

**Teaching Students at Disadvantage: Successful Strategies Implemented
by Teachers in the Classroom**

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**A thesis submitted to the Department of Education
in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for a degree of
Research Master of Arts in Education**

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Dedication

To my mom, Kathleen and my sister Margie who passed away before I completed this study. You both always took an interest in how I was getting along with my study. Mom you always worried so much about me. I love you for that. It is that love and strength that kept me going on this journey. This is for both of you. I love you.

Abstract

This qualitative, phenomenological thesis investigated and examined successful strategies for teaching students at disadvantage in Nova Scotia classrooms. Three elementary teachers participated in this research study. These participants (a resource teacher, a resource / administrator, and a classroom teacher) were interviewed using a structured interview format and audio taped. Once transcribed, data was analyzed through qualitative means using the Grounded Theory Approach.

My main focus was literacy instruction in the elementary school including grade primary to six. Across these grade levels, I inquired into how participants balance their teaching strategies to include students at disadvantage, what successful strategies they found enhanced their learning, how they measured success for students at disadvantage, what these teachers thought the parent's role was in their child's education, what concerns or challenges these teachers faced in their classrooms on a daily basis, and what part administrators played in helping teachers cope with students at disadvantage.

All three participants demonstrated mixed feelings about the word disadvantage. The literature denotes several meanings. Participants agreed that respect for the learner was the first essential step in teaching students at disadvantage for success. All teachers felt it is a team effort including administrators, classroom and learning center teachers, parents, program assistants, specialists, outside agencies, including the health care system, working

together for the success of students at disadvantage. Another factor important for their success was to allow them to become critical thinkers.

I describe what participants do to recognize and teach students at disadvantage successfully in Nova Scotia classrooms. In other words, what constitutes exemplary practices being carried out in Nova Scotia classrooms?

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I am also much indebted to the teachers I interviewed for taking their time to share their talents and views on successful teaching strategies for students at disadvantage. A big thank you goes out to Tonya, Hanlon, and Monica. I thank you so much.

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Chapter I

Introduction

“The teacher must derive not only the capacity, but the desire, to observe natural phenomena; the teacher must understand and feel her position of observer: the activity must lie in the phenomenon.”

~Maria Montessori, 2005~

A. Background

It was 1998. I was teaching in a school where over thirty per cent of the population were students at disadvantage. I was the vice principal as well as a classroom teacher. My principal had returned from a conference in Montreal and purchased a book called *Altered Destinies Making Life Better for Schoolchildren in Need*. I picked it up and flipped through it. I could not put it down as I was amazed with what I was reading. It was as though the author, Gene Maeroff, was reading my mind. His ideas were describing the students in my class and in our whole school. I was always aware from the outset of my location. For instance, my own childhood and schooling that I describe further on in the thesis, left me with a sense of not belonging or fitting in with my classmates, but on the margins looking in at whatever others were doing.

I had observed and read about how teachers perceive students at disadvantage. I wondered how this perception of who the students are affects what teachers do--if it does affect them. I asked myself how current teaching strategies reflect the program

as they relate to students at disadvantage. How are students classified in relationship to the program and to the structure of the class? What I read in this book and what my teaching and personal life brought to this situation persuaded me to investigate how I can further help students at disadvantage be successful in school.

Due to a limited amount of time, I worked with only three teachers. These teachers have several years experience working with students at disadvantage. They provide a curriculum that engages students in interesting and challenging learning that goes beyond basic proficiencies.

Therefore, the purpose of this phenomenological research was to investigate exemplary teaching practices used by classroom teachers that support students at disadvantage in Nova Scotia public school classrooms. An exemplary teaching practice was defined as strategies that provide an equal learning opportunity for all students in a classroom.

This phenomenological inquiry, as part of uncovering meaning, articulates the strategies three elementary teachers use in their classroom to help students at disadvantage be successful. In addition, attention was paid to the role of an administrator in initiating change, relationship building, decision-making, and providing leadership and vision for classroom teachers responsible for teaching students at disadvantage. Within a critical perspective, the focus was on empowering students at disadvantage to take control of their own learning. According to B. Fay a

critical perspective is concerned with empowering human beings to transcend the constraints placed on them by race, class, and gender (Creswell, 2003, p.10).

B. Terminology

Educational researchers (Comber, 1998; Comber & Thomson, 2001; Comber, 1996; hooks, 1994; Maeroff, 1998; Knapp, 1995; McLaren, 1998; Levin, 1995; Freire, 1987; Ashton, 1997; Connell, 1994; Means & Chelemer & Knapp, 1991; Knapp & Shields) describe students at disadvantage as 'at-risk', marginalized, impoverished, inner city, low income, working class, and members of minorities. They all agree students at disadvantage are most likely to experience school failure and this school failure, more often than not, involved literacy learning difficulties. For example, a student living in poverty would likely experience many obstacles to success such as financial or personal stress, leaving books and learning as not as high a priority as a child who was raised in a middle class family (Maeroff, 1998).

Comber (1998) discussed how teachers in disadvantaged schools feel the students' 'backgrounds' are the general cause of academic difficulties. However, she argued that describing student populations in terms of their various backgrounds such as, socio-economic, family, poor, cultural, minority, and linguistic can create deficit constructions of the student, which have curriculum and assessment consequences.

Comber points out, "children's families, homes and cultures are hardly 'background'. Poverty is not something neatly left outside the school gate (p.4). Your family, home, and culture make up your identity. Comber continued to say there is

nothing “background” about these central identity factors. Teachers need to teach the child, providing discourses of schooling that engage students at disadvantage with appropriate experiences.

Also, Comber and Thomson (2001) speak about metaphors used by teachers who work in disadvantaged schools. These metaphors, ‘that’s the way these kids are, or ‘in this school we could not possibly do that’, are not unique to any particular disadvantaged school. I have heard these same words during my teaching in disadvantaged schools. It was also my belief as well that the way we talk about people matters. If we make negative constructions then we produce negative effects. Therefore, I believe if we make positive constructions then positive effects will result. Dechman (2002) reports:

Children are born with certain characteristics and into certain family environments that are shaped and reshaped through interactions within social context. Successive interactions change both the attitudes and behaviours of the child and the attitudes and behaviours of others with whom the interaction occurs, such as parents, peers, and teachers. Teachers’ perceptions and behaviours toward a child can affect parents’ perceptions and behaviours toward the child and vice versa setting in motion either a positive or negative spiral (p.7).

During my teaching career I have had parents come in on the first day of school and announce in front of the child and everyone else in the room, “Don’t expect much from her, she is not like her sister”. Thankfully, I make my own judgment on the ability of a student in my class. I always make my own assessment and try to help the parent see all the positive attributes of their child. I agree with Dechman (2002) when she says, “we bring out in children what we see in them” (p.9). Because I feel so passionately about my work, I am interested in helping my colleagues to understand

how important it is to build positive constructions of all the children in our classrooms.

Although there are many euphemisms such as, at -risk, marginalized, inner city, low income, minorities, and impoverished, in this research I am mainly using the term students at disadvantage. To many teachers and administrators these words conjure up certain images and can carry preconceived notions of what to teach or what not to teach to students such as these. Haberman has observed that young people living in poverty may be offered 'a pedagogy of poverty' at school and a minimalist and behavioral curriculum, (Comber & Thomson, 2001, p.1). Anyone familiar with the school day already knows there is too much curriculum to cover and too little time. Thus, determining how to meet all students' needs each day and to cover the entire curriculum is not a trivial issue. As Jerome Bruner says, "a curriculum...is the enterprise par excellence where the line between subject matter and the method grows necessarily indistinct" (Resnick & Klopfer, 1989, p.vi).

Furthermore, Comber & Thomson (2001) argue it is time to create learning environments that work for all students. "We need to learn from history, both in terms of theory and enacted curriculum practices and their effects" (p.1). Thus a motivation behind this research was a desire that more teachers become informed and thus be encouraged to implement new strategies that bring greater success to students at disadvantage. For several years, I have been an educator and an administrator in a disadvantaged elementary school. I believe my experience in both roles enhanced my awareness, knowledge, and sensitivity too many of the challenges, decisions, and

issues encountered as an educator, and has assisted me in working with the participants in this study.

C. Personal reflections

“Ideas are shaped by our individual and collective biographies” (Levin, 1994, p.1). My own ideas of disadvantage were strongly affected by my own childhood experiences growing up in a rural community. I related strongly to the childhood experiences described by hooks (1994) in the following:

It was the constant evocation of materially privileged class experience (usually that of the middle class) as a universal norm that not only set those of us from working-class backgrounds apart but effectively excluded those who were not privileged from discussions, from social activities. To avoid feelings of estrangement, students from working-class backgrounds could assimilate into the mainstream, change speech patterns, points of reference, drop any habit that might reveal them to be from a nonmaterially privileged background (p.181).

Throughout my growing up, I was constantly trying to see where and how I fit into society. I had always felt on the outside, on the margins, looking in at whatever people at the center were doing. Growing up in a rural community and being fifth in a family of seven has certainly influenced how I am in this world. My position in the family gave me a sense of security as I had older siblings to depend upon and younger siblings to try blame things on. I say ‘try’ because it rarely worked. However, my sense of security changed once I started school.

My early schooling took place in a two-room school housing grades primary to six. I was four years old and some grade sixes reached the age of sixteen. We all shared the same facilities. It was then that I became as Scott (1996) describes an observer- as – participant. Moving from primary to grade two that first year gave me a feeling of not belonging or “fitting in” with the group. Upon entering junior and senior high this feeling became more evident and stronger. Being two years younger than my classmates left me feeling on the edge, or outside looking in, at my classmates. I only participated specifically when invited to do so, with no sense of ever feeling like I belonged.

This new environment, junior and senior high, soon made me feel socially unaccepted. Everyone seemed so sophisticated and I could not relate to the clothes, language, hairstyles, and groups or cliques. I did not have the experiences my classmates talked about, so rather than let them know, I became a great listener and observer in order to avoid being labeled the ‘other’. Close friends did not exist for me. My self-esteem was very vulnerable, but my determination made it manageable. The world did not seem very ‘fair’ or ‘just’ in those days. Therefore a sense of fairness and a need for justice became very important to me. This pattern followed me all through high school. To this day, I rarely feel entirely comfortable in any group and I’m always aware of issues of social class and how I am positioned in relation to others.

In the community where I grew up, college was not considered a goal or even an option for any of us. Transportation was a problem, so other than what was available in my school, I had no access to libraries. For the same reason, I never attended events at my school, nor did I go to a movie until I got a job. I didn't go to a doctor until I was an adult, and I went to the dentist only twice as a teenager to get teeth extracted because of severe toothaches. Connell (1994) expresses my experience well when he says,

There are other types of resources beyond income and wealth that cannot be cashed out on an individual basis, but where inequality is materially significant: for example, access to public institutions such as libraries, colleges, and hospitals; to public utilities; and to safety and community health (p.127).

I finished high school when I was sixteen and worked until I was nineteen. I always knew I wanted to be a teacher and I decided to go to Teachers College. I still don't entirely understand the resolve or the desire that brought me to that decision. Perhaps it was my social and economic circumstances that developed a desire within me to help others who were also disadvantaged or had a sense of not belonging. At times, I still battle with a lack of confidence in my own abilities; however, I feel this made me more sensitive to the needs of students at disadvantage.

My experience as a person in the world and as a learner has shaped the way I think about my work. I am conscious of the role privilege plays in school and I am deeply interested in and concerned about creating spaces in which children whose experience is similar to mine can develop the skills and dispositions they need to break the relentless cycle of poverty and disadvantage. Freire (1987) said reading the

word is not enough; we also have to learn to read the world, that is, to understand the lives and lived experiences of the students we teach and to act on those understandings (p.35).

Disadvantage is not just based on income; it also relates to experiences the student brings to school. Maeroff (1998) says,

Disadvantaged children tend to know little of the larger world- except for the televised distortions of reality. The only intellectual stimulation for most of them comes from school.... They do not get to the library or the circus. They participate in little conversation of substance outside of school. They are not taken on vacations and they may not have met anyone who ever attended a play or a concert of classical music. In some instances, they may not know adults who get up every morning of the week, day in and day out, to go to work at full-time, salaried jobs with benefits. They do not have computer games to amuse them in their bedrooms, and their homes have few books or magazines. A trip to a restaurant means going to McDonald's or Burger King, and they may never have eaten off a table covered with a cloth. Meals with family members may be unusual occurrences (p.255).

The lack of exposure to valued practices in the dominant culture makes it difficult for students from disadvantaged homes to make connections to reading the word.

D. Rationale

When I see children in my classroom whose literacy achievement is affected by race, gender, social class and /or ethnicity, I consciously work to develop teaching strategies and a classroom atmosphere that sustain their development, not just as readers of print text, but also readers of the way their lives and experiences have been constructed. I find myself constantly asking what kinds of support do these children

who are not being successful, need if they are to overcome the barriers they face, and how can we know what is needed? How do other teachers work to ensure that these children are engaged as learners? Are there clearly recognizable and transferable skills of teachers and characteristics of classroom environments that create the possibility of hopeful outcomes for students at disadvantage?

In this study, I worked with three exemplary elementary school teachers in Nova Scotia who teach in a variety of high poverty areas. With their help I have come to better understand what exemplary teaching practice looks like in these contexts, how success can be measured, what concerns they have about their work and their students, and what they think is vitally important to children's education. I will also discuss what system and policy supports participants felt they have or think they need in order to do their work effectively.

E. Significance

This study offers insights into how we, as educators, might work more systematically and effectively to help our students at disadvantage gain access to the kind of public school education that may help them change their lives for the better. This information will help provide us with the potential for implementing new strategies and innovative ways that will best meet all the diverse needs of students at disadvantage. Becoming a teacher, for example, should never be a matter of lucky breaks, personal resilience, or overcoming huge odds as a result of social positioning.

Chapter II

Literature Review

“The whole art of teaching is only the art of awakening the natural curiosity of young minds for the purpose of satisfying it afterwards.”
~ Anatole France, 1980 ~

Researchers (Comber, 1996 & 1998; Comber & Thomson, 2001) described both schools and students as disadvantaged. A lot has been written about students at disadvantage and their achievement, or lack of achievement, in school. However, there was a paucity of literature regarding support for instructional strategies that assist students at disadvantage to become successful. It was only within the last ten to fifteen years that literature about the experiences of students at disadvantage has become more prominent in Canada.

A. Studies on Canadian students at disadvantage, what is the likelihood of them achieving successful outcomes in school and what kinds of life outcomes can they expect?

In 1994, Levin & Riffel reported that poverty was related to lower achievement in school, to greater risk of dropping out, and to lower eventual occupational status and income. As well, Connell (1994) reported that students from working class, poor, and minority ethnic families continued to do worse than students from rich and middle-class families on tests and examinations, were more likely to be held back in grade, to drop out of school earlier, and were much less likely to enter college or university.

Pauline Raven, author of the child poverty report card, ranked Nova Scotia the third most impoverished province in Canada (Chronicle Herald, November 24, 2003). For a child in Nova Scotia, the poverty rate was more than three points higher than the national average for 2001. Nova Scotia had a 19.2 % rate of poverty, meaning one in five children were living in poverty, compared to a Canadian average of 15.6, or one in six. She continued to say the province was doing worse now than in 1989 when Canadian parliamentarians pledged to end child poverty by 2000. These statistics are devastating and should be an embarrassment to our government. Teachers everywhere are receiving more and more students at disadvantage in their classrooms. What does this mean for our students at disadvantage? Where can teachers look for the additional support to come from?

The Nova Scotia Child Poverty Report Card 2000 cites Ross & Roberts (1999) who tell us the consequences of child poverty are as follows:

Poor children are:

- less likely to have nutritious food
- less likely to have annual visits to the dentist
- less likely to participate in extra-curricular activities
- more likely to have low birth weights
- more likely to visit the hospital emergency room
- more likely to have delayed vocabulary scores, low math scores
- more likely to fail elementary and grade school
- more likely to face poorer employment prospects
- more likely to have friends who are frequently in trouble
- more likely to leave school before graduation

The above factors affect students at disadvantage with regard to their readiness to learn, their ability to be successful in school and later in life. It is the intention that

this research study inform teachers about ways they can improve results for students at disadvantage by changing their attitudes and practices.

However, our government needs to take a greater interest in our youth. The Nova Scotia Child Poverty Report Card Campaign 2000 cites the stance our government took on poverty, in which Finance Minister Paul Martin said poverty is a threat to the best start in life for Canada's children. "All Canadians do not begin life at the same starting line... When Canadians are deprived of the opportunity of reaching their full potential, the Country is deprived of its opportunity of reaching its full potential" (March, 1998). In addition, our Prime Minister at the time, Jean Chretien said that poverty is something our nation will pay for in the long run. He said, "The fact is we pay a heavy price for having children in our society who grow up in poverty..." (September, 1998). Six years later and the Federal government have displayed no greater interest in our students at disadvantage and their learning.

B. Educational policy, what is the systematic support for poor children and families?

After reading researchers' ideas about disadvantaged students, I realized teachers make many false assumptions about them, and this is another reason why this research is important. Levin and Riffel (1994) said, "Educators and policy-makers may make the assumption that students from poor families cannot learn, so that failure is to be expected and accepted" (p.10). *Action against Poverty: School Boards Making a Difference* (2001) tell us that over 20 % of children live in poverty in this

country. Within the context of a marginalized school population, I worked extensively with young children who had difficulty in learning and I observed that in almost every case the problem was not with ability, but with systems that were not designed specifically to support these learners and their families. Levin and Riffel (1994) state,

given both the very clear link of poverty to later social costs and the considerable documentation on poverty in Canada, it is remarkable that so little policy attention in education has been given to the issue. The federal government has not played a major role in this area. Provincial governments have taken few initiatives to address the impact of poverty on schools and children (p.9).

Research communicated that all levels of government were failing to provide support for our students at disadvantage. Poverty involves the entire society including community, school boards, and government. Many times individual schools and school districts were left to contend with the issue as best they can, which was often not very well. Levin (1995) states,

Schools cannot solve problems of poverty, and should say so publicly. At the same time, they can be more effective in alleviating the impact of poverty and, especially, in assisting the victims of poverty to understand and advance their own welfare (p.34).

From my experience, it seemed that schools that had the greatest needs often tried to speak publicly but were told there is no money for any additional help. These same disadvantaged schools were expected to work miracles with funding based on enrolment rather than the needs of the school. School boards stated that they alone cannot tackle the root causes of poverty. However, as policy-makers at the local level,

they can display an interest in making a positive difference in the lives of these children and their families.

C. What does school instruction look like for students at disadvantage?

Allington (1990) found that students at disadvantage received less literacy instruction, although their needs were greater. There was little evidence to suggest

that schools with many poor children schedule more instructional time for literacy lessons than schools with few poor children, remedial or special education programs are organized in ways that routinely enhance time allocated for literacy lessons, and the literacy instruction provided low-achievement learners is differentiated in ways that improve on-task behavior (p.11).

Furthermore, Allington (1997, 1980, 1983, and 1984) did studies on “good” and “poor” reader groups in classrooms. His focus was on the distribution of oral and silent reading opportunities and differences in text reading opportunities.

He found poor readers were most likely to be assigned round-robin oral reading in reading groups, while good readers were more likely to be asked to read silently. The series of studies described how teachers interrupted poor readers more often and asked fewer comprehension questions. Poor readers seemed to learn what they were taught but the studies show they were taught something fundamentally different from what the better readers were taught. These differences in the oral and silent reading processes created two different types of readers; one group learned to read for personal purposes with self-monitoring of meaning and the other learned to pronounce words aloud while being monitored externally by their teachers or peers (p.13).

We, as educators, often draw false conclusions about the potential of students at disadvantage and fail to challenge them in fear of setting them up for failure.

According to Levin (1995) researchers have concluded that our practices for these children “set low expectations, place too much emphasis on behavior control, use too

much seatwork, and greatly underemphasized the development of meaning by learners” (p.32).

Schools are inclined to devalue or not accept the kinds of knowledge and experience children bring. Shields (1995) discusses two types of teachers, constructive and non constructive, when talking about how teachers respond to differences in the backgrounds of students. The constructive teacher believes that students can learn regardless of what background they come from. The non-constructive teacher assumes that a student is inherently limited because of their background. He continues on about the non-constructive teacher,

The real tragedy with this group of teachers is the vicious circle that their beliefs and attitudes created. Negative beliefs about students’ backgrounds led to lower expectations, which led to the provision of fewer or more impoverished learning opportunities. Then, when these children did not perform as well as their peers, the teachers felt justified in both their views and their practices (p.36).

As a researcher, my goal was to acquaint other educators in bringing to the foreground issues surrounding the instruction of students at disadvantage.

D. What changes are needed to instruct students at disadvantage?

Since the time of John Dewey, it has been said that we must begin to instruct wherever children are when they enter our classroom. However, demands on teachers to cover curriculum tend to result in similar expectations from all students. Nevertheless, “children’s home and family lives do not disappear when they begin

schooling.” (Comber, 1998, p.4) Children from disadvantaged backgrounds come to school with very different types of experiences and variations in their language development than what our school curriculum demands from them. Comber (2000) says,

schooling’ as an institution is strange to all children, however some can call on existing capital to make school work for them. She continues that some children may appear ‘ready’ because they come with a selective repertoire of social and communicative practices upon which school literacy learning is contingent. In contrast other children may appear ‘unready’ for school literacy learning because their participative repertoires are different from those required for literacy lessons (p.4).

Therefore, teachers must be aware of each child’s background and begin to instruct according to what the child is comfortable with in the classroom. Dechman (2000) says enabling each student to progress at own rate within their own real-life circumstances enhances rather than detracts from the probability that they will eventually succeed in mastering the expected curriculum (p.9).

In the Atlantic Canada English Language Arts Curriculum Guide: Grades Primary – 3 (1997) it states under specific curriculum outcomes for language and literacy development that,

students with special needs, language problems, and/ or English as a second language may demonstrate markedly slower and /or different patterns of development. The classroom teacher needs to assess continually where the student is in the process of becoming literate, and to consider what he/she needs to continue to progress. In addition, it is important to realize that all language processes are affected by a number of internal and external factors such as prior knowledge and experience with the situation (e.g., type of text, in reading) p.21.

Therefore, as educators, it is reasonable to adopt practices that will benefit all students. Maeroff (1998) points out that the meter stick we use to determine where

children are is middle class and white. Students at disadvantage need to be identified early since unlike students with “special needs”, their outward signs are not as visible, nor are their needs taken seriously. Sometimes it is only through behavior that these children become noticed. My experience working with students at disadvantage has led me to discover they are capable of learning and becoming literate given the resources. Comber (2000) says, “As educators we need to believe in what children can learn and can do, not to be driven by our fears of their difference and otherness from us” (p.23).

The Student Engagement in Learning and School Life report (Smith et al, 1998) explains how some schools provide a rich diverse learning environment. They take into account the social and creative development of the student, as well as the academic development. If critical thinking and collaborative learning are important skills/ dispositions for *all* students to acquire, then they are that much more important to students at disadvantage, as students at disadvantage are less likely to have the kinds of prior experience on which school depends.

I believe students at disadvantage need to experience success in school; therefore, it will be necessary to change our methods of teaching in order to meet the child’s needs. It is not only the students at disadvantage, who learn in a variety of different ways, but all children. Every student has the right to become literate. It is our responsibility to find ways to teach all children so they become successful learners. Ashton (1997) says, “Give me a fish and you feed me for a day; teach me to fish and

you feed me for a lifetime” (p.11). We do not solve their problems, but rather teach them how to solve their own problems.

Freire’s (1989) idea of critical awareness and engagement for students challenged the “dispenser of knowledge” theory. Students are not fountains that you try to fill up with knowledge. They are to be active participants in their own learning. hooks (1994) says, “progressive teachers work to transform the curriculum so it does not reflect biases or reinforce systems of domination. These progressive teachers engage students in order to provide them with ways of knowing that enhance their capacity to live and learn fully” (p.21-22). It is a hope of mine that more teachers will become informed in ways to instruct students at disadvantage in the classroom. I think it is necessary for students to discover learning, through the guidance of a teacher.

Knapp, Means and Chelemer (1991) alert us to the need for implementing new instructional models that will challenge students at disadvantage to do authentic tasks and experience success doing those tasks, and to enhance their self-concept. (See Appendix C)

Researchers Knapp &Turnbull (1990) suggest that students at disadvantage will be better able to meet the academic challenge of school if,

teachers know and respect the student’s cultural and linguistic background and communicate this respect in a personal way to the students. Also if the academic program allows and encourages students to draw and build on the experiences they have, at the same time that it exposes them to unfamiliar experiences and ways of thinking. In addition, teachers should make the school’s culture explicit

to these students, as they explain and model these dimensions of academic learning (p.5).

For many years I have been an educator in schools where far too many children suffered the consequences of various forms of social disadvantage. Watching them learn and grow, and working with them and their families to help them get the most out of their education has taught me a great deal. I believe that students at disadvantage have potential for academic learning and that this may not be fully realized by many educators. The Public School Programs for Nova Scotia (1997) states:

all children in Nova Scotia need a broad-based, quality education... quality is also demonstrated by the diversity of educational experiences in which students are actively involved and by the extent to which individual student needs are met... offer a school experience that will provide students to develop into lifelong learners capable of identifying and solving problems, and dealing with change... the teaching/learning environment must be sensitive to the culture and heritage of learners. It goes on further to say, a sound education provided in partnership with the home and the community forms a basis for students to become healthy and caring persons, having a respect for self and others and a desire to contribute to society as productive citizens (p.v).

I believe it is necessary to search for more effective curricula and instruction for students such as these. Not doing so amounts to the failure to provide equal learning opportunities.

Chapter III

Methodology

“One test of the correctness of educational procedure is the happiness of the child.”

~ *Maria Montessori, 2005* ~

A. General Research Perspective

This chapter explains the methods used in carrying out the study, giving special emphasis to the analysis of data. It should be noted at the outset that the methodology was to a certain extent an evolving one that took definite shape as the study progressed. I conducted an interviewed-based, qualitative, phenomenological study. The participants described their experiences teaching students at disadvantage. They explained useful teaching strategies for students at disadvantage to be successful. Also, in the study, I ‘bracket’ my personal experiences in order to help understand those of the participants. According to Creswell (2003), the qualitative researcher systematically reflects on who he or she is in the inquiry and is sensitive to his or her personal biography and how it shapes the study.

B. Participants

In this study, I worked with three exemplary elementary school teachers in Nova Scotia who taught in a variety of high poverty areas. I interviewed these participants a resource teacher, a resource / administrator, and a classroom teacher. These teachers

are known in the Nova Scotia education community for their experience, dedication, and understanding of the issues of poverty and education. Also, these teachers' reputations are not only known to their colleagues, but to critical academic educators as well. However, each of these teachers is independent of one another and they see the same effects in the classroom.

C. Instruments

I used the method of sampling in analytic induction called purposeful sampling. I chose particular subjects to include because they were believed to facilitate the expansion of the developing theory (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998). I interviewed the teachers individually. This procedure was open-ended interviewing. Interview questions were based on personal knowledge and expertise and on the current research. The content and structure of all interview schedules were similar. Questions were focused around their philosophies for the successes students at disadvantage received in their classrooms. What teaching strategies they found to be most successful when dealing with students at disadvantage.

D. Procedure

Following approval by the Graduate Studies Ethics Committee Review Board, I approached the potential participants. I asked if they would be willing to volunteer for this commitment. As a follow-up to potential participants' oral consent to participate,

I provided all participants with a letter explaining the purpose of the research, participant's role, and the assurance of confidentiality, along with a consent form. I also provided a telephone number and an email address where the researcher and/or the thesis advisor could be contacted (See Appendix A & B).

Once written permission was obtained from the three participants, I made arrangements to meet with each teacher individually on two separate occasions. I conducted interviews on an individual basis. I arranged a personal time that was convenient for each participant. In addition, I arranged interviews outside of their place of employment at a location that was convenient for each participant. I audio taped each interview. I used a style of interviewing that entailed a predetermined list of questions and issues to be explored which allowed conversation to flow freely but also maintained a focus on a particular issue. This ensured me that the areas explored would elicit views and opinions from each participant (Appendix D). I reminded the participants that they could voluntarily withdraw from the study at any time without adverse consequences. I thanked each participant orally and in writing upon completion of the interviews. I labeled the audio tapes. I dated and coded each tape by a pseudonym. I then transcribed for analysis.

E. Data Analysis

The analysis of the data was done using qualitative measures. The purpose of qualitative research is to learn about some facet of the social world and create new

understandings that could be used by that social world (Rossman & Rallis, 2003). I transcribed all the interviews. I reviewed each transcript thoroughly using the grounded theory approach or as it is often referred to, “the constant comparative method of analysis” (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). Grounded theory is inductively derived from the phenomenon it represents. Therefore, the data collected, its’ analysis, and the theory stand in reciprocal relationship with one another. A grounded theorist does not begin with a theory, and then prove it. Instead, s/he begins with an area of study and what is relevant to the area is allowed to emerge (Strauss & Corbin, 1990).

I used the analytic method of open coding (Strauss & Corbin, 1990) which is a process of breaking down, examining, comparing, conceptualizing, and categorizing data. Conceptualizing the data was the first step in the analysis, comparing incident with incident so that similar phenomena was given the same name. Once I identified particular phenomena in the data, I began to group the concepts in order to reduce the number of units with which to work. The grouping of concepts that seem to pertain to the same phenomena is referred to as categorizing. Finally, I pulled the categories together and more abstract groups of concepts or subcategories were formed (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). There are several ways of approaching the process of open coding: line by line, paragraph by paragraph, taking an entire document and comparing it to the next. In this study, I approached the process of open coding using question by question.

F. Limitations

Limitations set some conditions that acknowledge the partial and tentative nature of any research. (Rossman & Rallis, 2003). In this particular research study, there were various limitations.

The small sample size and the reliance on one technique for gathering data can be seen as a limitation. It was a time factor that allowed only three participants. The participants have many years experience working with students at disadvantage and are well known to critical academic educators. However, the goal of this study is not to present all the solutions necessary for students at disadvantage to be successful, but rather a few very workable strategies that can be implemented gradually into a classroom.

Central to the notion of credibility in qualitative research, is a process of self reflection on the part of the researcher. Bogdan & Biklen (1998) point out “Researchers in the phenomenological mode attempt to understand the meaning of events and interactions to ordinary people in particular situations” (p.23). The researcher’s bias is an important limitation to keep in mind.

Given that this work will be informed by a critical theoretical perspective, it is inescapable that my personal bias will reflect in this study. It is therefore essential that I acknowledge and identify my own culture and worldviews and understand how they are in constant interaction with the participants and the research study.

The goal of the researcher is to add to knowledge and not to pass judgment on a setting (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998). Since I was interested in the participant's experiences with students at disadvantage, I interacted with the participants in a natural, unobtrusive, and non threatening manner so the participants' views were as accurate as possible.

The discussion on limitations serves to remind the researcher, as well as the reader, that no study is perfect, that findings are tentative and conditional, that knowledge is elusive and approximate, and that our claims should be humble given the extraordinary complexity of the social world we want to learn more about (Rossman & Rallis, 2003).

Chapter IV

Results

“If a child is to keep alive his inborn sense of wonder, he needs the companionship of at least one adult who can share it, rediscovering with him the joy, excitement and mystery of the world we live in.”

~ Rachel Carson, 1956 ~

A. Introduction

The results will be presented in two sections. The first section will include a brief background on the participants. Pseudonyms are used for participants' names. The second section will include the findings which emerged from the qualitative data analysis.

B. Participant Backgrounds

Participant # 1: Tonya

Sex: Female

Current position: Learning Center Teacher / Vice -Principal

Teaching experience: 23 years

Tonya holds her Bachelor of Child Study, MAED, and MA. She began her career as a Preschool teacher / Director. Over the twenty three years Tonya has experience as a Primary teacher, a grade four teacher, a grade one teacher, and a resource teacher. She has fifteen years working with students at disadvantage.

Participant # 2: Hanlon**Sex:** Female**Current position:** LSD Itinerant**Teaching experience:** 11 years

Hanlon holds her BEd degree and her MEd in literacy degree. She previously worked as a resource teacher. She has always worked in diverse settings that included students at disadvantage.

Participant # 3: Monica**Sex:** Female**Current Position:** Classroom Teacher**Teaching Experience:** 34 years

Monica holds a T.P.T.C. (Trained Primary Teacher's Certificate), P.A.C. (Primary Art Teacher's Certificate), Diploma in Education from Australia and a Bachelor of Education from here in Nova Scotia. She began her career in Australia where she taught elementary with experience in all grades from primary to six. She has experience teaching art and drama as well. Most of her career she has worked with students at disadvantage.

C. Findings / Questions

Research Question # 1

How would you identify a student at disadvantage in your classroom?

When interviewing the participants about identifying students at disadvantage in their classrooms three themes emerged. The first theme revealed that the word disadvantage has a **judgment** to it. The second theme from the participant's responses was that the word disadvantage places a **label** upon the students. Tonya says when people hear the word disadvantage, they think of the whole child, they have lice, they need handouts, they need me to do things for them, to fix them, because I am the advantaged one. She asks, is it the label that is going to help us figure out the strategies or is it the strategies we come up with to make things easier for the child? Tonya also points out that we are all disadvantaged in some area and it is only when we are put in a situation where we need to use that skill that it becomes a problem. Tonya says she would like to think of her students as having successes and not having successes.

The third theme indicated the word disadvantage has a **negative** connotation. Hanlon responded by saying she does not like to pigeon-hole students, rather than call them students at disadvantage, she would say differently advantaged. We have to see where their advantages are, we may have to dig deep, and they may be inherent in

their culture, but they are there. Then take these advantages and translate them into whatever behaviors, knowledge, or skills we need them to do now.

Monica's view tells us students at disadvantage usually stand out in different ways and probably behavior is the key. She continues saying often the behavior is anti-social and inappropriate.

Research Question # 2

Describe how your teaching strategies can make learning successful for students at disadvantage?

When interviewing participants about how students learn in their classroom the first theme to emerge was **self-esteem**. All participants agree that in order for a child to learn, they need to know they are cared about, feel valued, and respected. It is then and only then will a child feel comfortable to take risks. hooks (1994) agrees

To educate as the practice of freedom is a way of teaching that anyone can learn. That learning process comes easiest to those of us who teach who also believe that there is an aspect of our vocation that is sacred; who believe that our work is not merely to share information but to share in the intellectual and spiritual growth of our students. To teach in a manner that respects and cares for the souls of our students is essential if we are to provide the necessary conditions where learning can most deeply and intimately begin (p.13).

The teacher needs to be the role model in sensitivity behavior. The teacher needs to encourage students to be tolerant and accepting of everyone's needs within the classroom. Tonya says,

She has seen many students who feel valued and in turn take risks in their learning because they feel safe and important. These students write read, create and compute to the best of their ability, which results in progress and achievement (transcript, lines 32-34).

The second theme that surfaced that help students at disadvantage learn is **relationships**. Tonya believes that a beginning is to help parents see the positive attributes of their child instead of always dwelling on the negative. It helps to have conversations with parents about their child's interests, strengths, and needs and around ways they can support their child in achieving success so parents feel included in a part of their child's learning. Parents need to feel comfortable working with the school. Monica stated,

I think generally parents need to develop a relationship with the teacher. So they don't see the teacher as a threat and certainly that there are not two different worlds, but a medium where home and school crosses over (transcript, lines 6-8).

Participants also agree that being a liaison for outside agencies to help families and students is necessary, as well as having a **team** within the school consisting of classroom teachers, specialists, such as speech, psychologists, learning center teachers, program assistants, parents, administrators, and health care workers. This team works together for the interest of the child.

Hanlon spoke more about relationships involving the students. She believes that it is very important to **even the playing field** in the classroom. The teacher takes a high level piece of descriptive writing and as a class students analyze the piece recording all the adjectives based on motion, color, and shape words. The students

then observe the words and discussion follows as to what they see in these words.

Students must show what they see by using the given words and any other descriptive words they know. An example of a poetry lesson done with grade five classes (Appendix E) explains how to even the playing field. This lesson has been done several times and without fail the same results happen. It is very difficult to pick out the work of a student at disadvantage from a high academic student. Teachers from previous years look at the work on display and wonder who did what. Hanlon says,

It does not matter that children are coming from different places, or cannot spell, or have limited knowledge, we are going to scaffold the students and talk them through with questions (transcript, lines 10-11).

Hanlon admits that she understands a teacher can't do this type of lesson with everything but she thinks we need to teach students directly and openly with whatever skill we want them to learn.

A discussion with Hanlon disclosed another theme to help students at disadvantage learn in the classroom called **front end loading**. An example of a strategy that uses the front end loading method is called the reciprocal reading strategy. This basically takes all the effective reading strategies and makes them into a list or steps to follow when reading a novel. What do you do first? Students look at the cover and do a think aloud. They discuss what they know and look at the pictures and maybe do a brainstorm or take jot notes, and make predictions. Then they read a chunk and get a picture in their mind depending whether it is a narrative or an expository reading. Then do a summary of what is read-- if doing it independently they would take jot notes about things they need to track in order to do the

assignment. We should clue kids in early to the assignment with any reading. Then clarify any words, terms or ideas not sure of and then predict, read another chunk and repeat the process. For a full lesson description see (Appendix F).

Participants perceived successful learning for students at disadvantage in their classrooms as **proactive and interactive**. Tonya believes finding out the strengths of students at disadvantage and their style of learning is necessary as so many different kinds of learning experiences are provided that tap into different learning styles. As Knapp, Turnbull, and Shields (1990) point out,

The disadvantaged child may well bring to school speech patterns, cognitive predispositions, and behavior patterns that do not match the way things are done in school. These students must learn the culture of the school while they are also attempting to master academic tasks. While recognizing there may be gaps in disadvantaged students' experiences, the educator builds on their experience bases and at the same time challenges the children to expand their repertoires of experiences and skills. This perspective gains support from a decade or more of cognitive research and related theories of learning that portray the learner as an active constructor of knowledge and meaning rather than a passive recipient of information and skills (p. 5).

For example if they are a visual learner then explicit verbal directions with lots of visuals for activities are provided. If they are hands on learner then lots of physical manipulative objects are provided. If they are a child who needs a lot of structure, learns better verbally, or works better in an open ended and freer classroom, then the necessary provisions are accommodated. Being successful depends upon having a plan and knowing what you are doing and what you want your students at disadvantage to do.

All participants agree lots of modeling and demonstrating is required. Also, the teacher must be able to read the signals that indicate students' level of frustration and at the same time teach them to become independent. Tonya explains if the students are trying to write, she uses the following techniques,

She says draw a line on the paper, when you have three sentences done put up your hand, I am just going over there to do that, and I will be back. Come back when their hand is up because they have three sentences done. Or if they need some kind of physical or visual strategy to help them do that, for instance say they are writing a story or a few sentences and they are not able to write it yet, you get them to tell you the story and you write it for them, lots of modeling and demonstrating, then cut it all up, mix it up, and make a game of it and say I will be back when you have it all put together. Just finding little things like that if a child is fidgety you make it a more physical activity, if the child is more visual make sure you have the visuals right there so they know what to do, how much to do, and where to begin and where to finish (transcript, lines 18-28).

Tonya firmly believes that you set up some explicit strategies so they know what to do and they are not thinking they have to come up with something and they don't understand it. The teacher has to have a plan and know what s/he is asking them to do.

Monica maintains that physical movement breaks, drama and puppetry help students at disadvantage effectively deal with social skills, act out frustration, and stress. She says, "I think through drama we can identify concerns and we can deal with them to some degree. I think it is very effective especially in younger children" (transcript, lines 17-19). Drama allows students the opportunity to act in a fantasy world. Puppets give them another voice to express and deal with certain feelings.

Research Question # 3**What concerns do you have for students at disadvantage in your classroom?**

When asked about concerns for students at disadvantage in their classrooms, the participants indicated they worried students at disadvantage would see themselves as an **outsider**. Tonya said, “She worries they won’t see themselves in the learning opportunities she sets up in her classroom, they will not feel included in the mainstream, other students will interpret differences as something negative, and their frustration with learning will turn into behavioral issues” (transcript, lines 24-28). As well Monica worries they do not fit in with the class and thinks a child needs to feel part of a group. They do not want to stand out in any way or draw attention to their failings but often exhibit behavior that does make them stand out.

Hanlon’s concern for students at disadvantage is that we do not always have to **rescue** them. She sees the need to come up with ways of teaching that create independent problem solving individuals that are also supportive, understanding and caring for each other. According to Means and Knapp (1991) “The dominant approaches to teaching at-risk students provide little or nothing to foster the growth of reasoning, problem-solving and independent thinking” (p.4). Hanlon tells us they don’t always need to be rescued, too much enabling is happening. She believes students need to learn how to verbalize their thoughts, processing, and feelings.

It is all about do, do, do, and action instead of using all your ways of experiencing and talking about your experiences, not just the events. Hanlon feels many teachers just skim the surface of a lot of stuff and don't take one little topic and go into such depth with it that students could actually learn lots of other stuff. Hanlon continues,

I think if that is done at the beginning of the year, it is slow probably to begin with and to teach really good strategies for certain things with it, it is slow. I call it front end loading, a lot of slow work, questioning kids about how they are thinking, how they are feeling, where they are at in it, self-evaluating all the time but the returns from that once they have gone through that type of learning and get through to the foundation that way, thinking and talking that way, learning solid strategies and it will carry them through the rest of the year. You get through things quicker as time goes on (transcript, lines 21-26).

This method is called front end loading. Freire and Macedo (1987) conclude that "Learning to read and write means creating and assembling a written expression for what can be said orally. The teacher cannot put it together for the student; that is the student's creative task." (p.35). Hanlon's poetry lesson exemplifies what Freire and Macedo are speaking about. (See Appendix E)

Research Question # 4

How do you measure their success?

It is interesting and important to note that a measurement of success according to the participants is **acceptance**. When students at disadvantage are participating in activities, exhibiting enthusiasm for opportunities to express them, have a positive attitude, and feeling accepted by their peers then you know learning is taking place.

Monica speaks about the importance of being there as a friend if a student of disadvantage wants to talk to the teacher at recess concerning things going on at home or perhaps just about an interest of theirs.

Tonya says we should always look at progress as individual growth and not compare them to every other child. We need to map out a plan and celebrate with the parents their individual progress. Comber (1989) says, "If teachers can work out what each student is finding success with or what he or she is finding difficult they can know better how to help" (p.23).

Another theme for measuring success is **perception**. Not only do students at disadvantage have to feel accepted but they need to see themselves as learners. Hanlon believes their ability to self-evaluate and being able to talk about their learning and thinking is a successful form of measurement. When you can see steady progress with skills you are trying to develop and the students can identify and see things, for example, what do you think reading is? Then Hanlon accepts that as individual growth of a student. According to Comber (1989)

When teachers closely observe their students, useful questions and insights emerge that can give a new view of what is happening in the classroom. Knowing how students perceive literacy tasks, how they approach assignments, how they look for help and how they monitor their work were target understandings (p.23).

Hanlon describes her assessment of reading for students at disadvantage in the following: Her goal is to have students become more fluent in their oral reading. She has a discussion with the child and records the length of the book, how long it took

them to read it, what problems they encountered, what they liked about it, what was easy about it? At the end of the year she gets them to pick a book they read at the early part of the year and read it again. They then report back to her on what they experienced this time. She finds that almost inevitably they say I read that book so fast, it was so easy; I can't believe it took me so long to read it the first time. This type of participation and engagement in activities assists students at disadvantage to self-evaluate and be able to talk about their learning and thinking. This leads to self confidence.

Hanlon goes on to say she thinks it is extremely important for students to evaluate themselves first; otherwise the teacher becomes a yardstick of their self-esteem. Students at disadvantage often ask the teacher how well did I do. The teacher's reply is, well you tell me. What did you do first? Tell me what you did, how did you go about it? How do you think you did? What would you do different next time, how would you change it? Then the teacher finds something extremely specific, one or two things that she feels is worth it or a mistake and teaches a lesson for the next time.

All participants agree students are very perceptive. They know when the teacher is supportive of their needs so it is crucial to be honest with them about their learning. Also all participants confirm learning must be in the hands of the students at disadvantage. The teacher becomes the facilitator to provide a rich environment of learning experiences and a guide always demonstrating with lots of modeling and coaching.

Research Question # 5

Describe your experiences in using successful teaching strategies.

The theme that was brought to light during these discussions was **assurance**. Students at disadvantage need to know it is okay to make mistakes and if we didn't make mistakes we wouldn't know if we did something wrong and we couldn't learn from them. Tonya points out that we must make students at disadvantage realize they can do things they thought they could not before. To do this we need to make our classrooms feel like a safe place. Learning begins in a safe classroom. When students feel safe they will take risks and realize they can do things they thought they could not do before. We need to make our classrooms physically safe, emotionally safe, educationally safe, and socially safe. When students feel successful then learning becomes a happy and positive experience for students, teachers and parents.

Tonya commented her teaching affects students at disadvantage by making them feel valued and successful, helping them see themselves in the classroom activities and literature, giving them a safe place to learn and grow, and teaching them about their own learning style and strengths.

Monica stated her teaching affects students at disadvantage by building up self-esteem. This is done by equalizing and breaking down barriers, Hanlon refers to this as leveling the playing field. Monica also finds success when she offers lots of 'hands-on' opportunities such as tactile (cooking, crafts, art mediums, textures) and experiential opportunities such as (field trips, guest speakers, presentations).

Hanlon believes her teaching affects students at disadvantage by making them stretch themselves to the best of their ability. She wants them to take risks and know why they are doing it and talk about it. Providing a safe way as they work through a difficult situation and arriving at the other side to a good feeling and then reflecting on the process that took them there.

Research Question # 6

Describe any challenges you face while working with students at disadvantage on a daily basis?

The major theme all participants stated was **time**. Tonya states finding the time to meet their needs, time to meet parents, time to meet with the team on a daily basis and with students at disadvantage it involves searching out material or creating special material, making sure things are reflective of their understanding, and things that are going to interest them, and doing this on a daily basis is overwhelming when you have other students in your class--so you never feel you do the best job you possibly could.

Tonya believes we need to make sure students are able to make connections with what is going on in our classroom and to give them opportunities to make those connections and accept connections so it is not always the teacher making the connections. We need to show them what they did well in a positive way.

Another theme that came about was **keeping things positive**. Tonya noted that being able to keep things consistent and maintain a positive attitude is a challenge. Another challenge is constantly overcoming the stereotypes or ideas people develop about students at disadvantage and trying to get the attitudes so it is positive. Seeing the positive in all students even when progress and behavior are not acceptable is demanding upon the teacher. Monica talks about behavior problems and being able to deal with them tactfully in front of the class. Sometimes students at disadvantage need down time, that is giving them space, privacy, and time to be alone. Another challenge is getting parents to support school learning even if theirs was negative and demeaning. Monica adds convincing parents of students of disadvantage that their presence at school can be important is not easy.

Research Question # 7

What do you see as the parent's role in their child's learning?

During the discussion of the parent's role in their child's learning, two themes surfaced. The first theme is parents **need to be an advocate** for their children. It is important that parents be supportive and a voice for their child. They need to take an interest in what their child is doing in school. It is their role to feed, cloth, and nurture their child.

Research tells us that teachers do make assumptions about students at disadvantage. Knapp, Turnbull, and Shields (1990) point out there is an assumption

that families of students at disadvantage have given their children a bad start in life. By assuming this, educators may miss the strengths of the cultures from which these students at disadvantage come from.

Tonya states we should not be judgmental when dealing with students at disadvantage. It is a very easy thing to say-- why isn't this parent reading to their child? Why does this one have no lunches? We have no idea what some of these parents are coping with in so many situations. They may not have the literacy skills, or money to buy equipment, be working three jobs and do not get home. We as educators can't change that but we can help them with what we know about their child and we can help within the context that we work with their child.

Tonya suggests that parents should become part of the team that works in the school to help students at disadvantage. The team works together to discover why a child is not being successful. Is the classroom lacking a culture representative of their home life? Does the literature reflect a variety of family lives? Are classroom experiences easily understood? Does the child have cognitive difficulties? Does the child have attention difficulties? Does the child have special needs? Does the child have cultural differences? Any of these factors may be a cause for a child to be unsuccessful. Therefore the school team consisting of teachers, parents, program assistants, administrators, specialists, health care system, and outside agencies, work together in order that the child has a positive experience at school.

Participants see parents' role as being patient and encouraging for their child. They expect them to help with homework if at all possible. If they are not able then participants would like parents to ask for help. Parents should be invited to help in the classroom. If the teacher respects the parent and is positive, then she will get a lot more support than being negative and pointing out the negative. As Tonya neatly puts it, "No parent or child wants to be unsuccessful so if they could be successful they would be" (transcript, lines 34-35).

The other theme that came about was parents need to be **coordinators**. Hanlon emphatically stated children who live in a reasonably organized home whether they are students at disadvantage or not are more successful. She thinks focus and organization are often learned and it does not start when the child comes to school. Children that have more chaotic and inconsistent lives are the children that have more trouble being successful.

Research Question # 8

What do you see as the role of an Administrator in helping teachers working with students at disadvantage?

How have / have not Administrators supported you while working with students at disadvantage?

The theme for role of the Administrator is **proactive leader**. It is the business of the administrator to know who the students at disadvantage are in the school. This can be done by a walk about to classes, reading the report cards, or having regular meetings with the staff and asking who you are concerned about. An on-going question administrators should ask is: Who do you need support for and what can I as administrator do to help?

The administrator is to look at the case load and meet with the appropriate people to see who do we need to help the most and how are we going to do it. When the administrator walks around to classrooms and sees something positive going on then s/he should give praise to that teacher. The administrator is to contact outside agencies if necessary and of course contact parents.

The administrator should be aware of positive events happening with students at disadvantage and be able to tell parents about the positive message in the hallway. The administrator is on the school team and has good communication with the classroom teachers. Monica thinks the administrator should share the responsibility with the classroom teacher especially when behavior is involved. Administrators see the child from a different view point when they visit the classroom.

When discussing Administrators support the main theme to emerge was **positive interaction**. All participants have been very fortunate to get support when they needed it. Hanlon stated she is a person who can get what she needs for her students,

all she has to say is what she wants to do and why. All participants noted that there is help all around but the big factor is finding time to locate it. Monica indicates support from her administrator at her school. The Healthy Eating Initiative was launched to combat the reliance on junk-food in the school canteen making available only healthy snacks. The Get Fit Week saw interaction between all classes to highlight the need for a regular program. The Safety House program was incorporated after attempts by a stranger to lure students. Tonya feels it is important to have parents' support, and administrators can be helpful in that area.

Teachers are more able to articulate administrators who are good at their job. Tonya tells whenever she came across an administrator who didn't see things the way she did then she knew that was not the place to go as she would not get what she needed for the student.

Chapter V

Discussion

“Parents can plant magic in a child’s mind through certain words spoken with some thrilling quality of voice, some uplift of the heart and spirit”

~ Robert Mac Neil, 2005 ~

The discussion chapter is divided into two segments. The first part consists of the themes and issues derived from the study. The second section focuses on possible direction for future research and various recommendations to be considered regarding students at disadvantage.

Discussion

The primary aim of this study was to investigate exemplary teaching practices that support students at disadvantage in public school classrooms in Nova Scotia. Several themes and patterns surfaced from the research. Some were supported by the available literature and others appeared to be new strategies that may not have yet been widely used and may be addressed in the future.

The first major theme to arise was the perception or judgment teachers have about students at disadvantage. One such issue is our approach to students at disadvantage. Teachers need to understand the discourse of difference rather than deficit. Tonya says, “it always comes back to we are looking at a deficit model and that’s assuming that what I do is always not the deficit model and I have issues with

that one” (transcript, lines 78-79). Teachers need to show more appreciation of difference from students. My research revealed a certain feeling, based upon what teachers learned in their past or from their experience, that made teachers interact with students at disadvantage a particular way. They allowed their self fulfilled prophecies to dominate their thinking. My participants agreed that a big concern is students at disadvantage can get labeled early and educators begin to think they can not learn. Shirley Brice Heath (1991) points out, “Let us then not think of students of diverse backgrounds as bringing ‘differences’ to school, but instead as offering classrooms ‘expansions’ of background knowledge and ways of using language” (p.17). Just because the school life is not exactly like their home life, it does not reflect what they know as a person.

As Hanlon said, “We are interacting with the intelligence of the kids whatever that may be and we are validating where these students are coming from” (transcript, lines 12-13). My experience from working in a school where many of the students at disadvantage attended was teachers took for granted that these students were unable to learn. I was told upon entering a school for the first time that I should not expect to cover the curriculum for my grade level as these students cannot do it. However, I was so impressed my first year in a school with students at disadvantage. I found them with a great desire to learn and a willingness to engage in all activities or situations presented to them. It is my belief that every child is capable of learning.

Actually, what teachers inadvertently said was that students at disadvantage did not have the same literacy experiences that we expect them to have so we can start teaching them in terms of the literacy and the philosophy that says they should have been read to, sung to, and have all the preparation necessary for the way we teach literacy. However, the world is not all neat, perfect and compact and neither is our classroom. The little faces in front of us all deserve our equal attention. Hanlon says, “We need to look at those kinds of intelligences or experiences that may have trained them. What do they come with, what are the literacies they come with; it could be around how to survive when you don’t have much money, or what do you eat when you don’t have much money” (transcript, lines 29-31).

Perception or judgment can be eloquently captured in Jack Prelutsky (1984) poem:

The New Kid on the Block

There’s a new kid on the block,
 and boy, that kid is tough,
 that new kid punches hard,
 that new kid plays real rough,
 that new kid’s big and strong,
 with muscles everywhere,
 that new kid tweaked my arm,
 that new kid pulled my hair.

That new kid likes to fight,
 and picks on all the guys,
 that new kid scares me some,
 (that new kid's twice my size),
 that new kid stomped my toes,
 that new kid swiped my ball,
 that new kid's really bad,
 I don't care for her at all.

(p.7)

Almost always without fail when children and teachers hear this poem for the first time there is a hint of surprise. It demonstrates how wrong conclusions can be hastily made before knowing all the facts. Educators need to appraise newly arrived students with caution.

Another theme of disadvantage was a negative connotation. Students' frustration with learning can sometimes turn into behavioral issues, and other students and teachers may interpret differences as something negative. As Shields (1995) points out,

Negative beliefs about students' backgrounds led to lower expectations, which led to the provision of fewer or more impoverished learning opportunities. Then, when these children did not perform as well as their peers, the teachers felt justified in both their views and their practices (p.36).

We need to create in our classroom an atmosphere of diversity, which may not be an easy thing to do. It can take time and a lot of cooperation.

Educators should ask: Do students become disadvantaged when they enter the classroom for the first time? Let's think about the situation into which they are now placed. They now have different experiences than at home, might be cultural differences, or the kinds of talk. Comber (1997) points out, "Ways of talking, listening and acting are not the same in all cultures yet in a classroom only a narrow range is acceptable"(p.25). When students come to school, the kinds of things we are asking them to do, students at disadvantage may not be familiar with, may not have had experience with it, or might not have the skills that some of the other children who are coming to school have, because they have been immersed in the kinds of school things we do.

The next theme has to do with relationships. All participants agreed that a positive relationship with parents was very important. Finders & Lewis (1994) state,

Too often, the social, economic, linguistic, and cultural practices of parents are represented as serious problems rather than valued knowledge. When we reexamine our assumptions about parental absence, we may find that our interpretations of parents who care may simply be parents who are like us, parents who feel comfortable in the teacher's domain. Instead of operating on the assumption that absence translates into non-caring, we need to focus on ways to draw parents into the schools. If we make explicit the multiple ways we value the language, culture, and the knowledge of the parents in our communities, parents may readily accept our invitations (p.6).

My research showed conversations with parents about their child's strengths, interests, and needs is a positive way to begin. All participants say the administrator can also make parents feel welcomed into the school by talking to them in the hallways about positive things their child has achieved. From my experience, making

parents feel comfortable, speaking to them in terms they understand, and respecting their point of view resulted in good relationships.

It was not only the parent/s and teacher that are required for students at disadvantage to be successful. It was a team of administrators, learning center teachers, teachers, specialists, health care workers, educational program assistants, outside agencies, and parents all working together. Developing whole school programs using the team mentioned above was one of the best ways to ensure meaningful engaged learning. Successful engaged learners are responsible for their own learning. They also must have the skills to work cooperatively with others. This brings us to the next relationship between students.

Several years ago I was presented with a class of fourteen students at disadvantage. It was their third year of school and all fourteen could not read nor write upon entering my classroom. These students at disadvantage had few expected readiness skills before entering school, their first year of school was shortened to a half day mandated by the school board, the classroom size their first year of school was thirty one, and there were high academic, behavioral, and psychological needs in the class. Two of my students at disadvantage were on medication for ADHD before entering my class. One was diagnosed midyear of grade primary and the other midyear of grade one. Twelve out of the fourteen families lived on social assistance and five of the children lived in single parent families. These students were all very capable learners and it was with great excitement that I took on this role. I looked at

each individual's strengths and weaknesses. I could not make any assumptions as these students at disadvantage had survived unique circumstances.

My first task was to make everyone feel safe and special. As the students at disadvantage became more confident and competent, I could see more success everyday. I also observed these students at disadvantage develop a bond amongst them and become very supportive of each other. Comber speaks about social and cultural factors play a role in student literate performance and I felt this bond developed because of the similarities in their backgrounds. Comber (1997) points out,

So much of being successful in a literacy event, then, is to do with being able to fit the discourse which involves much more than reading and writing 'skills'. In other words, being successful in the classroom is about displaying the sets of various words/ actions/ values/ beliefs that 'count'. Hence, literate practices come to shape identity in non neutral ways (p.25).

One only needs to listen and observe during playtime when students often imitate the teacher in her words and actions. My experience of remaining in the classroom and working during indoor lunch hour proved very interesting in listening to conversations between students. I heard them role-playing the teacher and it revealed to me that these students felt very comfortable and safe in that classroom.

This brought the theme of assurance to light as teachers reassure students at disadvantage that making mistakes is okay. If we didn't make mistakes we wouldn't learn from them. Every child needed to feel part of the group, the social group, and they did not want to stand out in any way or draw attention to their failings. The behavior problems that existed in previous years with my class of fourteen students

were practically non-existent. This can be attributed to these students at disadvantage feeling valued, respected, and cared for in a safe environment.

Hanlon talked about a strategy called evening the playing field. She worked with students on the same assignment and got results that made it difficult for previous teachers to recognize whose work belonged to whom. Children learned very quickly in a classroom how the tone was set. They realized very quickly what effort needed to be put into an assignment. Hanlon stated all students need to know what it feels like to get the discomfort feeling. They need to experience the feeling of frustration in a safe way where they are going to be taken through it carefully. Then when we get them to the other side of the good feeling, they can reflect on it. That's what learning is about, taking risks and building a frame of reference to deal with disappointment. This guarantee of assurance is so relevant for students at disadvantage. Teachers and all adults working for a child's benefit must use an appropriate discourse in the classroom to help students at disadvantage be successful.

In my experience all children are extremely intuitive or perceptive and can read situations and people. Before we begin teaching students at disadvantage we need to understand what kinds of skills they have developed in order to meet those needs to survive and stop thinking they are just being manipulative.

Another theme that surfaced was teachers need to be proactive and interactive. Teachers need to find the strengths of a student and identify their style of learning.

As Comber points out,

We cannot proceed with literacy instruction as if all children are living in households and communities whose languages, literacies and pedagogies match those of mainstream western schooling. At the same time, it is essential we do not assume an absence of literacy or an absence of encouragement or even pedagogic interaction in households where school literacies and parental education are limited (p.5).

Teachers need to have a plan that accommodates explicit strategies with explicit directions for different styles of learning. Some of these strategies my research found included drama, puppetry, music, and physical movement. The Student Engagement in Learning and School Life report (Smith et al, 1998) states,

The arts infused curriculum, for example, offers children opportunities to move beyond restrictions imposed by the traditional curricular emphasis on the rational/verbal in order to explore their worlds and ideas through music and visual and performing arts. (p.131)

My experience working in a school with an arts infused curriculum revealed the positive results of learning that took place for all students. Students at disadvantage were on a more even playing field when all types of talent are considered valuable not just being able to read. This type of curriculum offered opportunities for all students to excel in their talent area. Whenever you can make a student feel special then you help develop self- esteem and confidence. This leads to success in other areas. All my participants agreed many hands-on opportunities, field trips, guest speakers, and presentations assist these students at disadvantage to be more successful.

A theme of concern my research discovered was many students at disadvantage see themselves as outsiders. Students at disadvantage need to have experiences in the

classroom they can understand and be understood. Exposure to culturally valued practices makes it possible for students at disadvantage to make connections. Culture that is representative of students at disadvantage home life and the literature reflecting their family life should be evident in our classrooms. Knapp and Associates (1995) conducted a two –year study that examined classroom instruction in high-poverty schools. Their particular focus was on instructional practices that promote children's understanding and build meaning into the learning experience.

Children derive greater meaning in their school –based academic work from three sources. First, when they are actively engaged in the attempt to make sense of things they experience in school, they are encouraged to be meaning makers. Second, they derive meaning from seeing the relationship of parts to the whole, rather than being left with only parts. Opportunities to connect one concept or one skill to another increase their conceptual grasp of what they are doing, whether it involves communication, problem solving, appreciation of artwork, or carrying out projects. Third, they find meaning by connecting new learning experiences to their existing body of knowledge, assumptions, and meanings, much of which is rooted in their upbringing and cultural roots. We refer to teaching that seeks to maximize these three things as 'teaching for meaning' (pp 7-8).

Because meaningful instruction has been successfully used in suburban settings, the researchers wanted to know if a focus on meaning would have a place in high-poverty settings. After a close analysis of instruction and student learning, the authors concluded that meaning-oriented instruction produces superior learning to the more traditional skills-oriented practices and works as well for low-performing as high-performing students. They state:

The findings of our research form an integrated three-pronged argument about teaching for meaning in high-poverty classrooms in elementary schools. First, teachers who emphasize meaning construct and maintain rich and responsive academic learning environments. These environments are simultaneously

orderly and varied; in managing them, teachers respond actively and constructively to the students' diverse cultural, linguistic, and socioeconomic backgrounds.

Second, these teachers give meaning a high priority in their mathematics, reading or writing instruction by posing cognitively demanding tasks from the earliest stages in learning, teaching discrete skills in the context of their use, and connecting academic learning to the children's experience base. Approaching instruction in this way produces superior learning of advanced skills and comparable or better learning of 'basic' skills by both high and low achievers.

Third, teachers are likely to attempt and sustain this form of teaching given the right combination of conditions and supports. At the school level, these conditions include subject-specific instructional leadership, a climate of peer support, and organization of the school day to permit uninterrupted blocks of instructional time. At the district and state levels, policies governing curriculum, assessment, and professional development must strike a balance among pressuring for change, guaranteeing some autonomy for teachers, and providing professional resources (pp. 184-185).

Similar to what Knapp & Associates (1995) said, Hanlon used an instructional practice that promoted children's understanding and built meaning into the learning experience. The interesting term she used was called "front end loading". One strategy previously mentioned called the reciprocal reading strategy was used with grade five. This strategy allowed students at disadvantage to participate on a more even playing field. Within the groups, all students assisted each other and the strengths of different students were revealed. The teacher observed each group and interjected when necessary. Hanlon says we are not teaching kids to be independent. She thinks teachers are rescuing them way too much. Hanlon states, "I don't see the point if a student is on resource in grade two, why they are still on resource in grade ten, I don't get that. If we are giving that much extra help something should be different, something should have changed for that student and its not and why is that"

(transcript, lines 10-13)? Hanlon believes teachers need to teach students at disadvantage to become problem solvers.

A theme of success found in my research was acceptance. Again we have the pattern of reassurance, safeness, and respect following through for success. When students at disadvantage felt included and free to express opinions with peers there was growth in their progress. Providing help to students at disadvantage when they recognize they need it and are able to ask for it with from whom ever they are comfortable with such as their peers or teacher. Students at disadvantage needed to be encouraged to persist in a task and not give up easily. The pattern of perception was seen as a measure of success and students at disadvantage need to see themselves as learners.

Hanlon told about a poetry lesson she did with a grade five class. This exemplifies acceptance and perception. The class was composed of all types of learners from various backgrounds, ranging from students at disadvantage to high academic effective learners. The findings of this lesson were most interesting. The excellent students, who always wrote a certain way and were validated for being a good writer, initially did not stretch themselves. They wanted to stay in their comfort zone. They really fought the process. Many of them chose to compose an expository paragraph. The teacher told them it was a nice paragraph but that she wanted them to show her the dancer, not tell her what a dancer was. The students at disadvantage had tons of descriptions, even though they couldn't spell or probably read half of what

they wrote. Also, these students needed more questions and assistance but still produced a quality piece of writing.

The teacher wanted all the students emotionally charged and a bit out of their comfort zone as there is where learning takes place. If you are always feeling good all the time you are probably not learning as much as you could. She wanted them a bit frustrated but would assist with a question to keep them going. Unlike the students at disadvantage, the more effective learners were not used to feeling uncomfortable to the point of frustration so this exercise evened the playing field for all students.

If students quit, which sometimes we let happen, then they never experience the feeling from beginning to end and how good that feels. They can look back on the uncomfortable part and talk about how they grew from that experience. If you had quit you would feel how? When the end product was posted on the wall teachers who had these students the previous year could not tell which poetry belonged to the high academic or a student at disadvantage as they all had the same even playing field and all the work at the end of the day was well done. This idea of interactive writing is proclaimed by Shirley Brice Heath (1982),

Responsive, interactive writing frequently occurring over a period of time, provides the experience from which students may search out meaningful units and systems in writing. The opportunity to talk about the writing- with classmates, teachers, and with the subjects- force writers to realize what they have not communicated through the written word- the assumptions they have made, the presuppositions they have not fully explained, the backgrounds of understanding which are not shared (p.97).

Throughout the entire research the most common theme that kept reoccurring was respect for the student.

Time can be a factor for many things. It is not controlled by anyone. Therefore, time marches on oblivious to everyone. It depends on how one perceives it in a particular situation. Think of times when you thought fifteen minutes was an eternity and when the same amount of time in another situation was very brief. My participants found time a factor when trying to meet the needs of students at disadvantage. There are many meetings with parents, specialists, administrators, and other teachers to be attended. There is searching for materials and preparing the materials for different styles of learners so students at disadvantage make connections with what is going on in the classroom.

Along with time, there was a challenge of keeping things positive. This meant keeping students at disadvantage positive about their learning when they get frustrated and refuse to do their work. Also, keep other teachers positive so that they avoid stereotyping of students at disadvantage. Try to get parents to be positive and support learning when they had negative experiences in their schooling.

My research found participants thought parents can and should play a role in their child's learning. The term respect again showed significance where parents were concerned. Parents should be invited to the classroom to give assistance. Parents should be told the positive traits, such as strengths, interests, of their child and not

only hear the negative. A variety of studies (Henderson & Berla, 1994) confirms that parent involvement makes an enormous impact on students' attitude, attendance, and academic achievement.

The final issue examined was the role of an administrator in helping teachers work with students at disadvantage. Participants agreed the administrator has an important part in this area. The administrator must be a proactive leader with first recognizing students at disadvantage, understanding their needs, and sharing the negative and positive events that happen in their lives. The administrator needs to welcome the parents into the school, contact and coordinate outside agencies, and set up meetings with the team. The administrator deals with discipline problems and visits the classrooms to observe students at disadvantage. Young & Levin (2002) tell us there is much anecdotal evidence that effective principals have a strong interest in instructional issues. They tend to be highly visible in the school. They both initiate and support improvement efforts by teachers and students. Since administrators are seen as the traditional authority in a school any suggestion made by them carries more weight with staff or parents than a suggestion made by the classroom teacher.

Implications /Recommendations

It is important to note that this study does not provide all the theories or strategies for teaching students at disadvantage. It does provide opportunities for educators to try some of the examples of successful strategies and to possibly learn to look beyond labeling any student in their classes.

Attention must be given to labeling of students, with more communication of knowledge between teachers and students at disadvantage. Mutual respect is required before any learning can take place.

The completion of a triangle symbolizes the relationships between parents, students, and teachers. The involvement of all three working together leads to successful learning.

Teachers tend to emphasize reading more than writing. This study showed writing is the key to successfully learning to read.

Drawing on the power of oral language, students should be given opportunities to tell stories, talking enables them to write.

Trained librarians are becoming invisible in most schools. There is a need for good libraries in our schools. Most often the schools with the highest population of students at disadvantage are where the poorest libraries exist.

Closer attention needs to be given to the transition of students at disadvantage between schools. To enable students at disadvantage attain a smooth transition to a new school more communication between the teachers from both schools is necessary to assist with programming.

This research dealt with elementary students at disadvantage, future studies may want to look at junior and senior high schools to see if students at disadvantage are still dependent upon the same kinds of support.

A concern with this research is the small sample size and the reliance on one technique for gathering data which was employed in this study. In further studies more data needs to be gathered—more teachers need to be interviewed to see if similar results can be attained when interviewing teachers of different age, gender, or ethnicity who had success teaching students at disadvantage.

Follow up studies may want to investigate successful strategies the students themselves see as effective. Distributing a survey or providing interview questions for the students may provide more data.

Parent involvement is essential for students at disadvantage to be more successful. Further studies may want to examine the family and school relationships as the students continue their school life.

An inquiry into the administrator's role in the lives of students at disadvantage upon entering junior and senior high could be compared to elementary school. As well as what changes occur between parents and the school when the students enter junior and senior high.

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Appendix A

Letter for Potential Participants

Appendix A

Letter to Invite Potential Participants

Dear _____,

My name is Joan McGrath and I am a student in the Research Masters of Arts in Literacy program at Mount Saint Vincent University. My thesis is an investigation into how teachers provide a rich curriculum for students at disadvantage, particularly those disadvantaged by poverty and what supports and / or challenges they deem necessary in order for them to sustain some degree of success.

You are known in the education community for your experience, dedication, and understanding of the issues of poverty and education. Your reputation is not only known to colleagues, but to critical academic educators as well.

My personal life and experience brings my own determination to help students at disadvantage. It is my hope that the continual pattern that prevents students at disadvantage from being successful will be broken.

It is my goal to have taped interviews with three experienced elementary teachers working with students at disadvantage. I am inviting you to participate in this research.

I will be contacting you within the next week to ask if you are willing to participate in this research. It will require approximately two hours on your part. If at any time you feel you wish to withdraw your participation, you may do so. Please feel free to contact me at 434-1842 if you have any questions or concerns.

Please read the following consent form carefully and seek clarification on any points. Your signature will indicate your informed consent to participate based on the terms as outlined.

If you have questions about how this study is being conducted, you may contact Dr. Anthony Davis, Chair of the University Research Ethics Board (UREB) who is not directly involved with this study c/o MSVU Research and International Office, via e-mail at research@msvu.ca or telephone (902) 457-6296.

Sincerely,

Joan McGrath

Appendix B

Consent Form for Participants

Appendix B

Consent to Participate Form

I agree to participate in a research study about *Teaching Students at Disadvantage: Successful Strategies Implemented by Teachers in the Classroom*, being conducted by Joan McGrath, a master's graduate student in Research Masters of Arts in Literacy at Mount Saint Vincent University.

As a participant in this research I have been informed that I have particular personal rights, outlined here:

1. I understand that I have the right to confidentiality with regards to interviews.
2. Respecting confidentiality, I understand that my name will not appear anywhere in relation to the research unless I choose to be acknowledged. A pseudonym will be used instead.
3. I have the right to withdraw from this study at any time and for any reason. I do not have to share my reason(s) with the researcher.
4. I have the right to refuse to answer any of the questions asked of me for any reason. I do not have to share my reason(s) with the researcher.
5. I am aware that participation in the study is voluntary.
6. I am aware that the two taped interviews will be 60 minutes each.
7. I am aware that the individual interviews will be taped. I have been informed that the tapes will be returned to me if I want them; otherwise they will be destroyed after data analysis has been completed.
8. I have the right to view, verify, and comment on my transcript, and have a summary of the results.
9. I am aware that I have the right to contact Dr. Jane Baskwill, thesis supervisor at 457-6189 or e-mail her at jane.baskwill@msvu.ca to inquire about the student or study.
10. I will receive a copy of this Consent Form.
11. I consent to participate in interviews: YES ☐ NO ☐

Signature of Participant: _____ Date: _____

Name of Participant, printed: _____

Signature of Researcher: _____ Date: _____

Appendix C

Example of an Instructional Model

Appendix C

Example of an instructional model by Knapp, Means, and Chelemer (1991, p.8)

Exhibit 1.1, Principles of Cognitive Approaches to Teaching Advanced Skills to Disadvantaged Students Taking a New Attitude toward Disadvantaged Learners

- Appreciate intellectual accomplishments all young learners bring to school
- Emphasize building on strengths rather than just remediation deficits
- Learn about children's cultures to avoid mistaking differences for deficits

Reshaping the Curriculum

- Focus on complex, meaningful problems
- Embed instruction on basic skills in context of more global tasks
- Make connections with students' out- of- school experience and culture

Applying New Instructional Strategies

- Model powerful thinking strategies
- Encourage multiple approaches
- Provide scaffolding to enable students to accomplish complex tasks
- Make dialogue central medium for teaching and learning

Appendix D

Research Questions

Appendix D

Research Questions

- 1. How would you identify a student at disadvantage in your classroom?**
 - 2. Describe how your teaching strategies can make learning successful for students at disadvantage?**
 - 3. What concerns do you have for students at disadvantage in your classroom?**
 - 4. How do you measure their success?**
 - 5. Describe your experiences in using successful teaching strategies?**
 - 6. Describe any challenges you face while working with students at disadvantage on a daily basis?**
 - 7. What do you see as the parent's role in their child's learning?**
 - 8. What do you see as the role of an Administrator in helping teachers work with students at disadvantage?**
- How have / have not Administrators supported you while working with students at disadvantage?**

Appendix E

Grade Five Poetry Lesson

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A Grade Five Poetry Lesson

Composition of class: all types of learners from various backgrounds, ranging from students at disadvantage to high academic effective learners. This is a whole day lesson.

1. Take a very high level piece of descriptive writing and pull out all the adjectives based on motion, color, and shape words. Analyze this piece of writing for this vocabulary and chart the vocabulary. There could be forty words on the board.
2. Have students look at this vocabulary and tell what they see. For example, one student said it reminded her of a dancer. Okay you are going to show me a dancer.
3. Then the student has to show a dancer. The student writes as a descriptive paragraph like a free write and think with their pencil, write down everything you feel, see, using the provided vocabulary and any other words you need to describe a dancer but do not use the word dancer.
4. Some of the students will piggyback off others and say I see a dancer too. That's okay as they don't all have to come up with something that is different.

5. After they say they are done I conference with them individually, and they read to me what they wrote and I never take writing from students' hands because they own it. I may look over their shoulder if I have permission. While conferencing with students, I ask questions rather than make suggestions. I ask questions such as; what kind of a dress, show me the dress, describe that, how do the feet move, what sound does that make, getting them to make use of their senses, to add more words, put more in, describe more, and as I listen I ask them to add more. What was that like, what did it sound like, what did it feel like? This can make students feel a bit out of their comfort zone.

6. I then display a paragraph I have completed to demonstrate getting rid of little words but leaving the descriptive phrases. The descriptive phrases they keep must have meaning and create a picture.

7. Next I show how to number the phrases in the order they are to appear in the poem. Then write out the phrases in a free style poem. During this process decisions are made as to what phrases or words I may repeat, where I may need more description, how can I flip words around to use less words, or maybe add 'ing' to words which might eliminate other little words.

8. The students work on their piece of poetry after the demonstration to tidy up their work. The final edit is completed and poems are typed, mounted, and put on display. They end up with an image piece, creating or writing about a dancer that shows what

a dancer is like, this is more action based rather than telling something. It is a free style piece of poetry.

Appendix F

Strategy for Teaching Reading

Appendix F**Strategy for Teaching Reading**

To teach reciprocal reading with the grade five classes, a novel was chosen and the teacher would work with the whole class at first. The teacher would read the first chapter and take the students through the process. The class took turns as the teacher reads someone summarizes for the whole group and someone clarifies. The first two chapters give the introduction, the background and the characters. Then the class goes into groups and one reads, one summarizes, and one clarifies, and then change roles. They track their own notes but decide upon them as a group. They track which task each person in the group has completed. They go through the whole novel in this manner.

It is a slow process but the teacher monitors groups and facilitates with any problems. If there is a common problem the teacher stops and does a mini-lesson on that skill for example how to write a good response using jot notes. This may take till Christmas as you move slowly through the strategies. Then you may give another novel or one does a literature circle and has the students do the same thing in a group.

Students are always reading aloud so teacher can monitor reading progress of a student and teach reading strategies and teach the group how to support readers as well. At first it is a slow process but once students are familiar with the strategies they tend to work faster as the year progresses. Students at disadvantage may take longer to be able to do it independently. If these strategies are started in the lower grades

with the teacher facilitating all the time and using the language such as clarify, predict, and summarize then the front end loading is well under way. Basically it is taking what good readers do and breaking it down into explicit steps and then behaving like a good reader.

The idea being that these strategies will become internalized as there are with a good reader. It is slow methodical work at the front but the return is when the students are up and running with explicit hands on skills. The whole reading process is about cooperative learning. The teacher has an opportunity to really track where the students are within their skills or outcomes.

Appendix G

A Story about a Teacher

Appendix G

I think the following story tells why we need to teach students and not subjects. It also portrays why we should get to know our students before we pass judgment or draw conclusions. I found it on the web but it was also an email sent to me. It is a story about an elementary teacher. Her name was Mrs. Thompson.

As she stood in front of her fifth grade class on the very first day of school, she told the children an untruth. Like most teachers she looked at her students and said that she loved them all the same. However, that was impossible, because there in the front row, slumped in his seat, was a little boy named Teddy Stoddard.

Mrs. Thompson had watched Teddy the year before and noticed that he did not play well with the other children, that his clothes were messy and that he constantly needed a bath. In addition, Teddy could be unpleasant. It got to the point where Mrs. Thompson would actually take delight in marking his papers with a broad red pen, making bold X's and then putting a big "F" at the top of his papers.

At the school where Mrs. Thompson taught, she was required to review each child's past records and she put Teddy's off until last. However, when she reviewed his file, she was in for a surprise. Teddy's first grade teacher wrote, "Teddy is a bright child with a ready laugh. He does his work neatly and has good manners...he is a joy to be around."

His second grade teacher wrote, "Teddy is an excellent student, well liked by his classmates, but he is troubled because his mother has a terminal illness and life at home must be a struggle."

His third grade teacher wrote, "His mother's death has been hard on him. He tries to do his best, but his father doesn't show much interest and his home life will soon affect him if some steps aren't taken."

Teddy's fourth grade teacher wrote, "Teddy is withdrawn and doesn't show much interest in school. He doesn't have many friends and he sometimes sleeps in class." By now Mrs. Thompson realized the problem and she was ashamed of herself. She felt even worse when her students brought her Christmas presents, wrapped in beautiful ribbons and bright paper, except for Teddy's. His present was clumsily wrapped in the heavy, brown paper that he got from a grocery bag.

Mrs. Thompson took pains to open it in the middle of the other presents. Some of the children laughed when she opened it. A bracelet with some of the stones missing and a bottle that was one-quarter full of perfume but she stifled the children's laughter when she exclaimed how pretty the bracelet was, putting it on, and dabbing some of the perfume on her wrist.

Teddy Stoddard stayed after school that day just long enough to say, "Mrs. Thompson, today you smelled just like my Mom used to." After the children left, she cried for at least an hour.

On that very day, she quit teaching reading, writing and arithmetic, and instead, she began to teach children. Mrs. Thompson paid particular attention to Teddy. As she worked with him, his mind seemed to come alive. The more she encouraged him, the faster he responded. By the end of the year, Teddy had become one of the smartest children in the class and, despite her lie that she would love all the children the same, Teddy became one of her "teacher's pets."

A year later, she found a note under her door, from Teddy, telling her that she was still the best teacher he ever had in his whole life. Six years went by before she got another note from Teddy. He then wrote that he had finished high school, third in the class, and she was still the best teacher he ever had in his whole life.

Four years after that, she got another letter, saying that while things had been tough at times, he'd stayed in school, had stuck with it, and would soon graduate from college with the highest of honors. He assured Mrs. Thompson that she was still the best and his favorite teacher he had ever had in his whole life.

Then four more years passed and yet another letter came. This time he explained that after he got his bachelor's degree, he decided to go a little further. The letter

explained that she was still the best and favorite teacher he ever had. But now his name was a little longer... the letter was signed, Theodore F. Stoddard, MD.

The story does not end there. You see, there was yet another letter that spring. Teddy said he had met this girl and was going to be married. He explained that his father had died a couple of years ago and he was wondering if Mrs. Thompson might agree to sit at the wedding in the place that was usually reserved for the mother of the groom.

Of course, Mrs. Thompson did. And guess what? She wore that bracelet, the one with several rhinestones missing. Moreover, she made sure she was wearing the perfume that Teddy remembered his mother wearing on their last Christmas together.

They hugged each other, and Dr. Stoddard whispered in Mrs. Thompson's ear, "Thank you Mrs. Thompson for believing in me. Thank you so much for making me feel important and showing me that I could make a difference." Mrs. Thompson, with tears in her eyes, whispered back. She said, "Teddy, you have it all wrong. You were the one who taught me that I could make a difference. I didn't know how to teach until I met you."