory Educational Needs					
Grants	—	—	—	5.0	5.0
Pupil Performance Incentive	10.0	10.0	17.7	18.4	20.4
Parenting Education	—	—	—	1.0	1.0
Attendance Improvement/ Dropout Prevention	26.9	27.1	37.8	38.7	52.1
Support Services	—	—	8.5	14.2	14.1
Community Schools	—	—	.5	1.5	3.0
Youth at Risk	—	—	—	7.0	14.0
Incarcerated Youth	—	—	5.0	5.0	5.0
Stay in School Partnership	—	—	1.5	1.5	3.5
Teacher Opportunity Corps	—	—	—	1.0	1.9
Technologies Network Ties	—	1.1	3.5	4.5	5.0
Student Information Systems	—	—	—	7.0	9.0
School and Business Alliance	—	—	1.0	1.2	2.0
Education of Homeless Children	—	—	—	—	7.4

Source: New York State Division of the Budget.
*Estimated

Appendix IV

Elaboration of the 13 Critical Points of the Joining Forces Initiative

1.,2.,3. Stable classroom groups, the homeroom system and personalised professional support are all parts of an effort to provide a setting for the grades secondary I, II and III which more closely resembles the primary sector. There is a sense that these students are perhaps still unprepared for the looser structure and greater independence of the high school system. Thus a closer monitoring by homeroom teachers teaching more than one course means instructors will also be familiar enough to refer students to specialised professional services, renewedly made available under the auspices of the dropout prevention efforts.*

4. Career planning and counselling have been rather inconsistent components of the educational program in Quebec high schools. To respond better to the expressed needs of students an intensive career orientation course has been proposed, as well as efforts to involve business and industry in vocational exploration initiatives.

5. Vocational programs have not been easily available in Quebec in the past. This is related not only to poor effort on the part of the educational sector, but also due to lack of interest amongst students. The MEQ has announced that it is committed to working with business and industry towards increasing the availability of work/study programs; however it has also recognised the need to heighten interest and perceived importance (ie. status) of the trades and occupations [Ministère de l'Éducation, 1992 C].

6. Remedial measures promoted under the initiative are targeting the potential dropouts with innovative programs which hopefully will draw them back into a learning mode. Activities mentioned included remedial teaching, reading and writing clinics, student pairing, supervised study periods, mentoring by teachers, help groups and so on. The MEQ has announced a commitment to promoting such projects, and has indeed developed an information bulletin which serves as a means of communicating ideas for dropout prevention projects [for an example see appendix V, p. 100].

7. Diversifying instructional approaches means accommodating the distinctive educational needs of students who are becoming discouraged thanks to their poor compatibility with standard instructional methods. One program under way in some school commissions is the technology-oriented path where the focus is on understanding new

*In light of the Quebec teachers union (la Centrale de l'Enseignement du Québec or CEQ) having a powerful influence over employment decisions, school professionals such as psychologists and social workers have suffered a proportionally higher rate of layoffs over the past ten years than have teachers. Approximately 500 educational professionals and support people were seen as being hired with the Pagé Initiative's funding [La Presse, June 5, 1992].

technologies. This program is to be expanded. Elsewhere a greater degree of latitude is being allowed in the individual schools, so that professional development can be focusing upon the immediate needs of that community. Decentralisation is the key to the strategy.

8. Enhanced extra-curricular activities help to bind students to the schooling environment. The Ministry proposes that credits towards the secondary diploma be granted in recognition of students participation in such activities as well as for voluntary community work. It also encourages principals to recognise teachers' efforts to promote such activities. The ministry has also committed itself to seeking means for having student representation on the school orientation committees, which would provide greater input to students.

9. In order to improve services to returning students, the Ministry will expand on already existing general and vocational schools specifically set up for returning students, taking into consideration their experiences and their involvement in the labour force. As well, sections set aside for returning students within regular schools will be replicated across the province. The government is also interested in exploiting the potential of distance education for aiding this group.

10. Preventing problems at the primary and pre-school levels is a more effective strategy than waiting for problems to become aggravated before intervening. The MEQ has numerous initiatives under consideration aimed at helping young children. These include: expanding access to full-day kindergartens for five year olds and half-day kindergartens for four year olds; extension of support services to day-care centres and parents; enlarging nutritional programs for poor students; and greater training, support and vigilance amongst kindergarten and primary school teachers regarding referral to professional services for children in difficulty.

11. A support team has been set up to assist school commissions and individual schools in implementing new initiatives. Information regarding research and programs in existence is circulated in a news bulletin [see appendix V, p.100]. Individuals expert in school success measures have travelled across the province to offer advice and assistance to isolated school's regarding what are effective measures.

12. The MEQ wishes to improve home-school relations, and is encouraging schools to promote parent assistance groups. These would examine such issues as homework, career decisions, part-time work, academic delays and family problems. The ministry also intends to provide professional development on home-school relations, and intends to support the production of a television series for teachers and parents of young children aimed at improving quality of adult-child interactions and relationships.

13. Recognising the impact of television on attitudes and behaviour, the ministry has committed funds towards developing a television series aimed at aiding adolescents in coping with difficulties encountered at this stage in their lives. Money will also be spent in publicising the importance of involving other actors in the effort to combat high school dropping out.

School Works

Appendix V

When We Work Together

Newsletter on Projects in the School System

Vol. 1 No. 1

The publication of this first issue of *School Works... When We Work Together* gives me the opportunity to tell you how pleased and enthusiastic I am about the school system's response to the plan of action on educational success, *Joining Forces*.

More than five thousand projects are already underway throughout the province. These projects are not merely the result of the \$42 million invested by the government to reduce the dropout rate. They are the fruit of the concerted efforts, energy and whole-hearted commitment of people from all levels of the school system. Above all, they are the expression of our concern for young people and our determination to work together so that they will succeed.

This is your newsletter. Every month, it will talk about you and about what people like you are accomplishing in schools across Québec. Use it to describe your projects and share your experiences with your colleagues.

I am convinced it will provide you with a wealth of information and encouragement to keep up your efforts as you fulfill the important mission of educating our youth.

Lucienne Robillard
Minister of Education
and Minister of Higher
Education and Science

Education: Driving Our Future

SUCCESS IN SCHOOL: Topic of the Day

In the fall of 1993, educators will take part in the first-ever professional development day to be held across the province as they meet together to talk about promoting educational success in their respective work environments.

The Table de mise en oeuvre du Plan d'action sur la réussite éducative (plan of action implementation table) has invited school boards to set aside one day of the school

calendar for this special event at the beginning of the 1993-1994 school year.

This special day will provide school personnel with an opportunity to talk about their accomplishments and to develop new strategies in their ongoing search for ways to give students better chances of succeeding in school.

Look for details in coming issues.

This is the first issue of *School Works... When We Work Together*, a newsletter aimed at the partners in the school system, and more particularly, at members of school teams.

Published monthly except in July and August, the newsletter will feature short articles on projects developed by school boards across Québec in line with the plan of action on educational success. Its purpose is to inform and mobilize educators and to foster discussion by providing a reflection of the school community's initiative and commitment.

School Works... When We Work Together is also published in French under the title *L'école, ça se réussit ensemble*.

Building on Trust

The Protestant School Board of Greater Montreal (Montréal region)

Teachers and school administrators can easily identify students who are at risk of dropping out. At-risk students are those who have behaviour problems, who are involved in conflicts and who are

subject to disciplinary measures on a more or less regular basis. To help these students realize that they can control their environment, Rosemount High School suggests a number of avenues, among which its Conflict Resolution Program.

First implemented at Riverdale High School, in the west end of Montréal, the program seems well-adapted to the realities of an environment characterized by multiculturalism. Under this program, six cycle II students are

recruited to act as resource people for other younger and possibly at-risk students. These six students receive training consisting in a series of workshops held over several weekends and a series of discussions with the school guidance counsellor. At the end of their training, the participants have the skills they need to act as mediators in disputes between students.

Each time they step in to resolve a conflict, the peer mediators must report to the school administration and fill out a response sheet to evaluate the benefit of their intervention. In the long term, this will allow the school to assess whether the number of disciplinary measures for at-risk students have decreased. For further information, call Barry Cole, Riverdale High School, at (514) 684-9920, or Marzia Michielli, Rosemount High School, at (514) 376-4720.

Bridging the Distance

Commission scolaire Gaspésia-Les Îles (Bas-Saint-Laurent—Gaspésie—Îles-de-la-Madeleine region)

To most of us, "The long and winding road" is a song, but to 80 students in Saint-George-de-Malbaie, near Percé, it's a daily reality. Once they finish Grade 6 at Belle-Anse Elementary School, students have no choice but to travel 64 kilometres to the nearest secondary school, Polyvalente C.-E.-Pouliot, in Gaspé.

The principal and teachers of the elementary school, together with parents, have found a creative and stimulating way of bridging this distance. At the end of the day, the students take the bus back to their village and to Belle-Anse Elementary School, where they can find all of the resources and assistance they need. Every evening, the elementary school turns into a community centre where secondary school students can get help with their homework, use the school library and computer equipment supplied by the school board and participate in various cultural and sports activities with cycle II elementary school students.

The key in setting up this "school away from school" was cooperation, especially on the part of parents, who take part in activities and provide transportation. For further information, call Brad Syvret at (418) 645-2236 or (418) 368-6188.

Success in School Calls for Concerted Action

Commission scolaire Abitibi (Abitibi-Témiscamingue region)

To meet their goals, administrators at the Commission scolaire Abitibi developed a series of measures based on cooperation between teachers, principals, professionals, parents, students and representatives of socio-economic organizations. The school board has even given its students godparents in the persons of Gino Trudel and Doris Piché, two young adults who have made their dreams come true through hard work and perseverance. At the age of 27, Gino Trudel is the head of Norbord, a large company that manufactures plywood. Doris Piché, an Olympic badminton player, is currently pursuing her university studies in Physical Education. Gino and Doris hope to convince students that education is a good investment, that it is their ticket to success.

These measures are part of a plan of action that was launched by the school board last fall. Not only is the plan of action aimed at making the school community aware of the importance of school and at getting it involved in promoting school, it is also aimed at increasing public awareness and at changing attitudes and behaviours in order to start a chain reaction that will spread to all milieus.

"If you can have a dream, you can make it come true."



Appendix VI

PEER TUTORING PROPOSAL

This proposal has been formulated according to the guidelines issued by the Ministry of Education as per the PSBGM.

1. NATURE OF THE PROBLEM

Kinds of issues:

Failure to complete the Secondary V certificate- in spring, 1992 the percentage of Secondary V students not to complete was approximately 28, meaning a 72% passing rate.

Socio-economic and educational context of school community:

Alternative school in sense of promoting high academic standards- yet in actuality, few students refused entry. Some children attend due to proximity of the Academy, or the athletics program. As such, despite the Academy's status, a significant number of students would be well served by a remedial project, especially since the PSBGM does not earmark funding for such initiatives to such a supposedly 'fast-stream' institution.

Socio-economically, the Municipality of Verdun is amongst the poorer communities in the Montreal region, suffering from prolonged high rates of unemployment.

2. CONTEXT

Some tutoring is being done in Dawson Community Centre, as well as the youth organization Toujours Ensemble; Also some has been done sporadically inside the school.

An attempt to mobilize the students towards helping one another by tutoring their peers can help to reintegrate students falling out of touch with their lessons. The community of learning will be enhanced as the 'peer helper' relationship makes a basis for a teacher to possibly reach a student who she or he has not got the time to help with excessive details. It can also help in pairing a socially well adjusted student with one who is more poorly adjusted, so as to elicit their greater participation and interest in the school.

3. OBJECTIVES AND TARGET GROUP

Long term objectives:

Primarily, the encouragement of participation by the better students in assisting the poorer ones to succeed. The establishment of a community of learning through linking students to their 'peer' tutor will draw them into participating rather than withdrawing. Establishing a 'partnership' with one's peer tutor can aid not just in terms of educational accomplishment. The sense of making progress will benefit in improving the poorer students attitude, thus serving to better the atmosphere of the classroom in general.

Short Term Objectives:

The short term objectives will be the attainment of improved course results, improved social participation rates, and a declining rate of early leaving. The establishment of a

greater sense of common cause between the better students and the poorer ones will conceivably result in improved results for the pupil, and a positive experience for the tutor as well. Tutors weak in some areas and strong in one or more others stand particularly to benefit from raised self-esteem resulting from their being recognized as worthwhile contributors.

Target groups:

Students in grades Secondary III, IV and V having difficulty with their coursework, and referred by their teachers due to concern for the students' possible failing. The problems for which the student is requiring help might not necessarily be strictly cognitive; if social, motivational or behavioral problems contribute to hampering a particular student's progress, extra help in the form of tutoring may be warranted where problems are not too severe. The number of students accepted for the programme would need to be restricted to thirty or so in order to allow for effective administration.

A similar initiative undertaken at the same school, targeting Secondary I and II pupils only, attracted 23 respondents from amongst 36 students referred by their teachers. Of those, 18 actually participated in the Dawson Community Centre's tutorial project sponsored by the 'Stay in School' initiative of the Federal Ministry of Employment. If one extrapolates on the basis of that response, one might anticipate between 25 and 35 students seeking such tutoring...conceivably more as some students will probably be better recognizing the significance of their impending failures.

Indirect services:

The involvement of the student in the programme will hopefully be a chance to expose them to a more motivated and well adjusted student (the tutor), and serve as an opening for the pupil to take a greater interest. Since there will be some structure to the pairing of the students, the opportunity for the poorer student to better communicate their problems to a peer seen as representing success in the academy should in itself initiate a better attitude, and greater success. Without such structured 'pairing', the exploitation of such an available resource probably would rarely occur spontaneously.

4. METHODOLOGY

Concrete activities:

Establishment of a Peer Tutoring Programme, based upon similar initiatives which have been undertaken at other Secondary Schools within the PSBGM. The basic framework consists of:

Establishing a liaison with the teachers in order to receive referrals for both the tutors and the pupils;

Establishing a 'bank' of qualified tutors from within the ranks of the school;

Setting up a location from which to co-ordinate the activities of the tutors and their pupils;

Providing the space for the tutorial, as well as providing the co-ordination of the meeting

times, dates, and the initial introductions;

Creating a scheme by which to provide for the remuneration of the tutors;

Establishing a mechanism by which to communicate with the concerned parties, be they school commissioners, Argyle administrators, Ministry officials, parents, teachers or students;

Steps to be taken:

The first step, which has already been undertaken, is that of consultation. This comprises:

Consulting amongst the teaching staff and administration of the Argyle Academy to formulate the project, obtaining their impressions and contributions;

Having gotten the go ahead, allow for the coordinator to develop, with the input of the principal, teachers, social services director and other concerned members of the school community, a format by which the teachers may refer prospective participants to the project;

Once the space has been allocated, and the clientele secured, the orientation/training programme for the tutors will have commenced; (this will be developed with consultation of both the teaching and administrative staff, as well as that of the developers of a similar programme at Outremont High School, some of whose expertise has already been offered).

Once the tutors are satisfied with their preparation for and conditions of their tasks, the referred pupils will be paired with the tutors specialising in the required areas;

Records will be kept of the progress made by the tutors and pupils, as there will be close contact maintained between the coordinator, the teachers and the tutors. Tutors will be contacting the coordinator regularly to give their impressions and collect feedback (as well as their payments).

Timeline:

The Project would begin to be implemented immediately upon approval of the necessary funding. Due to preliminary efforts already having been made, the first training session for prospective tutors could conceivably be beginning within two weeks of the approval of the programme providing the coordinator were to be nominated immediately. This would suggest the possibility of having the first tutorial sessions beginning less than one month following project approval (based upon three separate sessions for training with little or no lag between ending training and beginning tutoring). If approval were to be received by late October, then the programme could easily offer tutoring prior to the Christmas break.

5. Resources

Human resources:

The project would need to employ a coordinator whose salary should amount to three hundred dollars per week for a half time position (obviously with fluctuating hours). Calculating six weeks in the fall (based upon funding approval of November 9th and

twenty-four in the winter totals \$9000. The honorarium given to the tutors, if calculated at \$5.70 per hour, would total \$228 per week, assuming an average of forty hours weekly. Multiplied by 30 weeks we get \$6840.

Material resources:

The basic needs consist of some office supplies such as stationary, office equipment, photocopying privileges, some bookkeeping ledgers, and a small postal budget. Presuming some concessions from the school itself, \$300 should suffice for these expenses. The other anticipated expense was that of a fund for some group activities to be used as a source of developing participatory solidarity. This could involve the coordinator organising a pizza party, or a ringet game, or a movie with popcorn, etc. once a month, organized to promote and encourage the students' staying with the programme. Activities could reflect the students' interests, and the budget should be about \$70 a month, with great fluctuation as to monthly expenditure. Introductory social activities should be paid from this fund as well. Multiplied by seven months gives us \$490. The total for the four funds would amount to \$16,630, and this includes any items under the operational or administrative categories.

6. CONTRIBUTION OF THE SCHOOL

Tom Conti, the schools guidance counsellor, is to be the primary liaison for the project, and the person to respond to urgent inquiries when the coordinator is indisposed; The teachers and administrators shall serve in a consultative role.

Space is to be provided for by the Academy for both the coordinator and the carrying out of the tutorials. Parental support and input will be solicited, and liaison will be maintained with the two youth organizations in the area doing similar work with students having difficulties, in order to profit from their services and expertise.

7. EVALUATION

Evaluation will be an ongoing process, with a constant flow of communications between the coordinator and the tutors; if success is not evident, the teacher and/or guidance counsellor will be consulted as well, in the effort to make the tutorials more rewarding.

An auto-evaluation will be requested of the pupil at the termination of the series, while a follow-up will be carried out regarding any pupils who abandon the programme. Teachers' evaluations will be sought and tabulated as a source of data by which to measure the project's success (provided that this does not violate the privacy of the students concerned).

A more general evaluation on the part of the guidance counsellor, or a willing administrator or teacher might also provide a perspective worthy of inclusion in the final report. Any of the above-mentioned measures would be formulated in consideration of the objectives stated in Section 3.

8. REPORT

A report will be submitted at the end of the school year, after the final examination results have been obtained and the progress of the pupils in the programme might be measured. Recommendations for the following year's continuation of the project would be elaborated upon the results described in this report.

Appendix VII

JOINING FORCES PEER TUTORING PROJECT SUMMARY REPORT

The Peer Tutoring Project referred to in this report has been based loosely upon one carried out at Outremont High School in the mid 1980's. Approximately twelve tutors and twenty-five 'tutorees' participated in the program regularly, while several others participated sporadically. This project was carried out under the supervision of Tom Conti, while being co-ordinated by Daniel McCool. The time frame runs from January 25 till June 1st.

1. INTENTIONS OF THE PROJECT

The purpose of this project was that of providing tutoring services to students referred by their teachers on the basis of their poor performance and possible 'at risk' status. The pairing with a more successful student was seen as a means to encourage the poorer student's being 'drawn into' a better attitudinal orientation towards their studies. The program was aimed at creating a context wherein poorer students might have one-on-one help from a peer, in a non-threatening atmosphere, thus permitting their improved performance.

2. TARGET GROUP

The target group was to have been the grades Sec. III-V; however, it was soon evident that these students were not as prone to seek help. They had already established their study patterns, and for the most part resisted this initiative. As the co-ordinator became more experienced, however, a small number of the upper grade levels were successfully brought into the program.

3. FORMAT OF THE PROJECT

The Peer Tutoring Program was a combined effort of the school guidance counsellor, Tom Conti; the project co-ordinator, Daniel McCool; several teachers (who recommended both the tutors and the tutorees); the administration who allocated space and resources; and of course the tutors.

The tutors had a brief introductory session describing their duties at the outset of the program. They were also kept informed by personal and written communication regarding developments in the program.

Teachers were informed of the project's progress periodically, while those specifically concerned (i.e. having students receiving tutoring) were regularly consulted.

The basic format consisted of the tutor and the student referred for tutoring being called into the co-ordinators office. At this point there would be a discussion of what sort of problems the student was having. The tutor would reply as to whether or not he or she felt comfortable in tutoring in this subject area. If yes, a time was scheduled and the sessions would begin. If not, another tutor was approached. Tutors were given 'progress

report' forms to fill out concerning the results of the sessions. Teachers were consulted to see if their perceptions coincided with those of the tutors. If not, inquiries were made in order to reconcile conflicting impressions.

4. ISSUES, OCCURRENCES ARISING OUT OF PROJECT IMPLEMENTATION

This project was undertaken with the intention of affecting the way poorer students relate to the school and their studies. The co-ordinator has found this to be a much taller order than anticipated. It has been a definite challenge to persuade, cajole entice and compel the participants of the program to indeed participate.

That being said, there have also been some successes, some of which were altogether unexpected.

At least seven students who have received tutoring (of 25) have shown a significant improvement in their performance which seems to be directly linked to the program. These are students who would definitely have failed their core subject, causing them to repeat the year (which is considered a factor in dropping out).

Seven other students have had such improved results after only a few tutoring sessions that although they have not continued to attend their sessions, it appears that the boosted results they obtained have added to their confidence, and they are continuing to do better. These students, however, have resisted returning to the program.

Four students are not extremely weak, although they have had below passing marks in maths. It appears that they will now pass.

Four other students are having some improvement, but they are so weak that it has been asked if they are learning disabled, and if the program is really adequate to deal with these students.

Three other students have shown no real improvement, two of whom have really missed too much school for the program to be effective.

In speaking with the students receiving the help, they seem to agree that it is helping them. Yet they do not seem to prioritize the tutoring. Their more important concerns seem to be of a social nature. In that regard, if the tutoring does not interfere with their plans for after school or lunch, then they are willing to do it. Otherwise it is put off or cancelled. One must bear in mind that it is the 'at risk' students who are being targeted; when motivation is lacking, it is difficult to instill it in this manner. Nevertheless, in a few cases students who were reluctant came on board after a bit of manoeuvring.

5. STUDENT, TEACHER EVALUATIONS, COMMENTS, AND FEEDBACK

Throughout the operation of the program input was sought from the teachers, administration and students. Procedures were modified in response to the suggestions made. For the most part the reactions were positive and useful. Often the students would seem to appreciate the help; however, it appears that peer pressure to resist seeming too

'keen' about school interfered at times with the students' participation.

Teachers were given evaluation forms with the names of the particular students in their classes receiving tutoring, asking if there had been a noticeable improvement. Of 25 students, seven have shown significant improvement to the point where their failure seems to have been averted; seven others have improved and left the program, but seem to have benefited in their improved attitudes; four were students that were not so much at risk, and have improved enough to assure their passing; four others are very weak, and although their performance has improved somewhat, the help they need is more than the program can offer; and finally, three others have shown no results; two of whom have missed too much school, and the other is considered attention deficit.

The amount of time required to co-ordinate this project is about 14 hours per week, as the responsibilities of the guidance counsellor prevent his being able to manage the organisation of the approximately 25 to 35 students involved in the project in a given week.

6. CONCLUSIONS

All in all, the project's effectiveness is evident. The student is able to have one-on-one assistance in an informal setting where he or she can work comfortably with a peer. Results indicate that it is a positive influence.

The co-ordinator also serves as another resource person in helping to identify needs of at risk students. This augments the teachers' and guidance counsellor's ability to work with these students in order to reintegrate them into the educational system.

The ability of the co-ordinator (or likely anyone working with such a population of underprivileged adolescents) to inspire confidence, and know when to push, and when to ease off, can only come with experience. That being given, the program seemed to peak in participation approximately three weeks before the end of the school year. As the co-ordinator became more effective, more students were enticed to participate; as the end of the year and the mild weather has arrived, distractions abound and participation has levelled off.

7. RECOMMENDATIONS

1. More formalized. Incorporate the program into the school's leadership program, giving the tutors credits for serious participation;
2. Have more formal training with the tutors in strategic learning techniques;
3. Increase the involvement of the parents (i.e. letters home, progress reports);
4. Greater follow-up with the tutors such as 'debriefing sessions' after the tutorials;
5. Begin earlier in the year- late September as opposed to late January;
6. Obtain a centralised location to carry out tutorials, rather than moving from room to room;
7. Establish contacts with other schools carrying out similar projects in order to share insights.