

Thesis :

THE APPLE LEGACY:

INTERPRETIVE STUDY OF LONG TERM INFLUENCES OF PARENT

PARTICIPATION ON APPLE PROGRAM STUDENTS

(Spine title: Long Term Influences of Parent Participation in APPLE)

(Thesis format: Monograph)

by

Bernie Lawrence

Graduate Program in Education

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Education

The School of Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies

The University of Western Ontario

London, Ontario, Canada

© Bernie Lawrence 2009

THE UNIVERSITY OF WESTERN ONTARIO

THE SCHOOL OF GRADUATE AND POSTDOCTORAL STUDIES

CERTIFICATE OF EXAMINATION

Supervisor

Examiners

Dr. Derek Allison

Dr. Carol Beynon

Supervisory Committee

Dr. Brian Way

Dr. Allen Pearson

Dr. Mary Lou Vernon

The thesis by

Bernie William LAWRENCE

entitled

The APPLE Legacy:

**Interpretive Study of Long Term Influences of
Parent Participation on APPLE Program Students**

is accepted in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of
Master of Education

Date _____

Dr. Fred Ellett, Chair

Thesis Examination Board

ABSTRACT

This research examines the long term influences of parent involvement on the lives of students who were members of the Alternative Parent Participating London Elementary (A.P.P.L.E.) Program, a parent participating program in London, Ontario.

Drawing on Coleman's theory of social capital, the paper contends that both the founding of the program and its ongoing growth and success is based on the strength of the social capital that is generated by the parent body. Using the key informant approach to gathering data, the researcher conducted 29 interviews with former students and parents from the program, with student ages ranging from 14-27. Analysis of the interview transcripts led the researcher to conclude that a high level of parent contact in the students' years in A.P.P.L.E. was regarded by them as fostering a positive attitude towards learning, a greater sense of personal learning styles and a greater level of comfort and confidence with adults through the students' adolescent years.

KEYWORDS

parent involvement, parent participation, A.P.P.L.E., Coleman, key informant, social capital, learning style, Epstein, Cotton

DEDICATION

I wish to dedicate this project to Katie, my muse and sounding board, my friend and cheerleader, throughout not only this research project but also my APPLE teaching days. She is a truly independent thinker, a passionate teacher and a wise woman. And my long-suffering wife of 25 years!

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I wish to acknowledge the guidance and inspiration offered by Professor Derek Allison and to express appreciation to Derek's wife, Patsy, and her research partner, Mary Lou Vernon, whose initial recordings of the early years of APPLE safeguarded this history from being lost. Thanks also to the timely and collegial support provided by Professor Brian Way.

In addition, I would like to express my gratitude to the members of the APPLE Executive, especially Melissa Somerton and Erin Harrison, for their assistance and support in making contact with former and current members of APPLE.

And lastly, my heart goes out to the many APPLE students and parents who have enriched my life, both professionally and personally. It has been a blessing and a

privilege to work with you.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

CERTIFICATE OF EXAMINATION	ii
ABSTRACT	iii
DEDICATION	iv
....	
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS	v
TABLE OF CONTENTS	vi
LIST OF TABLES	vii
LIST OF APPENDICES	viii
CHAPTER ONE - INTRODUCTION	1
Research Question and Rationale	2
Unique Qualities of APPLE	12
Chapter Outlines	23
Summary	25
CHAPTER TWO - LITERATURE REVIEW	27
Cooperative Education and Social Capital	28
Research on the Impact of Parent Involvement on Student Academic Success - a Review	32
Models of Parent Involvement	43
Summary	52
CHAPTER THREE - METHOD	55

.....	57
Key Informant Approach	
.....	64
Student and Parent Interview Questions	
.....	75
Conclusion	
.....	
CHAPTER FOUR - FINDINGS	77
.....	
Introduction to the Research	77
.....	
Student and Parent Responses - a Summary	81
.....	
Emergent Themes	10
.....	2
Conclusion	11
.....	6
CHAPTER FIVE - CONCLUSIONS	11
.....	9
Summary of Findings	12
.....	2
Implications for Research	12
.....	9
Implications for Theory	13
.....	4
Implications for Practice	14
.....	0
Summary and Concluding Remarks	14
.....	9
REFERENCES	15
.....	1
CURRICULUM VITAE	15
.....	9

LIST OF TABLES

Table	Description	Page
1-1	Database of alternative schools in Ontario DSBs	9
2-1	Parent roles and responsibilities	44
2-2	Epstein's model of types of parental involvement	47
2-3	Forms of community and home involvement recognized by Epstein (1996)	50
2-4	Expanded model of school, classroom and home involvement	51
3-1	Student and parent interview questions	64
4-1	Interviewee profiles	79
4-2	Student perceptions of parent/child relationships	91

LIST OF APPENDICES

Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION

The Alternative Parent Participating London Elementary (APPLE) program in London, Ontario opened its doors in 1985 and, after several years of growth, began graduating students from Grade 6 in June 1993. Parents who enrol their child(ren) in the APPLE Program do so on the understanding they will volunteer to participate in the education of not only their own child(ren), but in that of the entire APPLE student body. This currently (2008) consists of approximately 140 students in six classrooms, from Grades JK to Grade 6, including several split or multi-age classrooms.

APPLE parents participate in the daily functioning of the classroom in a wide range of activities, such as reading stories with individual students, running a math centre for a small group of students, and helping students and teachers in many ways. They organize special guest visitors and speakers, from within the program and without, plan field trips and provide transportation for the students. APPLE students, if they participate in the program in its entirety, will have experienced eight years of these interactive activities with a large number of adults by the time they leave the program at the end of Grade 6. Although parent involvement is a concept that has gained wide favour over recent decades, the level of active involvement of APPLE parents appears

exceptional, even among alternative schools.

My interest in the APPLE program, and parent involvement in education, began in September 1989 when I was hired to teach the Grade 3/4 class, and continues to this day, although I stopped teaching in APPLE in 2002. Over the thirteen years, APPLE grew to Grade 6, by 1993, with 13 students graduating from the program that year and similar numbers over the ensuing years. I had the opportunity to work closely with a group of parents who were devoted to enriching the classroom lives of their children as described above. I observed the behaviour of these APPLE students around the schoolyard, with other adults, with their peers in the classroom and compared this informally to the behaviour of their non-APPLE peers. These experiences caused me to wonder about longer term influences of the APPLE program on the types of learners into which these young students would evolve. Having left APPLE in 2002, I determined that sufficient time had elapsed to provide a healthy buffer from my personal involvement and began to develop this specific research project.

RESEARCH QUESTION AND RATIONALE

How do APPLE graduates view their experiences in the APPLE Program and the effects of those experiences on their subsequent education and life? Do they see a connection between the types of learning events and daily interactions with adults which APPLE students experience in their first eight years of school and their subsequent attitudes towards learning and relationships with adults?

I sought to answer these questions by interviewing 18 APPLE graduates, nine

who were still enrolled in grades 7 – 12 and nine who had completed grade 12 and were either in the work force or pursuing further education. To assist in interpreting what the graduates reported, I also interviewed 11 parents, all of whom had been (some still were) active parent participants.

As reviewed in greater detail in Chapter 2, there is a rich body of research investigating effects of parent involvement on the academic success of students. Major contributors such as Epstein (1995), Cotton and Wikelund (2001), and Henderson (1994) concur with the not-surprising finding that students' academic success typically improves when parents are involved in their education. This appears to be a general and widespread effect supported by studies in low income school districts (Armor, et. al. 1976), in urban areas (Walberg, Bole, & Waxman, 1980), on a state-wide scope (Simmons-Morton & Crump, 2003), in Canada (Ertl, 1999), and for older middle school students as well as those in lower grades (Ho Sui-Chu & Willms, 1996).

This study differs from--yet complements and extends--earlier work in at least two significant ways:

1. The focus of earlier research has been largely, though not exclusively, on the short-term academic benefits generated by parent involvement. This study sought to examine the longer-term influences of parent engagement from the perspective of the students themselves. As such the interviews were designed to probe students' attitudes towards education, their relationships with their parents and with other adults, and perceived differences between themselves and their peers in these specific contexts.

2. The level of parent involvement in APPLE differs markedly in both quality and quantity from that studied by earlier researchers. While previous studies have investigated effects of parents reading at home with young children in the evenings, or setting aside homework time for their middle school-aged children or faithfully attending parent/teacher conferences, the level of parent participation in APPLE is far more substantial and sustained.

To better appreciate the unique nature of APPLE, the following sections present a history of its genesis and operation, culminating with a comparison between APPLE and similar alternate schools. The chapter then concludes with an overview of the balance of the thesis.

The APPLE Program: Its origins and current status

As noted in the Allison and Beaujot's (1989) review of APPLE's first years of operation, the school did not "come out of nowhere" (p. 1). The co-operative principle at the heart of the program was firmly grounded in the experiences of the founding families, "families who had spent years as members of co-operative preschool programs" (p. 1). The California council of Parent Participation Nursery Schools (2004), defines such programs as

a democratic organization where each family shares in the planning and operation of the school. Parents participate in the program on a rotating basis, serving as assistants to a professional nursery school teacher and staff. The efforts of parents and their direct involvement during the

school day make parent participation nursery schools a unique educational endeavour. (¶10)

Co-operative preschool and day care programs began as informal arrangements among parents, but have developed into widespread and popular organizations. The Organization for Parent Participation in Childcare and Education, Ontario (2007), for example, currently lists over 170 associated member daycares on its website.

As outlined in the Allison and Vernon (1986) review, "in the spring of 1982, a group of London parents interested in extending parent participation into the elementary school was formed by Mary and Peter White" (p. 7).

When the group first brought its proposal before the London Board of Education, concerns over parent involvement in selecting the teacher led to delays in getting the APPLE program off the ground. The group persevered, and in September 1985 the first APPLE primary grades classroom, a multi-grade group of 24 children led by teacher Penny Hanford, opened.

The founding families shared a number of pedagogical beliefs about how children learn and thus the kind of learning environment they hoped to co-create with their child's teacher. The Allison and Vernon (1986) review asked

APPLE parents to identify ways in which they contributed to classroom activities. Responses included working with groups or individual children in the classroom, preparing activities related to parents' particular talents or interests such as singing, playing piano, cooking and sewing, assisting with

general supervision at recess and lunch, taking children to the library and preparing teaching materials (p. 27). Drawing on their observations and parent interviews, Allison and Vernon went on to identify and discuss structural, programmatic and environmental differences between the original APPLE concept and the standard classroom. Structural differences included ways in which parents were involved in all aspects of the program and its operation as reviewed above, the strong links between the home and the program, and ways in which parents provided support for one another (p. 33). Program differences centred on an open concept approach affording greater freedom to students than would typically be the case in a regular classroom, the use of whole language techniques, and the mixed grade levels taught in the single class, although this last feature was a temporary necessity. In their final environmental category, the researchers identified the following characteristics

which set APPLE apart from regular classrooms:

- 1) a child-centred environment
- 2) with more adults
- 3) a smaller class size
- 4) more one-on-one attention
- 5) aimed at fostering self-confidence and self-discipline
- 6) in a non-competitive atmosphere

7) with a non-destructive approach to discipline

8) and high quality teaching. (p. 32-36)

Many of the descriptive terms and phrases used in this 1986 document refer to somewhat intangible qualities. Terms such as "open concept," "non-competitive," "whole language" and "child-centred" found such wide and often indiscriminate use through the 1990's as to become almost meaningless. But, as described by Allison and Vernon (1986) in their original analysis, the early APPLE parents frequently relied on such terms when describing what attracted them to the program (p.35). When I was teaching in the APPLE program during 1989-2002, attempts were made to define these terms more clearly with a view to developing a shared, agreed-upon understanding of the essence of the APPLE classroom environment. Even so, the 2005 version of the *APPLE Handbook* distributed to all parents contains none of these definitions, the distinctiveness of the program being described primarily in terms of child-centred learning.

By 1989 APPLE consisted of three classrooms from JK through Grade 4, with a total enrolment of less than 60 students. With leadership provided by determined parents, an ongoing publicity campaign and consistent political lobbying at the board level, APPLE grew to include a multi-grade 4/5/6 class in 1993, with a total enrollment surpassing 100 students. Because APPLE was housed in Brick Street Public School, a JK-6 facility, expanding the program to Grade 8 was problematic. From 1993 to the present, APPLE has produced approximately 10-15 graduating students each year, who returned to their home schools for Grade 7. The program currently consists of six JK

through Grade 6 classrooms, with an enrolment of around 140 to 150 students. Because Brick Street Public School is slated to be closed because of declining enrolment of its neighbourhood population, the fate of the APPLE program remains less than secure.

APPLE is philosophically similar to several Ontario alternative schools

APPLE was established as an alternative school operated by the London Board of Education and continues to operate as such within the successor Thames Valley District School Board. The idea of alternative schools within the public education system was not new in the 1980s, although none existed in the London Board at that time. Allison and Beaujot (1989) observed that “early experiences in parent initiated, parent participating schools in the form of the free schools of the 1960s were particularly unstable and short-lived. It has been reported that the average life of a free school was eighteen months” (p. 5). The longevity of APPLE may thus be quite remarkable, but it appears other alternative schools have been operating for similar periods of time, although none appears as distinctive as APPLE.

Allison and Beaujot (1989) provided a solid working definition to identify the distinguishing features of alternative schools. These include the following:

- a child-centred curriculum that is experiential and integrated
- the use of the community as an extension of the classroom
 - educational enrichment
- an open-door policy for parents

- a governance structure that permits cooperative decision-making. (p. 3)

I began a search of Canadian school board web-sites to identify alternative schools operating within the public school system that matched these characteristics. The Edmonton Public School Board [EPSB] has taken an active role in supporting the development of alternative schools, with programs ranging from aboriginal studies, hockey, arts education, Christian and other religious schools and a number of languages. On its web-site, the EPSB (2008) states that “our diverse programs of study support our mission statement by giving parents and students different paths to achieve academic and personal success. Choice is the foundation of our district's approach to education” (¶1).

Yet despite the wide range of alternative schools in the Edmonton system, the inventory on the Board's website does not appear to include a parent participating school similar to APPLE. Looking closer to home, I conducted a search of Ontario District School Board web-sites and identified several alternative schools, similar in philosophy to APPLE, all of which are located in either Toronto or Ottawa. Table 1-1 provides a summary comparison of these schools based on an analysis of their websites.

The term, identifying characteristics, refers to catch-phrases or terminology taken directly from the web-sites of each of these schools, which were used to identify those schools whose educational philosophies appear comparable to those of APPLE.

Table 1-1

Alternative schools in Ontario District Schools Boards

School	Identifying characteristics	Similar to APPLE	History	Student Enrolment
Ottawa/Carlton District School Board				
Churchill	informal, play-based, child-centred, activity-oriented, hands-on, and experiential. parent participation, self-directed learning	Yes	1984	8 classes
Grant	a co-operative/non-competitive environment; multi-grade groupings; pro-active parent involvement; student self-evaluation and anecdotal reporting	Yes	1991	170
Summit Alternative	Self-directed learning; cooperative approach, high level of parent involvement;	Yes		
Lady Evelyn Alternative	no web-site available			
Riverview Alternative	no web-site available			
Manor Park	no web-site available			
Toronto District School Board				
A.L.P.H.A.	un-graded, individualized programming, multi-age grouping, non-competitive learning, creative problem-solving techniques, critical thinking skills for today's world, parent participation	Yes	Oldest in Toronto	80
Avondale	Multi-age groupings, out-of-classroom experiences, global education, parent involvement, critical thinking, problem solving	Yes	27 years	126
Beaches	Family involvement, experiential learning, cooperative learning, critical thinking	Yes	Founded in 1976	100
Downtown Alternative	Parent involvement, conflict resolution, Multi-age groupings, hands-on math and science, whole language, and collaborative and group learning,	Yes	20 years	88
High Park Alternative (JK-6)	multi-age, community-based curriculum, non-competitive, arts program	Yes	1981	120
Mountview Alternative (JK-6)	family-centred, multi-age, cooperative learning, parent involvement,	Yes	1981	145
<p>Most of these alternative schools advocate a belief in child-centred learning. In</p>				

its Mission Statement (2004), the Ottawa-based Churchill Alternative School, for example, promises to “provide ... a language- and play-based, child-centred, experiential approach to learning” (¶1). Similarly, a Toronto alternative school with a long history is the Downtown Alternative School [DAS], established 1986, just one year after APPLE. On its web-site, the DAS (2007) identifies its core beliefs as follows: “we welcome new ideas, creative approaches and innovative teaching methods that stretch students' imaginations. Multi-age groupings, hands-on math and science, whole language, and collaborative and group learning are integral to DAS's educational approach” (¶2). In addition, “a strong emphasis is placed on the child-centred approach, where each child's emotional, social, intellectual, and physical development serves as a starting point” (¶1).

Likewise, the current *APPLE Handbook* (2005) not only states the school's commitment to child-centred learning but also provides the following rationale: “child-centred learning experiences reflect the strengths, needs, and interests of the group and of individual children, and provide each child with a sense of competence and success” (p. 5).

Another shared feature of most of these alternative schools is that of multi-age groupings. A Toronto (TDSB) alternative school, Avondale Elementary Alternative School, states on its web-site (2006) that “we embrace multi-age, multiple-grade classes,” explaining that “we believe that the continuum of human development must constitute the foundation of program development” (¶1). And in a brief introduction on its TDSB web-page, Mountview Alternative School (2006) explains that “the focus of

Mountview Alternative is to promote its mission in a small school, family-centered environment, with multi-age groupings” (¶1).

Toronto's ALPHA school claims to be the oldest alternative school operating in Toronto today. On its web-site, ALPHA (2008) states that the program emphasizes "individualized programming, multi-age grouping, non-competitive learning, creative problem-solving techniques, critical thinking skills for today's world" (¶1).

In its more muted support of multi-age groupings, the *APPLE Handbook* endorses the belief that “collaborative groupings within and among classes and age groups foster the skills of leadership and shared responsibility” (p. 5).

Not only do many of these alternative schools share common beliefs about education and learning, their structures of governance are also similar. When examining the governance of alternative schools, Allison and Beaujot (1989) observed that these schools characteristically embody a participatory attitude towards decision-making. They wrote that "the distinguishing characteristic of elementary parent participating alternatives is community governance and a sense of school ownership among students, parents and teachers" (p. 12). On their websites, the other currently operating alternative schools discussed above appear to embrace this belief.

The DAS statement of beliefs declares "we are a democratic school and practice democratic decision-making at all levels – in the classroom, among teachers and administrative staff members, and on the joint parent-staff committees that guide the school's functioning" (¶1). The ALPHA web-site describes a number of decision

making procedures – children's councils, all-school meetings, community consensus – that are commonly used. Indeed, the writers claim "it is the working together of parents, students and staff that makes ALPHA unique" (¶1), aligning this school with the description provided earlier by Allison and Beaujot. Likewise, the APPLE's commitment to democratic decision-making is found in its formal structures, as described in the *APPLE Handbook* (2005). These include the democratically-elected positions on the APPLE Executive, and its monthly General Meetings, where members of the parent body "come together and discuss issues that affect the APPLE experience ...and our common interests and goals" (p. 11).

The above review clearly establishes the APPLE program within the collection of alternative schools operating within the public education system in Ontario. It shares such alternative school characteristics as child-centred philosophies, multi-age groupings and democratic governance. That being said, APPLE differs from its companion schools in significant ways, most notably in its emphasis on parent participation. The following section addresses the unique nature of the APPLE program.

UNIQUE QUALITIES OF APPLE

This section begins with an exploration of the differences between APPLE and other alternative schools established around the same time under the broad banner of free schools. While it operates within a public school system, APPLE is also not just a regular public school with a strong parent volunteer program. Furthermore, although APPLE does share some characteristics with a number of alternative schools in Ontario

as discussed above, its defining characteristic – parent participation – has been refined and institutionalized to a degree that it stands alone among these alternatives. The degree to which APPLE parents are actively engaged in the education of not only their own children, but all students within the classroom community, is singular to the program.

APPLE is not a free school.

The goal of establishing schools which offer an alternative to conventional education is not unique to a cooperative nursery school setting. Many alternative schools pre-date both the cooperative daycare movement and the founding of APPLE. Indeed, ‘free schools’ or ‘sixties schools’ as they were sometimes known were a common outgrowth from the questioning of conventional thinking that accompanied the decade of the 1960s and early 1970s. Critical books such as John Holt's *How Children Fail* (1964), Postman and Weingartner's *Teaching as a Subversive Activity* (1969) and Ilich's *Deschooling Society* (1971) offered powerful critiques of the existing school system, promoting alternative philosophies of how a society can and should educate its young. Despite their rather high mortality rate, some free schools survived their tumultuous birthing moments and continue to exist today. The philosophies of these schools, though, and their subsequent pedagogical practices are quite different from that of the APPLE program.

To begin with, free schools tend not to be contained within a school system; rather they exist on its periphery, typically as private schools. A cursory search of free school web-sites in the U.S. and Canada revealed not one of these free schools that existed within the public school system, unlike the alternative programs and schools which this study addresses. Beyond this consideration, though, free schools are more politically charged; they offer a greater challenge to both the values and the operational norms of the public school system. In its Mission Statement, for example, the Brooklyn Free School (2003) identifies its mission as seeking “to minimize ... expectations on students to acquire the accepted wisdom of present day society or meet arbitrary standards, so that each child can become an independent learner and thinker” (§1 Mission). It is clear that these kinds of schools would be reluctant to submit their students to the grade-specific EQAO testing regimes that have been established in Ontario and mandated by the Ministry of Education over the past decade.

This is not to argue that APPLE shares no common philosophical elements with free schools. For example, further into its mission statement, the Brooklyn Free School subscribes to the belief that “all children are natural learners,” a belief shared by APPLE. In the *APPLE Handbook* (2005), this is expressed in the statement, "a child's natural curiosity and inclination to learn ... must be supported" (p. 5).

The Brooklyn Free School mission statement, though, goes on to add that “they [the children] are fully supported to pursue any interest they have, in the manner they choose, at their own pace, and for as long as they want to” (§1 Mission). By contrast, in Ontario, all schools and their teachers are compelled to follow to a greater or lesser

degree a curriculum prescribed by the Ministry of Education. The *APPLE Handbook* (2005) clearly acknowledges that “the education policies of the Province of Ontario and the Thames Valley District School Board apply equally to APPLE as they do to other schools in London” (p. 3) and that, in addition, “our teachers follow the curriculum as mandated by the Ministry of Education” (p. 3). This formal acceptance of a prescribed curriculum, however reluctant, is common to all Ontario alternative schools which function within the public school system.

The APPLE program, therefore, although it continues to exist as an alternative to the traditional classroom, does not share the same philosophical or pedagogical underpinnings of the free school movement of the sixties. The defining characteristic of APPLE, which is parent participation, does not necessarily require its exclusion from the public school system.

APPLE is not a traditional school program with a volunteer component.

Parent involvement in education, while perhaps a somewhat uncommon idea in the years preceding the founding of APPLE, has gained considerable cache over the years. Indeed, it has become a matter of public policy to laud the merits of parent involvement. Under the headline, "McGuinty Government Strengthens Parent Involvement in Public Education," a Government of Ontario's Ministry of Education (2003) web-site article declared, "Our government believes that parents should have a direct influence on the public education of their children... Whether it's with a voice at the table or a resource at the school, the new board and the grants will help support parent involvement" (¶1).

This growing phenomenon of acknowledging the value that parents can add to the health of the education system is fairly recent. In the early childhood experiences of this author, for instance, in the 1960s and early 1970s, it was rare indeed to see parents in the hallways of the school, unless of course their children were causing problems.

School was deemed to be the realm of the professional school teacher; by contrast, amateurs such as parents were best advised to leave the schooling of their children up to the school. This tacit acceptance of the wisdom of the institutional school system was about to undergo a dramatic change though, as a growing number of voices began to challenge the status quo. Critics of the traditional school system included Paolo Friere (1968), the Brazilian educationist, whose most well-known work *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* criticized the static, non-transformative nature of the education system. He promoted the concept of "problem-posing education, [which] bases itself on creativity and stimulates true reflection and action upon reality, thereby responding to the vocation of persons as beings only when engaged in inquiry and creative transformation" (p. 24).

Other critics such as John Holt argued for the entire abandonment of the education system, at least its institutionalized forms. In an interview with a writer for the magazine, *Mothering* (1980), Holt explained his belief that "the human animal is a learning animal; we like to learn; we need to learn; we are good at it; we don't need to be shown how or made to do it. What kills the processes are the people interfering with it or trying to regulate it or control it" (¶1)

The public mood was ripe for exploring alternatives to traditional education, becoming increasingly distrustful of the education system. One of the many forms this

took was an increased involvement of parents in the education of their children. Parents were less willing to leave their child's education in the hands of the expert and began to take a more active role, both at home and in the school community. It was not long before researchers began to study the effects of this growing involvement of parents. An examination of the research into the academic benefits attributable to parent involvement is provided in greater detail in Chapter 2. At this juncture, it is sufficient to observe that there is a substantial body of research supporting the benefits of parent involvement.

One might reasonably expect, then, that school structures would be making changes to encourage and support parent involvement. Indeed, Ho and Willms (1996) observed that “the prevailing perception among educational researchers is that successful schools establish practices that foster greater communication with parents, encourage parents to assist children at home with their schoolwork and recruit parents to work as volunteers or participate in school governance” (p. 137). Unfortunately, they go on to conclude that “our findings suggest that such schools are uncommon” (p. 137).

The Ontario Ministry of Education (MOE) has joined the chorus of promoters of parent involvement in education. “Research shows that children do better in school when their parents play an active role in their education” (¶16) is the introduction to a recent MOE (2008) publication, in a chapter entitled “How Can I Get Involved?” The chapter goes on to outline tips on how parents can assist their child at home in the various disciplines of reading, writing, math and homework. However, when the issue of parent participation is explored, the possibilities are less inclusive. The engagement

of a parent is limited to involvement in the political process at the school, such as joining a parent council: “Publicly funded education means . . . public participation: the community's commitment to the next generation” (¶1). There is extensive information on the formation of a new Parent Involvement Advisory Board, but precious little guidance for parents who might choose to participate as a partner in the classroom!

It is tempting to ask, given the convincing evidence of the positive effects of parent involvement, why parents are not being accommodated in the classroom on a regular basis in most schools. Indeed, at an institutional level, there is little evidence of resources being directed toward changing this pattern, neither through faculties of education nor school board initiatives. In its quarterly newsletter, the Northwest Regional Education Laboratory (1997) provided a summary of the barriers to parent engagement in education:

Many schools across the nation pay lip service to family involvement or point to an annual open house, semi-annual parent-teacher conferences, athletic events, and other minimal offerings as their efforts to involve families. Still other schools encourage families to get involved in their kids' schooling, but offer few avenues for participation, few guidelines for parents to follow, and few tips to the myriad ways families and communities can be involved. And teachers, whose schools of education paid little attention to family involvement, have few skills to know how to effectively engage the parents who want to volunteer in the classroom or those who want to play a more active role from their home. (¶1)

Coleman (1991) offered insight into why educators and school board policy-makers shy away from actively engaging parents in the daily delivery of education. He argued that the empowering of parents, which occurs as parent groups become involved in the educational process, can be somewhat of a Pandora's Box for the education system: "Social capital among parents, once created, will not always reinforce school goals, nor should it. A strong body of parents is a force in the community that will often act in accord with the school – but as an agent for the children of the community, it also acts as a check on the actions of the school" (p. 2). Indeed, a politically-active parent group, with an active engagement in the daily workings of a school, can raise questions about pedagogy, about teacher competence and about resource allocation. Additionally, when operating inappropriately, it can also conduct unethical or unprofessional actions, in terms of human relations or issues of confidentiality, creating even greater inconvenience for administrators.

Coleman went on to observe that keeping parents away from the school makes administration easier. Having an active parent group "gives the school more strength but it makes administration harder.... It requires more consultation, building consensus over a wider range of people, sharing control, and sharing responsibility" (p. 3). Giles (1998) agreed that "educational bureaucracies typically are more conducive to unilateral, command-and-control leadership than collaborative leadership" (p. 24).

Beyond the institutional barriers to parent participation, there are also the changing demographic barriers. With the growing reality of two-job parents and/or single-parent families, it is not surprising that levels of involvement can become quite

minimal, especially in low income or new immigrant areas, thereby diminishing the opportunities for parent involvement. In their study of attitudes among Ontario administrators serving these communities, Kugler and Flessa (2007) observed that, as researchers, they heard “parents being described as a ‘problem’ that schools need to work around” (p. 17). They added that “low parental involvement was seen as inevitable, rather than as a specific challenge needing concrete planning” (p. 16).

In conclusion, despite convincing research revealing the positive influence parent involvement has in student learning, it is clear that many barriers exist at the institutional level which preclude extensive parent participation in the traditional public school. APPLE persists in the face of these institutional barriers and continues to insist that its parents contribute their time to the day-to-day running of the classroom. In that sense, it is truly an alternative to the traditional public school and, as the following section outlines, is indeed somewhat anomalous in the realm of alternative schools in Ontario.

APPLE is singular in its prescriptive nature of parent participation.

Earlier in this chapter, the position of APPLE as a member of an extended family of Ontario alternative schools, sharing similar educational philosophies, pedagogical practices and democratic governance was established. APPLE is set apart from these alternative schools though in this founding belief contained in its acronym, APPLE, the *Alternative Parent Participating* [author's emphasis] Learning Environment program; that is, the belief in the value and necessity of parents' engagement in the education of their child(ren).

APPLE appears to be the only program within Ontario's alternate schools where parent participation hours, either in the classroom or on committees, are specified and formally tracked. The *APPLE Handbook* outlines that "families who are involved in the APPLE Program agree to a minimum monthly participation of ten hours" (p. 2). It adds that "attendance at your child's Enhancement Meetings is mandatory. It is for the benefit of you and your child that you attend 2/3 of these meetings" (p. 2). Field trips, where transportation is typically provided by parents, are expected to take place at least once a month. Hours of parent participation are tabulated on a monthly basis, with families submitting information to the Vice Chairperson of Participation, as required by the APPLE constitution. And parent attendance at four out of six general meetings, where the entire parent body meets, is mandatory (p. 12-14).

The *APPLE Handbook* states that "parent participation in the classroom has always been the backbone of our program" (p. 3). This high level of parent participation in the daily workings of the classroom has been monitored consistently in recent years, with the number of hours invested by parents and families being summarized and tabulated. In the school year 2001-2002, parents contributed over 10,000 participation hours, an average of 110 hours per family, according to records maintained by the Participation Officer and then-APPLE Chairperson. By 2006, these numbers had dipped somewhat, to a total of 7,140 hours spread across 90 families, or an average of 80 hours per family (personal communication with past APPLE Chairperson, Sophocles Katsademas, September 12, 2008). These numbers represent a substantial enrichment of the APPLE classroom environment, and significant opportunities for close interactions between APPLE parents and students.

It has been noted that a requirement of active participation in the program makes APPLE self-limiting; only parents willing or able to contribute substantial amounts of time enroll their children in the program. In the rather frenzied pace of life that is common even to those living in a small city such as London, this demand tends to limit the APPLE program either to those parents with time they can afford or those for whom the education of their children is an extremely high priority, for which it is worth making special sacrifices or lifestyle limitations.

This topic arose regularly over the course of the parent interviews. But it is worth noting that the parent body of APPLE is not made up primarily of upper middle class families where the income of one parent is sufficient to allow the second one to not be in the work force in order to fulfill the time requirements of the program. This study did not examine the background of APPLE parents, the socioeconomic status of APPLE parents, the percentage of single parent families, nor the educational background of APPLE parents. From personal experience of thirteen years teaching in the program and thereby knowing the background of many APPLE families, I can confidently assert that, from 1989 to 2002, APPLE had a number of single parent families, a high percentage of families where both parents work to provide family income (although often one of the parents had a degree of flexibility in work time) and a small representation from blue collar homes. APPLE does tend to attract parents who place a high value on education and, in that way at least, is self-selecting.

The involvement of parents in alternative schools is hardly limited to the APPLE program. Indeed, each of the schools listed in Table 1-1 identified parent participation as

an important aspect of the school program. In a statement typical of the types of parent participation endorsed by these schools, the ALPHA school web-site claims that “parent involvement is very high at ALPHA . Those who are free during the day are encouraged to spend time in the school, either as a volunteer helper for the teachers or sharing a special skill or interest” (¶ 2).

An alternative school from the Ottawa area, Churchill Alternative School, shares similar values according to its web-page (2007) on school philosophy which declares commitments to innovative approaches to learning and interaction among children of different ages and at different stages of development. The Churchill web pages also stress a family-centered environment which encourages parental and community volunteerism.

Another Ottawa site, Grant Alternative School, outlines its fundamental assumptions about education in a letter of understanding which all parents who intend to join the program are requested to sign. The letter (2007) states the "distinguishing features of [Grant's] alternative philosophy and practices are a co-operative/non-competitive environment, ...multi-grade groupings...and pro-active parent involvement, particularly in developing school philosophy and in helping teachers develop and implement curriculum" (¶3).

Encouraging parental volunteerism, though, is a far cry from the APPLE model, where participation hours are mandated and counted. Parent involvement, while encouraged at these alternative schools, does not represent "the backbone of the program," as the *APPLE Handbook* (2005) states. It is the intensity of this involvement,

the proximity which APPLE parents have to the daily life of the classroom and the level of engagement that APPLE parents have with other members of this community that sets APPLE apart from other alternative schools.

This prescriptive nature of the expectations placed upon APPLE parents may well be a phenomenon based on early experiences of the program. The *APPLE Handbook* (2005) contains a number of policies that have been set in place to address specific issues arising from the integration of parents in the daily functioning of the classroom, including confidentiality, conflict resolution, communication and finances.

Allison and Beaujot (1989) warned that “there is some indication in the Ontario literature on parent participating alternatives which suggests a natural fall-off in participation over time in programs and schools similar to APPLE” (p. 54). Since APPLE continues to maintain a high level of participation, it is reasonable to propose that the practice of mandating and tracking of parent volunteer hours has been effective in bucking this trend. Whatever the cause, the unique qualities of the parent participation levels in APPLE offer a valuable opportunity for research.

CHAPTER OUTLINES

Chapter 2: APPLE in theoretical context: A review of pertinent literature

This chapter begins with an examination of Coleman's (1988) theory of social capital as an explanation for the growth and apparent success of the APPLE Program. This is followed by a review of the extensive research that has already been undertaken on the influence of parent involvement in education. Over three decades of study has

established a consistent connection between parent involvement and a child's academic success. This is followed by an examination of the *nature* of parent involvement, reviewing several models of understanding this involvement, including Epstein's work on the six levels of parent involvement. The chapter concludes with the proposition that the model of involvement exemplified by the APPLE Program has not been studied, perhaps because it is indeed such a rare breed.

Chapter 3: Methodology and data collection

This chapter explains the background and nature of the key informant approach used in this study and justifies its choice as an appropriate method for examining the APPLE program. The procedures used to collect data are described, including the criteria for the selection of interview participants and the specific questions that were posed to tease out what was suspected might be the long term influences of parent involvement.

Chapter 4: Findings

This chapter focuses on the month-long stretch of 29 interviews with former students and parents of the APPLE Program. The responses of each of those interviewed to the seven questions are summarized. Specific responses, using direct quotations, are then presented. Six additional themes, which emerged as common threads through during analysis of the interview transcripts, are also described with reference to both the number of times the topic was initiated by the respondents and the context in which it arose.

Chapter 5: Summary and conclusions

The final chapter outlines the implications of this research for practice, for theory and for research, based on the data collected. Themes that recurred through the interview process are summarized and recommendations made for APPLE Program practices. The utility of both Coleman's theories on social capital and Epstein's parent involvement model are discussed. And the implications for research, specifically the effectiveness of the key informant approach, are examined. The chapter closes with a review of the questions that were originally proposed and examined, and the questions which remain to be answered.

SUMMARY

The following information provides the reader with the following background information essential to understanding the nature of the APPLE program:

1. APPLE was founded by parents who were committed to expanding the successes of cooperative daycare experiences and to participating in the educational experiences of their children.
2. APPLE shares philosophical underpinnings with a number of alternative schools specifically in Ontario, including its emphasis on child-centred learning, multi-age class groupings, parent involvement and democratic governance.

3. The nature of parent participation in APPLE is substantively different from that of other alternative schools. Parent participation in the form of attending meetings, volunteering in the classroom and organizing special events, rather than merely encouraged or supported, is formally mandated and participation hours are tracked and recorded.
4. The overwhelming conclusion is that APPLE is something of an anomaly in education today. Although it was founded in the same era as free schools of the latter half of the twentieth century, it is not a private school with a radically different purpose from the traditional school. While existing within the public education system, it has a clearly articulated set of alternative beliefs that set it apart from the neighbourhood school. And though it is closely aligned philosophically with other alternatives within the system, APPLE is singular in its devotion to parent involvement.

I propose that APPLE offers a unique and rich opportunity for educational research. Given its history and extraordinarily high level of parent participation, it is uniquely positioned to provide insight into how daily experiences with parents in the classroom in the formative years of a child's education might influence the development of an adolescent and young adult. From its first graduating class of 12 students from Grade 6 in 1993, APPLE has gone on to launch over 140 students into the public education system.

The obvious questions and the ones which I sought to address in my research are these: how do APPLE graduates view their experiences in the APPLE Program and the effects

of those experiences on their subsequent education and life? Do they see a connection between the types of learning events and daily interactions with adults which APPLE students experience in their first eight years of school and their subsequent attitudes towards learning and relationships with adults?

Chapter 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

When I began to envision this project, I thought I knew what I wanted to find. I had taught in the APPLE Program for 13 years and, over that time, I had watched so many parents who were engaged passionately in the education of not only their own children, but also that of their children's classmates and, in some cases, all children in the extended APPLE community. I had seen parents re-arranging their work schedule to spend a morning doing math enrichment puzzles. I had watched parents helping children read, conducting individual story conferences with student writers, setting up special classroom events and celebrations. I had seen parents working countless hours publishing hardcover books of student writing, making costumes for drama centres or making up board games to develop math skills. And I also had heard stories of the long and sometimes heated meetings where parents hashed out issues like their divergent

beliefs about education and learning, and established guidelines and codes of conduct to promote a standard of community behaviour.

I thought that this level of involvement should make a difference in the lives of those children. At the outset of this project, I wondered whether there had been studies on the impact of parent involvement in education and, if so, could this impact be identified? And I wondered if this level of involvement might translate into something less tangible than simply improved scores on reading achievement tests. Could it actually have an impact on the kind of citizens these children would become?

Fortunately, a large number of research studies has indeed been undertaken examining my initial question, the effects of parent involvement on student achievement. This chapter provides an overview of what has already been learned. Additionally, this chapter examines the growth and longevity of the APPLE program. It is clear that, during the time that many alternative schools flourished, as observed by Allison and Beaujot (1989), APPLE grew from its somewhat tenuous debut in 1985 of one classroom with 24 students housed in a corner of Brick Street Public School, to its current status of six classrooms and nearly half of the total population of the school building. There are a number of theories that could be applied to explain the development and growth of the APPLE Program. Because so many elements align with Coleman's (1988) theory on social capital, the analysis used here relies on the structures he proposed to understand the apparent success and longevity of APPLE.

COOPERATIVE EDUCATION AND SOCIAL CAPITAL

The cooperative preschool and day care programs, which began as informal arrangements between parents, have grown into widespread and popular organizations, such as the afore-mentioned Organization for Parent Participation in Childcare and Education, Ontario (OPPCE,O). Once parents are engaged in co-operative work, associating with like-minded parents, they begin to develop what Coleman (1988) refers to as social capital.

Social capital, as described by Coleman (1988), has these three identifying characteristics: obligations and expectations, based on the trustworthiness (relationships) of the actors; information channels based on these relationships; social norms based on community sanctions (p. 102-104). A co-op daycare setting is an ideal birthing room for all three of these characteristics. Lee and Bowen (2006) identified just a few opportunities for the development of social capital that exist in this setting; “interactions with other parents while volunteering at school or attending parent-teacher association meetings can also help parents gain access to beneficial information, parenting skills, or resources available in the social network represented by those parents” (p. 196).

Once social capital has been created, it can be used to accomplish a variety of goals, as agreed upon by the community concerned. Lee and Bowen (2006) observe that Coleman “viewed social capital as a means to an end, for example, a means by which parents can promote their children's school achievement and educational attainment” (p. 195). Casey and Christ (2005) reiterate this claim that “social capital is defined as networks and norms, such as reciprocity and trust, that enable collective action” (p. 827).

Coleman (1988) himself did not limit the accumulation of social capital for simply personal advancement or success. Indeed, he argued that “a property shared by most forms of social capital that differentiates it from other forms of capital is its public good aspect: the actor or actors who generate social capital ordinarily capture only a small part of its benefits” (p. 26). This quality, the sense of building a stronger community of learners, rather than achieving largely personal success--or that of their own child--was present at APPLE’s inception and, I contend, continues to this day. Over the course of interviewing parents, Allison and Beaujot (1989) observed that “families mention particularly the sense of belonging to a community of parents ... a community with a common philosophy, in that they share a high level of concern about their children” (p. 24).

This sense of community, especially among a group of people who do not share physical common ground such as proximity to a local school, needs to be actively developed and supported if it is to remain healthy. The *APPLE Handbook* (2005), which outlines the expectations and philosophy of the program, provides insight into the nature of this community. Much of the document is focused on the nuts and bolts of running an organization-- things like meetings, executive positions and responsibilities and fund-raising. In addition though, and perhaps as a result of twenty years of experience, the writers of the *Handbook* take particular care to describe issues that are faced by communities, rather than individual stakeholders. For example, under the topic of Conflict Resolution, it is noted that parent volunteers are there “to support and nurture the learning environment of our children. We all strive to accomplish what is best for our children by putting our time and efforts into quality education. We need to

acknowledge that individuals will differ in their opinions and that all are important and respected. Sensitivity and tolerance is vital” (p. 17).

Under the topic of Parent Responsibilities, the issue of how to function in a community is again addressed. Over the course of a school day, especially in an active classroom where students are regularly engaged in problem-solving, teachers are faced with minute-by-minute decisions on when and how to intervene or guide. In APPLE, these situations are also faced regularly by parent volunteers. In the *Handbook*, parents are instructed to be “supportive, but not to take the responsibility for children’s actions or activities away from them. Students may be solving the problem themselves and premature intervention becomes interference. If adult intervention is needed, do so by encouraging the child to identify the problem, discuss possible solutions, and choose one” (p. 19). Again, it should be noted that this intervention does not benefit just the child of the parent volunteer; all of the children in the learning community gain from this experience, when it is effectively addressed.

Lastly, while exploring the set of norms and networks, or what Coleman refers to as reciprocity and trust, that APPLE has developed, it is prudent to examine another sensitive and challenging aspect to the program, namely the issue of confidentiality. If parent volunteers are not just engaged in fund-raising, or photocopying or cutting out shape books, but actively interacting with students and the teacher in less structured or predictable situations, they will see and hear things that most parents would not, and they will have access to what could be seen as confidential information. Again, in the *APPLE Handbook*, parents are instructed to “respect the confidentiality of our teachers

and students and keep a positive attitude toward all aspects of the operation of the classroom. In other words, what happens in the classroom stays in the classroom” (p. 19).

A strong case then can be made that the APPLE program has evolved into a more unified and, indeed, codified program with clear policies and protocols and prescribed methods of operation at the executive level, especially compared to the fledgling one of the 1980s of which a snapshot was provided in Chapter 1. Additionally, I hold that APPLE’s greatest strength, its social capital, continues to be based on the sense of community that it actively pursues. All of the above references in the *Handbook* lend credence to APPLE’s active pursuit of developing a healthy community based on agreed-upon norms and expectations. This sense of community that APPLE parents have worked to develop and strengthen was a recurring theme, especially apparent during the interviews, where participants independently refer to its lingering impact on their lives.

This section concludes by reaffirming that APPLE appears to have developed social capital in its founding initiatives and has actively pursued the strengthening of this sense of community by establishing, and indeed codifying, these norms and expectations.

RESEARCH ON THE IMPACT OF PARENT INVOLVEMENT ON STUDENT ACADEMIC SUCCESS--A REVIEW

This section begins with some broad sweeping statements about the effectiveness

of parent involvement on the academic performance of students. These statements are ones that have been promoted by organizations such as the Ontario Ministry of Education, school districts in the United States, parent organizations such as the Parent Teacher Association, and research laboratories in the United States. This is followed by a more in-depth examination of the original research, the studies upon which these sweeping generalizations were based. The section is not intended to be a simple re-hashing of well-documented research work. Much of the literature is useful in providing a background, to prepare the canvas for the painting I hope to produce. Along the journey through these various studies, I seek to bring the reader's attention to how they relate to the type of experiment that has been taking place in APPLE classrooms over the past two decades or so. Where research settings and parent/student activities are similar to those of APPLE, it seems reasonable to suspect that the conclusions drawn by the researchers on the effects of parent involvement can be applied to APPLE students. Likewise, where differences arise, I seek to question how applicable the conclusions are to the APPLE Program.

In reviewing the literature, it becomes evident that researchers have used a broad scope when identifying certain practices at home or school as evidence of parent involvement. Although a wide range of practices have been grouped together under the umbrella of parent involvement, differentiating between these practices is critical to this study of the APPLE Program, whose parent participation practices are so clearly defined. This chapter then closes with an examination of a number of models of parent involvement, including Epstein's Six Level of Involvement, weighing their merits and assessing their applicability to APPLE.

Generalized research findings

Study after study confirms the following: *When parents are involved in the education of their child(ren), the academic performance of their child(ren) typically improves.*

The Michigan Department of Education (2001), in a brochure entitled *What research says about parent involvement in children's education*, provides this observation: “family participation in education is twice as predictive of students’ academic success as family socioeconomic status” (p. 1). The brochure goes on to list a wide range of associations with parent involvement including higher grades and test scores, better school attendance, increased motivation, better self-esteem, lower rates of suspension, decreased use of drugs and alcohol (p. 1). While these studies do not establish a direct causal link between the parent activities and student graduation rates, they certainly raise the likelihood of such a link.

In a Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory publication, Cotton and Wikelund (2001) summarized the findings of their extensive review of research, funded in part by the Office of Educational Research and Improvement (OERI), U.S. Department of Education. They investigated many kinds of parent involvement, from simple home-school communication, homework support and parent/teacher conferences, to more intensive classroom volunteering, serving on decision-making panels and organizing school functions. The outcomes that were investigated included general achievement in math and reading, IQ scores and various behavioural and attitudinal measures.

Cotton and Wikelund (2001) claim that “the research overwhelmingly demonstrates that parent involvement in children's learning is positively related to achievement. Further, the research shows that the more intensively parents are involved in their children's learning, the more beneficial are the achievement effects" (¶1). Five of the studies from which these conclusions are drawn are considered in greater depth later in this chapter.

Adding one more voice to the chorus of proponents of parent involvement, the following is an excerpt from a recent Ontario Ministry of Education (2005) document entitled, *Developing partners in education*: "Parents play a vital role in the development and education of their children and in the success of schools. The Ministry of Education appreciates that the needs and contributions of parents have been undervalued and the education system needs to create several new points of reinforcement in order for the “parent factor” to realize its potential" (¶1).

Given these and many similar summary statements, it appears that a consensus has been reached concerning the benefits of parent involvement in education. Indeed, a thorough search of articles revealed no studies that show deleterious effects of parent involvement. A closer examination of some of the studies which have led educators to this conclusion follows.

The research in detail

As proposed in Chapter 1, much of the impetus for rise of parent involvement in children's education came in response to changes in society. Some of the earliest research on the effect of this involvement took place in the 1970's, well before the APPLE Program was established. An American researcher, Brooks (1971), observed that "the conception of the role that parents should play in public education has undergone a dramatic shift in the last decade. In the not-too-distant past, the parents' role

in public schools consisted mainly of dropping their children off at the door of the school and voting for bond issues" (p. 10). As parents began to take a more active role in the education of their children, it was not long before educational researchers began studying the effects of this involvement.

Early studies support parent involvement

One of the earlier studies took place in 1976 in Los Angeles. In their study of 20 elementary minority schools, Armor, Conry-Oseguera, Cox and King (1976) examined the effect of high levels of parent-teacher contact on the reading skills of students enrolled in Grade 6 classrooms. The schools in which the research took place "had predominantly minority-group student bodies and were located in low-income neighborhoods" (p. 6). The researchers concentrated on three factors: teacher training in the reading program, an orderly classroom, and sustained efforts to establish and maintain parent/teacher contact. They concluded that "all students displayed large and consistent gains in percentile points for the 6th grade on the CTBS reading examination, [adding that] the more vigorous were the schools' efforts to involve parents, the better did 6th grade students in those schools fare in reading attainment" (p. 7).

Corroborating this study was one undertaken by Walberg, Bole, and Waxman (1980) in Chicago's inner city schools which investigated the effect of parental support of learning activities on student achievement. Students from grades 1 to 6 across 41 classes, were involved in the project, along with their parents who supported their children's learning activities at home. The researchers concluded that "children of involved parents made significantly greater academic gains than children of noninvolved

parents" (p. 509-510).

In their study of 362 first-grade students, Walson, Brown and Swick (1983) surveyed parents about their support of their children's learning at home and their involvement in the neighbourhood community. The researchers compared this to the children's achievement on test scores and concluded that "children of actively supportive parents scored highest, followed by the children of passively involved parents, and then the children of noninvolved parents" (p. 180).

In her review of 27 studies of parent involvement in schools in the United States, Becher (1984) concluded, among many other observations, that "children with higher scores had parents who had perceptions of themselves as 'teachers' of their children that were stronger than those of parents with lower-scoring children" (p. 7). She further drew these conclusions based not on the active involvement of parents in their child's school but rather on the attitude and influence of the parent at home:

Children with higher scores on measures of achievement, competence and intelligence had parents who held higher educational expectations and aspirations for them than did parents of children who did not score as high. Parents of the former children also exerted more pressure for achievement, provided more academic guidance, and exhibited a higher level of general interest in their children. (p. 14)

Herman and Yeh (1980) found similar results in their study of 72 California early elementary schools. The principals, teachers and parents of students in two second-

grade and two third-grade classes in each of the schools were investigated using the estimates of parents' communications with the school, their awareness of school operations, their participation in school activities, their influence in school decision-making, and their relationships with teachers. Differences in student performance were assessed using criterion-referenced reading and mathematics tests. The researchers concluded that "parent involvement in schools was beneficial; the degree of parent interest and participation in school activities was positively related to student achievement" (p. 1).

In one of the few studies of junior high school age students, Cotton and Savard (1982) concluded "parental involvement in remediation and restructuring the home environment facilitate gains which continue in the absence of outside supervision" (p.9). That is to say, parents were supported in their efforts to provide structures, for example, for completing homework or reading. The researchers went to observe that "most significant was that these gains were obtained by students who are often described as emotionally apathetic and recalcitrant" (p. 9).

Gillman, Schooley and Novak (1977) conducted a study of three Michigan elementary school districts engaged in implementing state-funded programs to improve reading achievement. The constant in this study was the reading program itself, while a key variable was the level of parental involvement at home. The researchers found that "the two districts with minimal parent involvement had higher achievement than schools without such involvement, and the district with intensive parent involvement showed the largest achievement gains" (p. 2).

These findings strongly support the belief that parent involvement in education is associated with greater success for children. Other researchers focused more directly on which forms of parent involvement were most effective at achieving this result.

Later studies became focused on effective methods

In their study of 1,267 sixth-grade students in four middle schools in a suburban Maryland school district, Simmons-Morton and Crump (2003) attempted to isolate the effect of various factors on student engagement and student adjustment to the challenges of attending middle school. The factors considered included parent involvement, parent expectations, social competence, parental monitoring and school climate. Students were surveyed at the beginning and end of each grade level investigated. The researchers concluded that only social competence and parental involvement emerged as independent predictors of both school adjustment and school engagement. Indeed, parental involvement was a better predictor of school adjustment and engagement than other measures of parenting behaviour, including monitoring and expectations (p. 126).

Studies continued to mount on the value of parent involvement in education. Statistics Canada undertook a project to gather data on the effectiveness different parent involvement strategies as part of the National Longitudinal Survey of Children and Youth [NLSCY]. Its chief researcher, Ertl (1999) made the following observation:

Researchers and educators have long argued the benefits of parents' involvement in children's educational experiences. If parental involvement can make a difference in children's academic achievement, then knowing which involvement strategies are most effective and how to measure and monitor this

involvement will increase children's chances of succeeding in school. (p. 36)

The NLSCY study (1994-95) set out to do just that by exploring the role of the parent in the child's learning environment, specifically 6- to 11-year old students, through the use of surveys.

Responses to eleven parental involvement questions from both the teacher and household members were used in the study. Children's academic achievement was determined using a mathematics computations test as well as teacher evaluations of performances in reading, composition and mathematics. Using factor analysis to evaluate the survey results, Ertl (1999) concluded, "there is a positive relationship between certain involvement activities and children's academic achievement. Teacher's perceptions of general parental involvement were most noticeably linked to children's academic achievement" (p. 18).

Again, the nature of parental involvement which the study refers to is quite different from that of a parent participating program. For example, the researchers considered "direct participation" to be comprised of the following activities:

- attending parent-teacher conferences
- initiating a discussion with the teacher about children's behaviour or academic performance
- returning phone calls from the teacher

The differences between these types of activities and those typical in APPLE are addressed in greater detail later in this chapter. Beyond these questions are the ones that

can be raised about the reliance on this study of teachers' *perceptions* of parent involvement. For example, one summary statement concludes "only 2% of children whose parents were perceived to be not supportive of teaching efforts, compared with 28% of children whose parents were perceived to be strongly supportive of the teacher's efforts, were ranked near the top of the class" (p. 4). While it is fair to acknowledge that all research contains elements of subjectivity, this over-reliance on teacher perceptions, rather than observed parent behaviors, raises concerns in the eyes of this writer.

Research links with social capital theory

In their review of the literature on parent involvement in education, Cotton and Wikelund (2001) also made an attempt to identify those activities which they determined were most effective at improving the academic achievement of children. When they compared various models of involvement, from volunteering on local parent advisory panels to fund-raising to working at home with their children, researchers declared the latter to be most efficient. These programs which engaged parents in "reading with their children, supporting their work on homework assignments, or tutoring them using materials and instructions provided by teachers, show particularly impressive results" (¶1).

In their comprehensive study of 24,599 eighth-grade students and their parents, from 1,052 public and private schools in the United States, Ho Sui-Chu and Willms (1996) set out to explore links between parental involvement and student success. They noted that "the most serious limitation of analyses of data from large-scale surveys and of most descriptive, qualitative studies is that causal inferences are weak" (p. 130). The

problem, they explained was that most studies treat parental involvement as a single variable rather than a multidimensional construct. They added that "the inclusion of a large number of separate measures makes it more difficult to interpret the effects of any particular measure and can lead to multicollinearity" (p. 134).

Ho Sui-Chu and Willms (1996) designed a survey of 12 items which divided parent involvement into four factors: home discussion; school communication; home supervision and school participation. One of the many fascinating conclusions they drew from their data was that involvement at home, "particularly in discussing school activities and helping children plan their programs ... had the strongest relationship to academic achievement" (p. 134), as measured by reading and mathematics achievement.

A further conclusion of researchers concerned the effect of volunteering on the school environment. Unfortunately, the researchers did not differentiate volunteering in the classroom from volunteering to attend Parent Teacher Organization meetings and other similar gatherings. They nonetheless observed that benefits, in the form of improvement on reading achievement tests accruing to children whose parents were active volunteers were negligible. Still, this volunteering contribution:

had a small but significant effect on reading achievement on the overall school results. This finding makes sense intuitively, since one would expect that when parents volunteer in school, they enrich the overall learning environment, strengthen social networks and affect the norms and expectations for all children in the school. (p. 138)

This language resonates with that of Coleman (1988) whose theory on social capital was reviewed earlier. Indeed, in their final summary, the authors noted that their findings are "consistent with Coleman's thesis regarding social capital: the social networks and norms established by the school community complement the mission of the school" (p. 139).

Re-visiting social capital theory a further time, the work of Lee and Bowen (2006) is relevant. In their study of achievement gaps among elementary school children, they concluded that parental involvement is directly related to student success. They refer more to the *perception of teachers* about the amount of parent involvement; "parent reports of educational involvement at home, defined as providing a supportive home learning environment, were positively associated with, teachers' ratings of children's reading and mathematics achievement" (p. 194).

Lee and Bowen (2006) go on to suggest that inequalities in the amounts of social capital individuals are able to generate are also a factor in student success, especially in non-dominant cultures. For example, they point out that "one source of inequality in access to relationships and resources is the fit between an individual's culture and the culture of the larger society or the institutions in that society" (p. 197). In other words, school success does indeed appear to be related to the social capital that an individual--or community--can build. An individual's culture may not match the culture of the larger society and hence he/she will experience an inequality in the social capital he/she is able to generate. This, in turn, may lead to a lack of involvement in the education of his/her children.

Not all studies support the assertion that parents from non-dominant cultures are less involved in their children's education. In the previously-cited work by Ho Sui-Chu and Willms (1996), a comprehensive study of almost 25,000 eighth-grade students, the authors declared "our findings little support the assumption that parents from ethnic-minority groups participate less than do White parents" (p. 130).

It is nonetheless beyond the mandate of this project to examine the role of social capital among non-dominant groups and the parental involvement in education of members of these groups. Further research is needed in that area. Even so, it is clear from a large body of research studies that two conclusions can be drawn:

1) parent involvement is associated with high student scores and;

2) parent involvement actually produces stronger results specifically in student improvement projects

That having been said, the scope of this discussion needs to be expanded to focus more directly on the nature of parent involvement. This term has been used to cover a vast array of activities and levels of engagement. In the following section, some of the models proposed to analyze the nature of parent involvement are examined, and their utility in investigating the nature of parent participation in the APPLE Program discussed.

MODELS OF PARENT INVOLVEMENT

Early on in the growth of parent involvement in education, researchers began

efforts to categorize the nature of this involvement. In their book, *Beyond the Bake Sale*, Henderson, Marburger and Ooms (1986) provided a review of the roles that parents could take, summarised here in Table 2-1.

Table 2-1

Parent roles and responsibilities as identified by

Henderson, Marburger and Ooms (1986)

Parents in the role of:	Tasks and activities
Partner	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • parents performing basic obligations for their child's education and social development e.g.: parent-teacher conferences, school-home communication; permission forms and report cards
Collaborator/Problem Solver	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • stimulate and reinforce learning at home (reading, trips to libraries and museums, dealing with school behavior and/or learning problems)
Audience	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • attend Back-to-School nights, Open House, exhibitions, plays, athletic events
Supporter	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • volunteer assistance, field trips, volunteer in school libraries, share their expertise in enrichment programs, fund-raising, auctions, carpooling
Advisor and Co-decision Maker	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • committees, advisory councils (in Ontario, now, Parent Councils)

This synopsis is helpful in attesting to the uniqueness of the APPLE Program. As described earlier, APPLE parents are engaged in all five of these roles. Each of the first three roles, as Partner, as Collaborator and as Audience, can also be undertaken in a conventional school within the public education system. But APPLE was primarily established, and continues to exist today, because parents are choosing to take on the role identified in the fourth category. APPLE parents are heavily engaged in this role of Supporter, volunteering in the classroom, setting up special field trips or guest speakers and sharing their expertise to enrich the learning environment of the children. Indeed, parent involvement in the first three categories is not even counted in the required ten hours per month that APPLE parents are required to contribute.

Table 2-1 can also be used to separate the kind of parent involvement upon which research has focused. In many of the studies reviewed above, parent involvement took the form of improved communication between school and home, the main goal of which was to ensure parents were aware of what was taking place in the classroom. In other studies, parent involvement referred to the willingness of parents to attend a parent/teacher conference to discuss their child's behaviour or learning issues. In some specific reading initiative programs, parents were encouraged to participate by reading with their child at home.

Again, this may not be as surprising as one might expect. After all, APPLE is quite a unique program. The level of engagement of parents in the daily life of the classroom is unusual. Further, most research studies have focused on special programs, initiated by either a school district (e.g., Herman & Yeh, 1980) or the researchers

themselves (e.g., Wahlberg, Bole, & Waxman, 1980) and were conducted for finite lengths of time. In the case of APPLE, the program was initiated by parents and their commitment is intended to last several years. Establishing a research study which required this level of commitment on the part of parents would be challenging and probably expensive. This might explain the lack of studies which focus on the parent in the role of Supporter.

Although Table 2-1 has been helpful outlining the variety of ways in which parents can be involved in education, it is merely one of a variety of models. Other frameworks for understanding parent involvement have been proposed. As noted earlier, Ho Sui-Chu and Willms (1996) divided parental involvement into four categories: school communication, home supervision, home discussion and school participation. The three-dimensional structure of Grolnick and Slowiaczek (1994) recognizes parent behaviour, child perceptions of parents' affective and personal availability, and intellectual and cognitive activities. While these models have merit in themselves, the structure of parent involvement proposed by Epstein (1995) has garnered considerable attention, both in professional journals and the popular media.

Epstein's six levels of involvement

Epstein's work has been referred to extensively in publications by the Parent Teacher Association (1989), Education Districts (Michigan, 2001) and other researchers, including Cotton and Savard (1982) and Ho Sui-Chu and Willms (1996). After studying the nature of parent involvement through the late 1970's and 1980's, Epstein recognised six distinct forms which this involvement could take. The six levels and their associated

practices are listed in Table 2-2. While representations of Epstein's model can be found in a wide range of publications, this Table 2-2 is based on that provided by the University of Oregon web-site (2007).

Table 2-2

Epstein's model of types of parental involvement

	Title	Activities associated with type
Type 1	Parenting	Help all families establish home environments to support children as students
Type 2	Communicating	Design effective forms of school-to-home and home-to-school communications about school programs and children's progress
Type 3	Volunteering	Recruit and organize parent help and support.
Type 4	Learning at home	Provide information and ideas to families about how to help students at home with homework and other curriculum-related activities, decisions, and planning.
Type 5	Decision making	Include parents in school decisions, developing parent leaders and representatives
Type 6	Collaborating with community	Identify and integrate resources and services from the community to strengthen school programs, family practices, and student learning and development.

Epstein's work went beyond simple description of the types of involvement. She went on to catalogue the impact of parent involvement on the academic achievement of students, eventually concluding that the partnerships of school, family and community

maximize the chances for children's success. In her role as director of the Center on School, Family and Community Partnerships at Johns Hopkins University, Epstein has attracted support from both the educational community and parent groups. The Colorado

Department of Education, for example, sponsors the National Center for School Engagement (NSCE), which focuses on applying Epstein's model of parent involvement to school communities. On its website, the NSCE (2008) states:

students with involved parents, no matter what their background, are more likely

to:

- adapt well to school and attend regularly
- have better social skills and behaviour
- earn higher grades and test scores
- enroll in higher-level programs
- be promoted and earn credits
- graduate and go on to higher education. (¶1)

Other jurisdictions appear to endorse Epstein's partnership model with equal fervour. The Anoka School District in Minnesota, for example, has established a Parent Involvement Program, based on Epstein's ideas, whose mission is to "foster partnerships between ...schools, families and community to increase student achievement" (¶1).

In a related form of endorsement, the Indiana-based Lilly Endowments Inc.

sponsored the publication of Epstein's 2003 book, *School, Family, and Community Partnerships: Preparing Educators and Improving Schools*. Lilly Endowment Inc. is a philanthropic organization which, on its website (2008) purports to view education as indispensable to personal, civic and economic success. The organization, therefore, is "alarmed...about Indiana's ranking as one of the lowest states in the nation in the percentage of adults over 25 with a bachelor's degree" (¶1). Its support for the spread of Epstein's ideas is in alignment with its goal of improving student success in Indiana and elsewhere.

Support for Epstein's ideas is not limited to those educational districts located south of the border. Speaking to the Alberta Teachers' Association (ATA), as reported in the ATA newsletter article, *Epstein identifies keys to successful school-family-community partnerships*, Epstein said, " Programs and practices, what we do in the schools, make the difference in whether, how and particularly which families become involved in their children's education" (p.1). Further endorsement, if needed, came from then ATA president, Larry Booi, who said that Epstein's strongest impact has been "in the area of action. Through her work, she has fostered the development of sustainable and effective programs of partnership throughout North America and has been the single, most important inspiration for the early development of such partnerships" (p. 1).

While hyperbole is not uncommon in the field of education, it would be hard to overstate the role that Epstein has played in supporting parent involvement in education and in identifying practices which weaken the barriers between schools and parents. For the purposes of this project, these six levels have been re-organized as shown in Table 2-3. Each type of involvement is postulated to have an affect on a

specific sphere of influence. For instance, if a parent chooses to spend some time in the evenings doing homework with his/her child, the child's success in school in the subject concerned, and perhaps others, will likely increase. The benefits accrue to the child and to the parent, what I have termed the "Personal/home community", and perhaps indirectly to the wider society.

A different type of involvement could be for a parent to join the PTA or other parent organizations, advisory councils, or committees for parent leadership and participation. Here, the political decisions undertaken by the organization can be of benefit (or detriment) to the entire **school community** and indirectly to the classroom and home.

Table 2-3:

Forms of community and home involvement recognized by Epstein (1996)

School community	Personal/home community
VOLUNTEERING: Recruit and organize parent help and support	PARENTING: Help all families establish home environments to support children as students.
DECISION MAKING: Include parents in school decisions, developing parent leaders and representatives.	COMMUNICATING: Design effective forms of school-to-home and home-to-school communications about school programs and children's progress.
COLLABORATING WITH COMMUNITY: Identify and integrate resources and services from the community to strengthen school programs, family practices, and student learning and	LEARNING AT HOME: Provide information and ideas to families about how to help students at home with homework and other curriculum-related activities, decisions, and

development.

planning.

Adapted from Epstein (University of Oregon)

Table 2-3 identifies the types of involvement typically available to parents in conventional public schools. Again, one can identify where the research into parent involvement effectiveness has been focussed. But in the context of previous discussions, Epstein's model does not recognize the type of participation which exists in the APPLE Program. To accommodate APPLE, a new column, that of classroom community, needs to be introduced, as shown in Table 2-4. Epstein touched only marginally on the type of involvement that is the backbone of the APPLE program, and indeed, other alternative programs that exist today, **the Classroom community**.

Table 2-4

Expanded model of school, classroom and home involvement

School community (Epstein)	Classroom community (Lawrence)	Personal/home community (Epstein)
VOLUNTEERING: Recruit and organize parent help and support	CLASSROOM VOLUNTEERS: Leading reading groups, running a learning centre, teaching an art activity	PARENTING: Help all families establish home environments to support children as students.
DECISION MAKING: Include parents in school decisions, developing parent leaders and representatives.	SPECIAL EVENTS: Organizing or coordinating field trips, arranging guest speakers, setting up celebrations and feasts	COMMUNICATING: Design effective forms of school-to-home and home-to-school communications about school programs and children's progress.

COLLABORATING WITH COMMUNITY: Identify and integrate resources and services from the community to strengthen school programs, family practices, and student learning and development.

HOME WORK:
Publishing student writing, art projects, serving on enrichment committees, gathering library resources.

LEARNING AT HOME:
Provide information and ideas to families about how to help students at home with homework and other curriculum-related activities, decisions, and planning.

The types of activities listed in this middle column are typical of contributions made by APPLE parents. They are investments in the richness of the classroom experience for all students and contribute to the community nature of the program, rather than to the academic success of a specific individual child. They also represent significant opportunities to strengthen the social capital of the program. For example, the action of volunteering in the classroom, of interacting directly with students, strengthens the relationships between parents (adults) and children, provides parents with a window to understand how the minds of children work at various ages--and *vice versa*--and reinforces the norms and behaviours expected of these relationships include respect, responsibility and nurturing.

Similarly for parents setting up special events and field trips, or engaged in committee work with other parents, are again engaged in developing social capital. Information channels are established, along relationships based on trust, and social norms based on community expectations are reinforced.

This model of parent participation has been largely overlooked, or at least understudied, by Epstein and indeed other researchers. But it is the backbone of the APPLE

program. If the influence of this type of parent involvement, dedicated to building a sense of classroom community, is as pervasive and strong as Coleman suggests, it is reasonable to be watchful of its surfacing during the interview process.

SUMMARY

The following three conclusions, founded on an extensive review of the research into parent involvement in education, provide the backdrop against which my APPLE interpretive study is painted.

The chapter opened with a general statement about the benefits of parent involvement, based on a handful of individual studies, out of the myriad undertaken over the past three decades, which examined the relationship between the engagement of parents in education and the academic success of their children. These studies consistently concluded that the two are correlated--*when parents are involved in their education of their child(ren), the academic performance of their child(ren) typically improves.*

Upon closer examination of the types of activities in which parents were engaged, a distinct difference was observed between the nature of parent involvement typical of the research studies, and the nature of involvement in a parent participating program, specifically APPLE

APPLE parents are engaged neither in a short-term research study nor a proposed Ministry of Education initiative. They are involved in investing their energy, their knowledge, their skills and their children in building a classroom learning community,

one that will sustain their children for their first eight years of school life.

At this stage of the process, it is worth taking a thoughtful look at the nature of parent involvement to see what conclusions can be drawn in advance of beginning the research project itself. As noted earlier in the chapter, most of the activities which researchers termed "parent involvement" are considered more like "assumed behaviours" of parents in the APPLE Program. Attending parent/teacher conferences, returning permission forms, reading at home with a child, maintaining home/school links--these behaviours are all assumed to be givens by APPLE parents. They are not even included as part of the ten hours of participation expected monthly of parents in the program. A few others, such as consistent homework times, close communication between parent/child, high academic expectations, may vary from family to family. But it is reasonable to conclude that, if this level of parent involvement has led to greater academic success of students, then APPLE students are more likely to be academically successful than their peers who have not had the benefit of this involvement. For this reason, I did not address the academic performance of the APPLE students who participated in the interview sessions. The academic benefits of other types of parent involvement have been studied more than often enough.

That said, current research has not focused on the type of parent participation embodied by the APPLE program and hence, the original questions have not been explored. How do APPLE graduates view their experiences in the APPLE Program and the effects of those experiences on their subsequent education and life? Do they see a connection between the types of learning events and daily interactions with adults which APPLE

students experience in their first eight years of school and their subsequent attitudes towards learning and relationships with adults?

The influences of these factors may be more difficult to measure, but they are certainly worth studying. In the following chapter, the specific methodology used to explore these questions is examined.

Chapter 3

METHOD

This chapter reports on the methods used to organize and undertake the research project itself. It begins with a brief review of earlier studies on the effects of parent involvement, and outlines how this project offers the opportunity to expand and enrich our current understanding of the long-term influences of this involvement.

This is followed by an explanation of the interviews of 29 key informants in the APPLE Program undertaken in July 2008. The advantages and disadvantages of using the key informant approach are outlined, along with a discussion of some of the anticipated problems. A review of the selection process follows, explaining how specific students and parents were chosen to be invited to participate in the project. I then review the specific questions which were used during the interviews and discuss purpose and wording.

Review of unique opportunities offered by this project

In the previous chapter, substantial data were presented to provide a point of departure for this research project. Study after study has confirmed that student academic success typically improves with greater parental involvement. Building on the foundation of the academic advantages to parent involvement, this research project was designed to examine wider aspects to parent involvement over a longer time frame.

This research project differs from prior studies in at least three ways.

1. Rather than participating in a short-term research study, typically a few months or in some cases up to one academic school year, participants in this study were members of the APPLE Program for eight years, in most cases. The influence on students of parents' long-term immersion in the classroom learning community during the formative years is thus more likely to be apparent, given the increased length of time.
2. As established in Chapter 2, the nature of parent participation in APPLE is substantively different than what has typically been studied previously. APPLE parents are embedded in the daily classroom life of students and interact, in many cases, directly with them. Previous studies have focused more on parent involvement undertaken in the home environment or in the larger school community, rather than the classroom.
3. The long-term effects of the kind of classroom community involvement, as typified in the APPLE experience, have not been examined. Graduates from the early years of APPLE range in age from young teenagers to young adults in their mid-20s; their reflections on the impact of this type of early learning environment, while perhaps not measurable in the positivist sense, may well be equally valid, especially if overall trends or commonalities are identified.

Before addressing the actual process of collecting data, some observations about the direction I originally intended to pursue are appropriate. The questions I had at the outset of the project, specifically the academic benefits of parent involvement in education, have largely been answered already by many researchers through the 1980s and 1990s. The results are in: the involvement of parents in the education of their own children is strongly related to academic success. A broader question, that of the effect

on the classroom community of learners, has largely been unexplored.

KEY INFORMANT APPROACH

I conducted 29 interviews with key informants in the APPLE Program in July 2008. Rather than soliciting information from a random sample of former APPLE students and parents, specific key informants were chosen and invited to participate, for reasons outlined later in this chapter. Specific questions were created for this project, which were intended to draw out recurring themes, or stories which beat to a similar drum, which would be used to generalize beyond the sample group of individuals.

The key informant approach is hardly new, having its origin decades ago in the field of anthropology, where researchers attempted to gain understanding of a particular culture by interviewing individuals who were already embedded in the culture and were positioned to provide an informed interpretation of it. This use of the key informant research method is wide-spread across many disciplines. Health organizations in Wisconsin (2005) have used it to estimate the range of services that will be needed in five years (¶4). Government aid agencies use it to gather data on the effectiveness of micro-enterprise activities (USAID, 1996, ¶2-8). The European Academy of Teachers in General Practice (EURACT, 2008) promotes the practice of using key informants, especially since the unification of Europe, as a means of exchanging information about "organisational, academic, legal, political, etc. aspects of the unique situation in their own country" (¶2). Each organization seems to spend considerable effort explaining both the process of interviewing key informants, and outlining the advantages and disadvantages of this approach.

Sherry (1999) explains the key informant approach as "identifying different members of your community who are especially knowledgeable about a topic ...and asking them questions about their experiences ... within that community" (§1).

Certainly the community to which she refers suggests a larger one than the small community of APPLE students who have graduated from the program and moved on further through the education system. Yet, even within such a small community, it is possible to identify those students who could be seen as key informants, individuals who are uniquely positioned within the community. On the EURACT web-site, Heyrman and Goedhuys (2008) described them as "individuals who possess special knowledge or status, who are willing to share their knowledge and skills with the researcher and who have access to perspectives or observations denied to the researcher" (§ 4). In their review of key informant research practices, the EURACT researchers go on to justify the level of subjectivity that is embedded in this type of research. key informants, they explain, are not to be selected randomly, but have to be chosen on the basis of, first, who has access to the data and, second, who is who is able and willing to provide these data (§ 5).

A USAID document (1996) on conducting key informant interviews supports this description of key informants. These individuals should be chosen, it is outlined, "for their specialized knowledge and unique perspectives on a topic. Planners should take care to select informants with various points of view" (p. 2). In applying this guidance to the selection of key informants for this research project, I sought to select students according to the following criteria:

1. Students who were enrolled in APPLE for the complete, or nearly-complete, duration of their elementary years (JK-Grade 6). If there is a long-term effect of the level of parent participation that exists in APPLE, it seems reasonable to concentrate on those students who were enrolled in APPLE for a long period.
2. Students who had the potential of bringing various points of view to the research, as recommended in the USAID document (1996). I made an effort to include students from single-parent families, from a range of socio-economic classes, students who were academically successful and those who struggled.
3. Students who had recently graduated from APPLE and moved into Grades 7 to 12. Such participants would not have been former students of mine, since I left the program in 2002 and thus involving them in the interviews was an effort to counter any residual influence of my teaching which may have been present in the interviewees satisfying criterion #1.
4. A balance of male and female students, to control for potential gender bias.
5. A representative range in age of students. I attempted to interview one or two students from ages 14 to 27, who also met the first four criteria, for these reasons: the first students graduated from APPLE in 1993 and are currently aged 26 or 27. More recent graduates selected for interviewing were at least 14 years old, ensuring they had acquired some distance - at least two years - from their APPLE experiences and were in a position to compare with their post-APPLE experiences. With this range of student ages, I attempted to locate and interview

one or two students from each age, to reach a complement of 12-15 students.

As noted earlier, I am a former teacher in the APPLE program and as such had developed prior relationships with many of the students interviewed. Given the lapse of time--between six and 15 years--since I had taught them, and the more mature ages of these participants, between 18 and 27, it is hoped that any lingering effects of this influence were mitigated. As a precaution though, I further chose to exclude several students and families with whom I have had an ongoing friendship since my time in APPLE from the selection process.

I expanded the range of interviews to include a smaller number--eight to ten I initially envisaged--of former APPLE parents. The criteria for selecting them were similar to that of students, that is, a lengthy connection with the program, and sufficient time from having left the program to have acquired a distance from which to observe the influences of APPLE.

I had originally intended to interview former and current APPLE teachers, to gather their observations of differences or similarities between APPLE students and those students from traditional public school classrooms. However, two brief, informal conversations with two teachers discouraged me from doing so. These teachers observed that they did not feel they had sufficient contact with their former APPLE students to legitimately comment on questions concerning the effects that the APPLE program had on these students.

In my original proposal, I considered interviewing former principals who had

overseen the APPLE program over the years. Upon greater reflection, I noted that few principals had administered the program longer than two or three years, which I deemed insufficient to have established the kinds of long-term personal contact and observation opportunities to be helpful. That said, I did contact the current principal, informing her of this research project and sought her assistance in contacting current APPLE Executive members. During two conversations over July and August 2008, she provided some insight into the current status of APPLE.

Implications of key informant approach

In its summary of using key informant Interviews, the University of Illinois Program Planning and Assessment office (2000) used the work of various researchers to outline potential liabilities to the key informant approach to data collection, including Anderson(1990), Butler and Howell (1980) and McKillip (1987). One pitfall the publication noted was that "other community members who are not being used as key informants may become jealous and resent being left out" (p. 2). Given the scattered nature of the APPLE community, spread out through the city of London and beyond, and given the low-profile nature of this project, I suspected this effect would be minimal. As it turned out, word of my research did circulate throughout sections of the APPLE community, and I received one phone call where a former student sought to know why he was not on the interview list.

A further limitation, the University of Illinois document suggested, is that by choosing only a few select individuals, the researcher may overlook the perspectives of community members who are less visible. This reaffirms the importance and value of

applying the selection criteria stipulated above judiciously and consistently, so as to ensure that the selection of key informants does not exclude less visible community members.

Another liability to the key informant approach, as observed in the document, was that "your relationship with the informant may influence the information you get" (p. 2). Certainly this could have been a factor in my research since, for some of the informants, I was their teacher and may have continued to wear a mantle of authority.

How this affected their responses to my interview questions is uncertain.

The USAID (1996) document on conducting key informant interviews noted a further limitation to this approach. Its writers proposed that the data collected may be difficult to quantify or organize (p. 2). While this is a valid consideration, I would argue that this is an interpretive study rather than a quantitative one. Its purpose was not to gather quantitative data, but rather to organize information based on general trends which emerged during the interviews. Additionally, there is a substantial body of literature which provides a theoretical framework for organizing qualitative data, especially the work of Miles and Huberman (1984), whose guidelines were used in this study.

While acknowledging short-comings to the approach I chose, I concluded on balance that the data gathered would likely provide valuable insights into the long-term effects of parent participation. In some ways, I was uniquely positioned to undertake this study. The Michigan State University's Education web-site (1999) stressed that "the quality of information obtained is dependent on the ability of the investigator to draw out the key informant's capabilities in perceiving and communicating the information needed" (¶ 4).

Because I am a former teacher in the program, I expected to find it relatively

easy to bridge the gap between researcher and teacher, as articulated by Goodson and Mangan(1996), to “enter the world of the teacher sufficiently well to emphasize and comment intelligently upon it” (p. 52). Similarly, because I have a personal connection with several of the subjects of my interviews, the observation by Goodson and Mangan that “inevitably, interviewers disclose details of their own lives to interviewees during these discussions, and the result is to engender much better mutual understandings of both parties as human beings” (p. 53), would not come as a surprise or threat to either party.

By interviewing APPLE students, especially older ones, who may have developed, by this time, a greater distance and perhaps wider perspective on their educational experiences, including APPLE, I hoped to gain more personal observations on the nature of the experience. Siegle (2007) observed that:

qualitative researchers often begin their interviews with grand tour questions. Grand tour questions are open ended questions that allow the interviewee to set the direction of the interview. The interviewer then follows the leads that the interviewee provides. The interviewer can always return to his or her pre-planned interview questions after the leads have been followed. (¶ 11)

For these reasons, I originally designed the following questions:

- Do you feel that your early educational experiences, with your parent and other adults in the classroom, were an asset after you left the program?

- When you continued your education, through grades 7 to 12, did you notice a difference between you and your classmates that you attribute to your APPLE experiences? If so, can you describe it?
- Did/do you have a healthy, strong relationship with your parents through adolescence and into adulthood? Do you feel this is connected to your APPLE life?
- Do you consider yourself to be a critical thinker. If so, how does this manifest itself? (This was intended to address an often cited larger goal of education, to develop critical thinkers for today's world, and whether the APPLE program contributes to this development)
- Do you attribute this critical thinking nature to your APPLE experiences?
- Are/were you active in school life--sports, politics, drama, art - at high school level? Do you consider this a reflection of your APPLE activities?
- Do you recall specific experiences in APPLE that helped to form your attitude towards learning? How did they influence your attitude?

These questions, which were designed to encourage interviewees to reflect upon their APPLE experiences and identify any lasting influences, upon closer examination, proved to be somewhat limiting and, in some cases, unclear. Too many invited Yes or No answers. In addition, the questions offered no framework upon which to hang participants' APPLE experiences and no explanation for why the questions were being asked. After working to address these limitations, I arrived at the interview questions as presented in Tables 3-1. STUDENT AND PARENT INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Table 3-1

Interview Questions

1S	<p>Your early educational experiences, with your parent and other adults in your classroom on a daily basis, were somewhat unique. You participated in many out-of-classroom experiences, had many guest speakers and visitors, and were part of an expanded learning community.</p> <p>a) How did these experiences affect you as a student?</p> <p>b) Do you recall attitudes that you developed when you were a young member of APPLE persisting after you left the program?</p> <p>c) Do you feel they were an asset or a handicap after you left the program?</p>
1P	<p>Your child's early educational experiences, with you and other adults in the APPLE classroom on a daily basis, were somewhat unique. She/he/they participated in many out-of-classroom experiences, had many guest speakers and visitors and was/were part of a large learning community. How did these experiences affect your child/children?</p> <p>a) In what ways do you think the attitudes that she/he/they developed as a young member of APPLE persisted after she/he/they left the program?</p> <p>b) Do you feel they were an asset or a handicap after she/he/they left the program?</p>
2S	<p>Do you recall specific experiences in APPLE that helped to form your attitude towards learning? How did they influence your attitude?</p>
2P	<p>No parallel question</p>
3S	<p>When you continued your education, through grades 7 to 12, what kinds of differences – negative or positive – did you notice between you and your classmates?</p> <p>To what extent do you think these differences could be attributed to your APPLE experiences?</p> <p>[Probe for further details if appropriate]</p>
3P	<p>When your child/children continued his/her/their education, through grades 7 to 12, what differences--if any--between your child and his/her/their classmates did you notice that you feel could be attributed in some way to his/her/their APPLE experiences? In what ways did these differences appear to be related to your child/children's (a) school life and (b) social life?</p>
4S	<p>Adolescence can sometimes be a somewhat tumultuous time, as teenagers re-define their relationships with their parents and other adults. In what ways do you feel the relationship you had with your parent(s) during your</p>

	adolescence may have been influenced by your experiences as an APPLE student?
4P	Adolescence can sometimes be a somewhat tumultuous time, as teenagers re-define their relationships with their parents and other adults. In what ways, if at all, do you think your relationships with your child/children during adolescence and into adulthood may have been influenced by your shared APPLE experiences?
5S	Because of their mutual interest and concern, APPLE parents tend to form a type of learning community, often with similar values. Can you recall your relationships with adults changing after you left APPLE and moved into a more traditional school program? In what ways were your relationships with adults similar to, or different from, those of your adolescent peers?
5P	Because of their mutual interest and concern, APPLE parents tend to form a type of learning community, often with similar values. In what ways did this relationship with adults change as your child left APPLE and participated in the traditional school program? In what ways was her/his relationship to adults similar to, or different from, those of his/her adolescent peers?
6S	We often hear that a goal of education is to produce critical thinkers, citizens who ask questions, who are independent-minded, who consider consequences of actions. How do you feel that your experiences in APPLE assisted you in developing your critical thinking skills – if at all?
6P	We often hear that a goal of education is to produce critical thinkers, citizens who ask questions, who are independent-minded, who consider consequences of actions. How do you think your child's experiences in APPLE helped him/her/they to develop critical thinking skills--if at all?
7S	One aspect of student engagement in school is participation in the range of activities that are available, especially at high school--sports, politics, drama, art and so on. Did/do you feel that you were engaged in these activities more or less than your peers? In what ways, if any, do you consider your level of involvement an outgrowth of your APPLE experiences?
7P	One indicator of student engagement in school is the level of participation in activities that are available, especially at high school--sports, politics, drama, art, and so forth. Was /were your child/children engaged in these activities more or less than his/her/their peers? Do you consider this a reflection of his/her/their APPLE experiences?
P only	In your years in APPLE, you were part of a learning community, brought together and held there by your passion for learning. Did these community relationships or attachments lead to other activities – sports, politics, bird walks, gardening--either during your time in APPLE or after they ended. For how long have these connections with members of the APPLE community persisted after you left the program?

Question 1

The early educational experiences of APPLE students, with their own parent and other adults in the classroom on a daily basis, were somewhat unique. Students participated in many out-of-classroom experiences, had many guest speakers and visitors, and were part of an expanded learning community.

- a) What effect did these experiences have?*
- b) Do you recall attitudes that you, or your child, developed as a young member of APPLE persisting after leaving the program?*
- c) Do you feel they were an asset or a handicap after leaving the program?*

This introductory question was phrased to be student-friendly, inviting former students and parents to recall the type of learning environment of which they were a part when in APPLE, to help stimulate what they were able to recall of the attitude they, or their children, had toward school and learning when they were young. Part C was included to ensure interviewees had an opportunity to reflect on the limitations and shortcomings of their APPLE experiences, as well as the positive aspects.

Question 2

Do you recall specific experiences in APPLE that helped to form your attitude towards learning? How did they influence your attitude?

An emerging theme in ethnographic studies is the use of storytelling as means of capturing an individual's personal reality of an experience, as exemplified by van Maanen's (1988) tales from the field. I assumed students might well feel more

comfortable discussing their attitude toward learning if they were able to recall and retell specific formative experiences from their APPLE years. This question was intended to provide such an opportunity. Since this dealt specifically with student experiences, the question was not presented to parents.

Question 3

When you, or your child, continued on through grades 7 to 12, what kinds of differences--negative or positive--did you notice between you and your classmates?

To what extent do you think these differences could be attributed to APPLE experiences?

Given their educational careers, APPLE students are not able to compare, in an objective sense, the type of student they became through the influence of their early educational experiences in APPLE, to the type of student they would have become *without* those experiences. To explore their views on this matter, the question asked the interviewees to compare themselves to the classmates they encountered after the conclusion of their APPLE life

Question 4

Adolescence can sometimes be a somewhat tumultuous time, as teenagers re-define their relationships with their parents and other adults. In what ways do you feel the parent/child relationship during adolescence may have been influenced by previous APPLE experiences?

In the APPLE literature, such as its promotional brochures, its web-site and the *APPLE Handbook*, the long-term influence of APPLE is not mentioned, but such effects are to be expected. APPLE parents are in a position to build a strong rapport

with their own children, as well as others, during eight years of engagement in the classroom. They are likely to be well-informed about their child's school life and are regularly engaged in special projects both in the classroom and at home. It seemed reasonable to explore whether this closeness persisted beyond the days of APPLE, as students entered adolescence with all of its physical changes, hormonal influences and societal expectations.

Question 5

Because of their mutual interest and concern, APPLE parents tend to form a type of learning community, often with similar values. Can you recall your relationships with adults changing after you left APPLE and moved into a more traditional school program? Parents, did you observe a change in relationship with your child after leaving APPLE?

In what ways were your relationships with adults similar to, or different from, those of your adolescent peers? Parents, did you notice similarities or differences in your child's relationships with adults, compared to his/her adolescent peers?

Again, our society has been steeped in a culture of Youth since the youth movement of the 1960s adopted the Jerry Rubin phrase, "Never trust anyone over 30." While it is unreasonable to consider youth culture as a monolith--to propose that any segment of our population speaks with one voice is simply unrealistic and misrepresentative--there is a prevailing myth in popular culture that adults are out of touch with the minds and hearts of young people, leading to difficulties in relationships.

The extended learning community that APPLE creates, where significant numbers of adults and students interact and forge relationships, provides an ideal

birthing room for Coleman's (1988) social capital. A level of trust is built, personal connections are developed based on these relationships, and information channels created. This question was intended to probe aspects of the relationships students developed with APPLE adults in their formative years, as learning partners, as sources of information, as trustworthy and caring individuals. Would their views on adults persist through adolescence? One way to investigate the influence of APPLE was to ask students to compare their current (or in some case, past) relationships with adults through adolescence, with that of their non-APPLE peers. While this would not generate a necessarily causal link, it would be worthy of note.

Question 6

We often hear that a goal of education is to produce critical thinkers, citizens who ask questions, who are independent-minded, who consider consequences of actions. How do you feel that the APPLE experience assisted in the development of critical thinking skills, if at all?

When I first began wording this question, I considered simply asking: do you consider yourself to be a critical thinker? One of my kind supervisors pointed out that this was one of those questions like, "Have you stopped beating your wife?" There is no way that a student could respond in any way but the affirmative. For this reason, the question was modified to address the issue of how a student becomes a critical thinker. By providing references to examples of critical thinking, the question was intended to encourage students to recall specific experiences in APPLE which had contributed to the development of those skills, and a critical attitude towards the world.

Question 7

One aspect of student engagement in school is participation in the range of activities that are available, especially at high school – sports, politics, drama, art and so on. Did/do you feel that you were engaged in these activities more or less than your peers? In what ways, if any, do you consider your level of involvement an outgrowth of your APPLE experiences? Parents, did you feel your child was engaged in extra-curricular to a greater or lesser extent, and is this an outgrowth of the APPLE experience?

At elementary school, especially a JK-Grade 6 school, the number of extra-curricular opportunities is usually quite limited--a cross-country running team, a Chess Club, perhaps some track-and-field activities in the spring. So the tradition of engaging in school life by joining a club would not have had much opportunity to develop in APPLE. Moreover, it could be argued that the close knit nature of the APPLE community might have discouraged APPLE students from involvement in broader recreational and social activities. On the other hand, their close involvement with other APPLE students might have made some more eager and willing to participate in such activities.

This question was designed to open the door to this form of engagement for students to pursue after they left the program and entered Grades 7/8 and high school. I reasoned that, if students are more highly engaged in school during their formative years, developing a participatory attitude towards school, one manifestation of this engagement might be participating in school sports, music, drama or political clubs.

That having been said, it is possible the opposite might be true: some critical thinkers may well have been turned off by the notion of joining a club, of the singleness of purpose that some clubs may have. Their participation in school life may well have taken on a more individualistic, rather than group, nature. This would be a tougher

attribute to identify.

Parent Question

In your years in APPLE, you were part of a learning community, brought together and held there by your passion for learning. Did these community relationships or attachments lead to other activities – sports, politics, bird walks, gardening – either during your time in APPLE or after they ended. For how long have these connections with members of the APPLE community persisted after you left the program?

This question was posed only to parents, with the intent of probing aspects of social capital as proposed by Coleman (1988). A group of like-minded individuals, he argued, might coalesce around a particular issue or concern and develop, through connections to these relationships, norms, expectations, a degree of social power or influence that could be invested to achieve a specific purpose. Coleman (1991) went on to observe that "relationships, once established over a specific purpose, will outlast that purpose and can create social capital for other purposes" (p.2).

I wanted to put this question to the members of the APPLE parent body because I suspected that, having formed into a community with a shared educational philosophy and having so many shared experiences--volunteering in class, serving on committees, developing protocols, driving on field trips--small groups of parents may have stayed together after their children had left APPLE, and perhaps turned their collective attention to other causes. I wanted to find out if this was indeed true and, if so, what types of causes had attracted the attention of former APPLE parents.

Ethical guidelines for key informant interviews Conducting interviews with key informants, especially when these informants are students, required careful attention

to ethical considerations. The University of Western Ontario (UWO) Research Ethics Board for Non-medical Research Involving Human Subjects (NMREB) outlines the broad ethical considerations for ensuring the protection of research subjects. In its 2002 publication, the NWREB explains that this protection is best assured by addressing the following: 1) that voluntary participation is assured, indicated by free and informed consent and 2) that an appropriate balance exists between potential benefits of the research to the participant or to society and the risks assumed by the participant” (p. 3).

In its review of my proposal, the Ethics Review Panel recommended that, in the interest of removing any hints of bias or coercion from the study, it would be preferable for a third-party to establish initial contact with the potential interviewees. I proposed that this could be an APPLE Executive member, either the APPLE Chairperson or the Registrar, since they have access to contact information for current members of APPLE and this proposal was accepted by the review panel.

While we--the APPLE Chairperson, the APPLE Registrar and I--made every effort to abide by the spirit of this stipulation, it must be acknowledged that my interview schedule took place over the short space of one month, July 2008. My initial meeting with the APPLE Chair and Registrar took place immediately upon my return to London from Shanghai, China, and established a potential list of interviewees. However, we also discovered that there is much lost history in APPLE, as can be typical of volunteer organizations. Although they had a current list of APPLE parents and were eager to make initial contact with them, going further back to find APPLE families who had left the program proved to be challenging. Together we began searching our own memories for former APPLE members. Both members of the APPLE Executive went out of their way to contact parents of whom they had heard, who had long-time connection with the program. Indeed, at their final APPLE General Meeting of the year, in June 2008, at a gathering of the full parent body, they even informed those present of the impending research project and asked for help in submitting names and contact numbers to facilitate the study. Many parents responded to this request and, by the time I arrived back in Canada in early July, a number of parents had already been contacted personally by the Chairperson or Registrar and were unanimously enthusiastic in their willingness to participate in the study. Even so, there remained a large gap in

the sources for the study, that is, those APPLE families who had been out of the program longer than the memories of current members. Fortunately for me, about a year ago in the spring of 2007, as the internet communication program, Facebook, was rapidly gaining popularity, a number of APPLE students tracked me down and added me into their address books. By contacting them through Facebook, and seeking out their contacts with other former APPLE students, several gaps in the research were able to be bridged.

With the limit of the time span, and the fact that July is a holiday month, there were several older students and parents who were contacted directly by this researcher, in the absence of the third-party members listed above. In addition, five interviews needed to be undertaken over the telephone, as a result of distance or time constraints. In a few cases, specifically with younger interviewees who had not been students of mine, the child's mother remained in the room, or within earshot of the conversation, for example, cooking dinner in the adjacent kitchen. I determined that what candidness may have been sacrificed by having a parent nearby would be compensated for by setting the child at ease during the interview by the proximity of a

parent. Lastly, in one instance, a chance encounter in a shopping mall led to a most fortunate solution to the difficulty of locating male interviewees in their early twenties, to fill in a gap in the cross-section of respondents. The former APPLE parent I ran into told me his son, age 23, was returning to London that evening, after studying at university in the United States. After making telephone contact with him, he enthusiastically agreed to be interviewed. In all cases, though, in keeping with the spirit of informed consent outlined by the Ethics Review Board, the list of questions and the consent form were e-mailed ahead of every interview schedule and signed copies kept by the researcher, as was agreed upon with the Board. Participants were given a choice of whether they wished to be interviewed--and they all enthusiastically agreed. They also were reminded that they could choose to end the interview at any point; this represented my efforts to ensure informed and voluntary consent to participate.

Analysis of the data relied on guideposts established by Miles and Huberman (1984), which began before the data were collected. Miles and Huberman observed that qualitative data analysis begins with “anticipatory data reduction...[which] usually occurs in the form of methods for focusing and bounding the collection of data. What orienting ideas,” they asked, “does the researcher bring to the inquiry?” (p. 25). For this research project, my initial questions were generated based on the orienting ideas I brought to the study; specifically, I sought to discover common elements in attitudes--toward school, toward parents toward the learning process--that I suspected might be present.

Miles and Huberman (1984) asserted that the role of the qualitative analysts is “to draw conclusions, to decide what things mean, and to note regularities, patterns, explanations...and propositions” (p. 26). These were the processes used to organize the data for presentation. Patterns of speech, repetition of specific language and consistent observations made by interviewees were used to group responses. Although initially I organized responses into tables, I found that this form of presentation added neither clarity nor insight to the discussion. Greater focus was achieved, instead, by grouping

each interviewee according to the language used in responses. By this means, I was able to make observations such as “sixteen interviewees made either direct or indirect observations of their learning styles,” which brought greater meaning to the data.

CONCLUSION As reviewed earlier, most current research on the effectiveness of parent involvement in education is quite different from that addressed in this study. This study represents a unique opportunity to explore the long term influences of parent involvement in education for at least two reasons. First, the APPLE program embodies substantial differences in the nature and intensity of parent participation to that investigated in earlier studies, especially with regard to the nature of classroom involvement of parents as summarized in Table 2-4 and in their time commitment. Second, this study addresses a broader definition of effectiveness, not the immediate academic benefits for an individual's child, but rather the larger questions of the broader legacies of this level of involvement. This larger purpose, succinctly put, was to explore the types of adolescents and young citizens these graduates from the APPLE Program would turn out to be.

The original questions I posed in Chapter 1 remained to be explored. How did APPLE graduates view their experiences in the APPLE Program and the effects of those experiences on their subsequent education and life? To be more specific, what attitudes would they carry toward learning? How would they describe their relationships with adults, with teachers and with parents and would they connect this to their APPLE experiences? Would they see themselves as critical thinkers, engaging with and affecting the larger world they would inhabit? Would they make a connection between the types of learning events and daily interactions with adults which APPLE students experience in their first eight years of school and subsequent attitudes towards learning and relationships with adults?

This was the nature of the questions that were put to them in the July 2008 interviews. The following chapter examines their responses in detail, presenting specific observations by students and parents, and identifying recurring themes.

Chapter 4

FINDINGS

The following chapter is divided into four major sections, beginning with an introduction to the research where the interview process is described and interviewee profiles presented and explained. Following an explanation of how the student and parent responses to the interview questions were grouped according to recurring themes, these responses are discussed in detail in the next section. Substantial use of direct quotations is made, to ensure authenticity. This followed by a section devoted to a presentation of emergent themes, that is, those trends that were introduced by the interviewees with sufficient frequency to be worthy of note. The chapter concludes with single-sentence summaries to each question presented during interviews and to each emergent theme. INTRODUCTION TO THE RESEARCH

Table 4-1 presents the list of students and parents who were interviewed in accord with inclusion criteria discussed in the previous chapter. Sincere efforts were made to match the selection of participants with the criteria listed in Chapter 3. The Table shows the ages of the students, to substantiate the claim of having taken a broad cross-section of the student body. The gender of the students is identified, ten female and eight male, a balance I deemed reasonable. A relatively, but appropriately, small number of students, six, were more recent graduates of the program and, therefore, not former students of mine. And all of the students but two had spent their entire early years, from JK to Grade 6, in APPLE. The names listed, though, have been changed to ensure anonymity.

Rather than creating further pseudonyms for parents who were interviewed, I identified them by their relationship to the former APPLE students, e.g., Daniel's mom, Jacob's dad, with one exception. In this case, I interviewed only the parent and, therefore, used a pseudonym for him directly. I also listed the approximate time span when their children attended APPLE, as best could be ascertained.

Table 4-1 *Interviewee Profiles*

Student Participants (N=18)			Parent participants (N=11)		
Age	Gender	My student	Pseudonym	Status	APPLE year
4	M		Gerald	Mother	1996-2008
4	M		Bill		
5	F		Alison	Mother	1994-2006
5	F		Kristen	Mother & Father	1995-2005
5	F		Lilly		
7	M		Dylan	Mother	1994-2007
3	F	Y	Sally		
9	M	Y	Edward	Mother	1994-2002

19	M	Y	Michael	Mother	1994-2004
20	F	Y	Cathy	Mother	1992-2005
21	M	Y	Jason		
21	F	Y	Holly		
22	M	Y	Carl		
22	F	Y	Barbara		
23	F	Y	Susan	Mother & Father	1992-2000
24	F	Y	Samantha		
26	M	Y	Donald	Mother	1986-1994
27	F	Y	Jill		
				<u>Sole parent participants:</u>	
				Dad (Bob)	1996-2004
				Melanie's Mother & Father	1995-2007

Male students=8 Female students=10 Total students=18 Mothers alone=7 Fathers alone=1 Mothers and Fathers together=3 Total parents=11

Explanation of interview process and presentation of responses

Most interviews took place face-to-face, required between 30 minutes to an hour to complete, were recorded digitally and later transcribed into text. In five cases, because of distance or time constraints or equipment malfunctions, I was compelled to make use of earlier skills developed as a newspaper reporter, and record notes and quotations on a laptop while the interview was being conducted. In these cases, the precise wording of quotes was verified by reading my written records to the interviewee. A total of 29 interviews were conducted, consisting of 18 former students and 11 former parents of the APPLE Program. Of the students interviewed, 10 were female and 8 male. Their ages ranged from 14 to 27, situating them between just having completed Grade 8 (currently entering high school) and having completed an undergraduate degree, currently part of the work force for several years. Of the parents interviewed, most were women, not surprisingly, since mothers tend to be the more active members of the APPLE Program, in my experience. In one case, I interviewed a father from the program, since he had been the more active member, and in three additional cases, the parents were interviewed together, with the mother making the greatest contribution to the discussion, but with occasional commentary by the father, whose observations I included in the transcripts. A review of responses to each interview questions is provided below, re-establishing what was hoped to be learned by asking the question and summarizing what was revealed. Although summary tables were created to differentiate between student and parent responses, the following discussion of individual responses includes both. The individuals whose responses are directly quoted are identified as either student or parent. Certainly it is fair to observe that there are nuanced differences between the quality of a teenager's reflection and that of a parent. For example, more former students commented, understandably, on the "fun" quality of their early learning experiences, and the expectations about education that they developed and this is noted in the summary. Similarities between student and

parent responses were far more common and pervasive, emerging throughout the interviews. Themes that were anticipated by the questions--relationships with adults/parents in comparison to peers, attitude towards learning--and those themes which became apparent over the course of multiple interviews--understanding personal learning styles, respect for others--emerged in both student and parent responses. In a few cases, the greater depth of experience and reflection that parents brought to the discussion could be identified, but these served to support and enhance, rather than contradict. For these reasons, with the exception of Parent Question 7, addressing social capital, the general comments and specific quotations are combined in the following discussion.

In addition, rather than presenting a random collection of responses to each question, I have grouped them according to common themes. In Question 1, for instance, in which participants identified specific attitudes towards learning, I grouped them into four sub-categories, and specified the number of respondents who shared that viewpoint. For other questions, I organized the responses into tables, again to provide

more specific details on the nature and number of respondents. STUDENT AND PARENT RESPONSES--A SUMMARY

The following section provides a summary of direct responses to the questions posed during the interviews. Using the Miles and Huberman (1984) guidelines presented in the previous chapter, responses have been grouped according to recurring themes. Although this results in data reduction, organizing responses in this fashion provides greater clarity for readers. In

almost all cases, interviewees are quoted directly, rather than paraphrased, and, of course, the responses presented are those which most directly speak to the questions posed. A more detailed analysis, along with implications of these data, takes place in the final chapter.

Question 1

Your early educational experiences, with your parent and other adults in your classroom on a daily basis, were somewhat unique. You participated in many out-of-classroom experiences, had many guest speakers and visitors, and were part of an expanded learning community.

a) How did these experiences affect you as a student?

b) Do you recall attitudes that you developed when you were a young member of APPLE persisting after you left the program?

c) Do you feel they were an asset or a handicap after you left the program?

The interviewees, students and parents alike, unanimously and enthusiastically sang the praises of that aspect of the APPLE Program, of the learning atmosphere that they breathed in every day, enriched by field trips, special events and

unique activities. Responses have been classified under four headings that characterize this atmosphere, as follows: (a) the fun and excitement of learning, (b) unique contributions of parents, (c) the specific "alternative" pedagogy of the APPLE Program, and (d) the outside-the-classroom-walls nature of learning generated through frequent outings and field trips. The discussion is concluded with a caution expressed by two of the respondents, who differentiated between the process of learning and the institutions which deliver education. (a) *Fun and games* Almost all of the student respondents (13) referred to the excitement and "fun" that they associated with attending school during their APPLE days. Susan, now aged 23, says that she really enjoyed school in those days. "I associated learning with fun," she says, adding that she continued to be motivated by the fun aspect to learning, even when the work became much harder at high school and university. Kristen found that the enthusiasm she felt towards school was difficult to maintain after leaving APPLE. Now 15, she has a firm belief that learning is "supposed to be fun," adding that she found that enjoyment difficult to maintain through grades 7 and 8, although she is re-discovering it in high school. Edward, now 19, remembers eagerly looking forward to attending school: "I enjoyed it, I wanted to go to school the next day because I wanted to know what we were going to be doing." This attitude persisted, he claims, beyond his years in APPLE; he recalls, "I only skipped one class all the way through high school," as he did not want to miss out on the opportunity for learning. These three students provided the most articulate expressions of the sense of joy and enthusiasm that they developed during their years in APPLE. This joy was not necessarily connected to an atmosphere of entertainment or fun-centred classroom activities, but appeared to be associated with learning itself. In this way, these students provided support for the Mission Statement in the *APPLE Handbook* (2005) which declared, "Children will experience a joy of learning in a curriculum enhanced by the personal expertise of parents in collaboration with teachers" (p. 5). The joy of learning is not portrayed as a contrivance, a means of tricking children into learning. The expectation is that, if learning is meaningful and authentic, and students make investments in their learning, it is an enjoyable experience -and one that students will expect to find and, indeed, to seek out.

This belief in a natural joy of learning is reflected in many alternative school philosophies. For example, Ottawa's Grant Alternative School does not refer to a joy of learning but it does claim "we focus on making learning engaging" (§4). Likewise, Toronto's Downtown Alternative School classroom practices "strive to create an environment that fosters the natural curiosity of children" (§1).

This form of enjoyment, as an extension of satisfying an innate desire to learn and understand, is not limited to a child's world. It is worth noting that each of the

above three APPLE students reported to have maintained this attitude well beyond their APPLE experiences, incorporating it into their secondary and post-secondary education.

(b) Parent specialists and exposure to wide variety of ideas Five respondents spoke specifically on the impact of having parent "specialists" in the classroom. By this

I refer to times when APPLE parents would come into the classroom and share their expertise in a specialized field: a doctor, complete with lab coat, speaking about health, medicine, bones; an electrician teaching how circuits work; a fireman describing daily life in a fire hall (before heading off on a field trip there); an artist running a class lesson on watercolour painting. Michael, now 19, saw this as a valuable way of compensating for a teacher's lack of knowledge in a specific area: "If a teacher wasn't good in art, he would 'outsource' to a parent who was good at it, or passionate about it, parents who were keen on trees and bugs and wild things." Michael added that this passion that the parents brought to the kids, in their area of expertise, was contagious and it would inspire him to be engaged and learn more, even though he "was never super academic".

Some respondents saw value in how being exposed to a variety of parents, in different careers, broadened their outlook on learning. Donald, aged 26, said that these experiences "opened my eyes [to the fact] that there's a lot of learning I could do," presumably in all these fields of work or interest that parents demonstrated in class. One

of the fathers used similar language to describe the influence of these types of presentations on his daughter, remarking they "opened her eyes to a number of aspects--exposure to different careers...." Cathy, now 20, also appreciated the variety of

careers she learned about, including a plumber and an electrician whose fascination with these practicalities of life led her to pursue some tech courses through high school." "It was always interesting having exposure to a bunch of different points of view and careers....You don't get exposed to that kind of stuff at all in high school...they don't talk about those kinds of careers at all." One parent described the importance

of this kind of exposure in bringing to life topics that are more abstract or foreign to a child. When a firefighter comes into class, she explained, "he's not only a firefighter but he's so-and-so's dad and he came in and spoke to us and took us to the fire station...These events de-mystify things, make things more tangible so there's no barrier

between themselves and the world." **(c) Alternative pedagogy** Four respondents identified some of the alternative philosophy and practices of APPLE as having had a significant impact on their attitude towards learning. Michael (19) learned to place a high value on the importance not just arriving at the right answer but of "getting things wrong" along the way. He mentioned specific activities such as technology challenges--building bridges, designing pulley systems, making rocket-launched landing crafts--where many answers are okay. Even today, he said, "I always go looking for more information if I find I'm wrong. If you're scared to be wrong, you won't even put your hand up to answer a question." Susan (23) recalls

developing the concept of the importance of process, rather than merely product. She specifically mentioned multiplication, explaining "you can always do the crunching bit, a lot of the rote crunching is for specific situations, like 6x6 is always 36, but if you learn the idea of multiplication, then you can always figure out problems." Her

APPLE years were also ones where she developed the concept of inter-connectedness between disciplines. She recalled the thematic nature of APPLE teaching, where many subjects were addressed under the umbrella of a specific theme, rather than discrete or disconnected disciplines. She added that she later enrolled in a unique multi-disciplinary Arts and Sciences program at McMaster University, based in part on her experiences in APPLE. *(d) Beyond the classroom walls.*

Some respondents raised the idea that learning is not restricted to school classrooms and textbooks but that it is everywhere. This idea was articulated by three respondents. Jason, now 21, said that his APPLE field trip experiences helped lead him to believe that "learning is not restricted to school time. You can learn outside of school, read books, go places. In APPLE, you see that learning is all around you. You are 'surrounded by school.'" Kristen's

mom observed that her children carry this attribute with them as well. As they plan family vacations, she said, "We are very experiential. When we go to Ottawa, they will almost always choose one of two museums, though their tastes have changed as they have grown older."

Jason offered a unique perspective on this attitude towards learning that he had actually developed into more of a life philosophy. He is currently enrolled in second-year university, studying engineering and he talked about people he'd met in various job experiences, both as a worker in the fast food service industry and as a researcher at UWO: "It doesn't matter what you want to do as long as you enjoy doing it." This respect for the passion that people have for their work, he said, was developed

in part by seeing the passion that parent volunteers had. *(e) Different attitude toward school than learning.*

Two students offered somewhat dissenting opinions on the nature of their APPLE learning experiences. These two students differentiated between learning and school. They both had positive attitudes towards learning--the value of pursuing what interested them, what they had a passion for. But, while acknowledging the "great minds" and involved parents who were attracted to the APPLE program, and through whose influence, "kids were more excited about learning," Donald, 26, gently suggested that "school is not the end-all, be-all of learning." He supported this by noting all the learning experiences that take place outside of the classroom walls.

Jill, aged 27, spoke more stridently against the formal, authoritarian structures that she sees as lending support to the education system.

About school, she said, "I hate it; I hate the structure of it; I hate the uselessness of it. And I've hated it ever since ...I left APPLE." She went on to explain that she was quite capable of learning, and actually enjoyed doing so, on her terms: "Tell me what I need to know," she said, "and I'll go and learn it. But [don't ask me to] go and sit and daydream in a lecture theatre for three hours just to get my 2.5 percent participation mark that I get for showing up for this class."

These two students did not criticize their school experiences while in APPLE and in fact, praised the eclectic nature of the program, with its emphasis on out-of-classroom experiences. Instead, this criticism was aimed at what they perceived to be the narrow confines of education offered by schools and universities.

Question 2

Do you recall specific experiences in APPLE that helped to form your attitude towards

learning? How did they influence your attitude?

This question was intended to allow students to use stories of personal experiences to explain their understanding of the development of an attitude towards learning. All the students reported on general activities such as having parents in the classroom, or driving on field trips in car pools, the Grade 5/6 camping trip, for instance, but only two respondents recalled specific instances from their APPLE experiences, and one of these recollections only occurred following prompting by a parent.

It was more common to recall the general learning atmosphere that students associated with APPLE. Each student expressed having positive feelings about the learning environment--the anticipation of going to school each day, the excitement of traveling with friends on field trips, the comfort and support of parents--but these did not appear to be linked to particular memorable experiences.

Question 3

When you continued your education, through grades 7 to 12, what kinds of differences – negative or positive – did you notice between you and your classmates?

To what extent to you think these differences could be attributed to your APPLE experiences?

This question was intended to address an obvious limitation to this inquiry--the heavy reliance on subjective data. APPLE students are not able to compare, in an objective sense, the type of student they became through the influence of their early educational experiences in APPLE to the type of student they would have become

without those experiences. They were consequently asked to compare themselves to their peers, to the classmates they encountered after the conclusion of their APPLE life following Grade 6.

Students and parents alike found it difficult to respond to the last part of this question with a clear positive or negative response. Instead, their answers became intertwined with several other questions or emerging themes including the following:

- a) difficulty with the transition into home school environment, in part because of perceived differences in attitudes towards learning
- b) comfort level experienced with adults through teenage years and into adulthood
- c) strong, positive relationship with parents through adolescence
- d) understanding of personal learning styles

Each of these themes is examined more deeply, and student/parent responses addressed, later in this chapter.

Question 4

Adolescence can sometimes be a somewhat tumultuous time, as teenagers re-define their relationships with their parents and other adults. In what ways do you feel the relationship you had with your parent(s) during your adolescence may have been influenced by your experiences as an APPLE student?

Both students and parents responded with enthusiasm and clarity to this question. Responses largely fell into the following two categories (a), student perceptions of their relationships with their parents and (b) parent perceptions of

relationships with their child(ren). Each is discussed in turn. *(a) Student relationships with parents* Again, the responses to this question were nearly unanimous, with all but three students responding that the relationship they have, or had, with their parents during adolescence remained close and positive. Similarly, all parents reported having a close and trusting rapport with their teenagers through adolescence. However, most raised the uncertainty of whether this was an outgrowth of APPLE or a pre-existing condition that would have developed outside of the experience of participating in their child(ren)'s education. Rather than pour through a litany of testimonies to the strength of parent/student relationships, Table 4-2 summarizes comments made by students.

Table 4-2 *Student perceptions of parent/child relationship*

Student	Age	Comment
Michael	19	I didn't distance myself from my parents at all; I never went through the moody teenage stage. Any problems with school or with people, I would just tell them and we would discuss it. I have no secrets from my parents.
Donald	26	My relationship with my mom was strengthened in APPLE because she knew what I was learning, she was involved in the classroom. It was a bonding experience for us.
Edward	19	I have a lot stronger bonds with my mom. A lot of my friends are not comfortable and avoid talking with their parents but I don't. Even when my friends are over, I don't care whether she listens in to what I say.
Dylan	17	My relationship with my mom hasn't really changed that much. I still find it hard to talk with my Mom and Dad about problems, but I think maybe my relationship is a little bit closer, compared to other guys.
Kristen	16	A lot of kids seem to hate their parents. They think their parents are against them, are being unfair about everything. . . When I go to some friend's house, I always stop and talk to their parents, but none of my friends talk with adults.
Bill	14	I actually like talking with my parents about what's happening in my life, not just problems. I don't keep parts of my life separate, hidden.
Holly	21	[My relationship during early adolescence] was okay at first because I still went to my mom as often as I used to but as I got older, my dad expected me to be more independent. With APPLE, my mom felt more connected, more involved in my life, so it was hard for her to find her place once APPLE experience was over for her.

There were many more comments made by students but this is a fairly representative sample and reveals the current of positive feelings and close relationships experienced by former APPLE students. *(b) Parent comments on child relationships*

Similarly, parents made parallel observations of their relationships with their

teenaged children. Edward's mom commented, "Edward and I are very close; he talks with me all the time, about everything. I think he found the kids he was hanging around with had very little parent involvement in their lives." Melanie's mother observed that their daughter "keeps us informed on what's going on in her life. I think that certain expectations were built up on what normal is, in terms of how involved parents are in their kids' lives, how much communication takes place. And this has continued after she left APPLE". Likewise, Alison's mom provided a contrast with her relationship with her own mother: "I didn't have this type of relationship with my mother--Alison and I are very close... There's a foundation of respect and closeness, even though adolescence happens, and kids don't want to hang out with their parents".

As captured by these quotations, relationships between former APPLE students and their parents appear to have remained strong through adolescence and beyond. Notable exceptions came from two students whose parents either divorced during their teenage years, or began a relationship with an unwelcome partner; these events created strains on the parent/teenager relationship, which although now more stable have not yet been resolved. This section closes with an observation that relationships are a two-way street, as one of the APPLE parents reminded me. She pointed out that her understanding of how children think, process information and express themselves was expanded through her APPLE classroom experiences: "We have a greater understanding of how kids think, how they learn, we're more comfortable with them, because we grew up along with them." Here was a question I had not considered and wished that I could return to ask of parents: How did your classroom experiences influence your ability to interact with a variety of young people in a range of settings?

Question 5

Because of their mutual interest and concern, APPLE parents tend to form a type of learning community, often with similar values. Can you recall your relationships with adults changing after you left APPLE and moved into a more traditional school program?

In what ways were your relationships with adults similar to, or different from, those of your adolescent peers?

All students concurred that their abilities to talk comfortably with adults, which were developed and practiced throughout their years in APPLE, continued through their adolescent years. They agreed that they saw parents as valuable resources for information and did not view them as figures of authority, to be avoided or feared. Parents also responded unanimously, that they saw these skills emerge through their child(ren)'s APPLE experience, and observed that this attribute was noticeably different from that of their peers, although two parents were not sure if this was directly attributable to the program. *(a) Student responses* Of those students who directly attributed their comfort with adult relationships to their lives in the APPLE

program, the following is a brief snapshot of five student responses. Typical of general responses to this question was this observation from 15-year old Alison, who identified the comfort that develops with familiarity: "I can really talk to adults comfortably but some of my friends can't. APPLE helped that since I knew every single one of my classmates' parents." Edward, age 19, also acknowledged, "I find it more easy to talk with people, especially adults, than a lot of my friends." He explained this added a level of engagement to his adolescent years, as he worked regularly with adults as a volunteer in, for example, the lacrosse league. Susan, now 23, had a similar comment; "outside of APPLE," she observed, "I don't think I saw very many of my peers interacting with their parents or even other adults."

By including teachers as members of the adult category, Michael moved the discussion to his relationships with them: "I found it easier to talk with teachers than most of my friends," he noted. "I never saw them as scary voices I was never afraid to ask a question or to challenge ideas that were brought up." This likely can be attributed to the feeling of familiarity, of having been in interactive situations, in this case with APPLE teachers as well as parents, which can make verbal exchanges less threatening.

Twenty-one-year-old Jason offered a unique perspective on the effect of having been engaged in conversations with classroom parents over many years. He observed that parents would always speak with him on an equal level, rather than talking down to him, and seemed to expect him to respond as a mature, thoughtful individual. They "raised the bar" in terms of maturity, he thinks; "maybe when you're used to always talking with adults, and they expect you to talk with them at a mature level, you learn to speak more maturely." After leaving the program, he said, he noticed that, in terms of speaking clearly and confidently with adults, his "peers were less mature in that way. I would meet them and think, 'You're like me ... a few years ago'".

(b) Parent responses Again, parents were unanimous in their observations of the comfort level that their children have with adults, both today and during their APPLE experiences. Rather than listing their consistent observations, I would like to draw attention to the responses of two parents, mothers of students who have been identified with specific personal challenges. One mother observed that her son, at age 15, is "more comfortable talking with adults. He has greater confidence with adults ... than do his peers" and attributes this to the collaborative atmosphere of APPLE. The other parent noted that her 18-year old son has "had to deal with an anxiety disorder--he's very shy socially...but I think he's more comfortable with adults. They're familiar so he finds interaction with them easier." It is especially encouraging to hear that this particular influence, the familiarity of working with parents for eight years in APPLE, is strong enough to counteract personal challenges that could otherwise inhibit learning and, indeed, day-to-day interactions.

(c) Early recollections Two students provided memories of early classroom experiences that provide unique insight into the influence of parent interaction in formative years. Fourteen-year old Bill recalled, "My first few years of school, when my mom was there in class, I always thought it was more comforting. It was someone you knew better than your teacher." Twenty-seven-year old Jill commented that "it's weird having memories of eight to ten different parents teaching me how to read. I remember picking out different types of books for different parents like, 'Oh, she won't let me get away with reading that one. It's too easy' or 'This guy really likes science, maybe I should pick a science book.'" Notwithstanding the amusement this anecdote offers, it is worth

observing the level of empathy for adults that this young APPLE student had developed, as she faced the difficult decision of choosing a book that would satisfy both her reading needs and the 'teaching' needs of the parent. It reveals a respect for different adult personalities, and harkens back to Coleman's (1988) social capital ideas, where relationships of trust and reciprocity are strengthened through interactions within this extended community. *(d) Does APPLE create these effects or reflect them?*

This section concludes with another look at the chicken-and-egg paradox which lies beneath many of the questions that were raised concerning the influence of APPLE on its participants. The following three accounts question--inconclusively--whether the comfort of talking with adults was a result of APPLE experiences or whether this attribute existed before APPLE. Daniel, age 27, stated that "I've never thought much about how I talk with adults. I was always comfortable speaking with adults but I'm not sure what caused that, not sure it was related to my APPLE experiences." One mother made a similar observation: "Cathy is more comfortable talking with adults [than her peers]. I don't know if that's a function of APPLE or if it's just Cathy being who she is."

Susan's mother made an excellent personal summary of this exploration; she identified Susan's passion for learning, for her seeking answers to personal questions, but then mused, "Did APPLE contribute to this? I assume so, but it's been there all along. I don't know if it came from the parent or the environment." Perhaps the background of Susan's mother as a botanist led her to her next question: "there's no control group, no one that started out with comparable skills and went to a non-APPLE program, so how can you be sure?"

One of the fathers made an attempt to describe specifically how this comfort level with adults was enhanced through APPLE experiences. "Those kids [APPLE] were exposed to a variety of adults all the time.

While being driven on [field] trips, they'd be engaged in conversations. These adult interactions, both formal and informal... non-related individuals, they [APPLE students] develop at least a comfort level in these situations." He went on to observe that, in the case of his daughter, she was always comfortable with adults but this skill "was accentuated and grown" through APPLE, "especially her ability to negotiate with adults."

None of the above discussion is intended to suggest that students outside of the APPLE program are unable to establish strong relationships with adults and to feel comfortable communicating with parents and teachers. Nor can it be said that APPLE students can objectively compare the strength of their relationships with adults to that of their peers. All former APPLE students acknowledged that they feel comfortable talking with adults, including teachers, and some believe this is experienced at a greater degree than that of their peers. Most students and parents attributed this comfort to the familiarity with adults that daily classroom contact created, throughout many years of APPLE experiences.

Question 6

We often hear that a goal of education is to produce critical thinkers, citizens who ask questions, who are independent-minded, who consider consequences of actions. How do you feel that your experiences in APPLE assisted you in developing your critical thinking skills – if at all?

All students responded, perhaps predictably, that they considered themselves to be critical thinkers but were hard-pressed both to identify how this process took place or what experiences contributed to its development. Likewise, parents unanimously concurred that they viewed their child(ren) as critical thinkers. Therefore, a different approach will be taken when assessing their answers. Over the course of the interview, and while recoding the transcripts, I noticed several students demonstrating critical thinking skills as they analyzed the questions I was asking, and were generating specific examples of using these skills, without prompting or guidance on my part. Six examples are reviewed in the following paragraphs.

Cathy told a story of a Grade 7 experience, where her class was asked to debate the statement, "Homeless people choose to be homeless and poor and should be left alone." She found herself alone in opposition to the statement, even though her classmates were from a similar middle-class environment. She recalled being challenged to develop and explain her opinions independently and to take a stand, in her eyes, against her peers--"they were so white collar, narrow minded ...[but] I know what I believe and I don't mind being the only one."

Holly, 21, says that she gained a reputation in high school for her strong critical thinking skills. Her peers brought essays to her, seeking her opinion and her editing skills. She attributed the development of these skills directly to APPLE. She recalled that "the questions I was asked in APPLE, especially in grades 4/5/6, were thinking questions, not easy; I remember that you'd have to think there for half an hour and think...Now, on essays, I never get the 'Why do you think this?' question from a teacher, because I was always told, you say your thought and then you explain why."

Edward, 19, when responding to a question about differences and similarities with his peers, brought up the question of drug use and the choices a teenager faces. Using critical thinking skills, Edward explained how he weighed the consequences of various choices of action and defended his decision: "I weighed it out and chose not to use it. APPLE gave me a sense of sticking up for yourself, that it's okay, you don't have to do something just because somebody else thinks you should."

Daniel, 26, responded to the critical thinking question by stating, "I'm an [engineering occupation]--I can't not be a critical thinker"! He went to explain that his thinking skills were "definitely related to my APPLE experience, where we were not just regurgitating information... We had parents in the class who brought their own experiences and knowledge... [and] had broader discussions, macro-discussions rather than 'the test is on Friday; memorize this.'"

One mother recalled an example of her son challenging the question-generating system for the *Reach for the Top* team at his high school, years after he had left APPLE. Her son, Nathan, now 19, had always been fascinated by technology, especially how things work: "Nathan was so frustrated that the *Reach for the Top* questions were never technology questions," she recalled. "Even the vocabulary questions, knowing the meanings of words--he knew so many parts to a lathe, for instance--but ...". One final anecdote comes from Jason, 21, now a university student. He was reflecting on the idea of tenure, and on the nature of thinking deeply, which he remembered from his APPLE days. As he fumbled for the proper wording, he arrived at this: "tenure is...like this position, that is safe, where you can express an opinion without losing your job. It's like ... 'we'll pay you to think, to come up with intelligent opinions.' If that starts early, like in APPLE, so much the better." Before concluding the exploration of this question, it must be remembered that there remains the ongoing question of whether APPLE contributed to the development of these skills, or whether there were other, more influential factors. When responding to the question of the development of thinking skills, one parent declared, "Some APPLE teachers did not contribute significantly to that... I don't think the program inherently develops that, although it has the greater potential to shape those skills. I wouldn't draw the conclusion that a parent participating program necessarily does so." This emphasis on individual teacher qualities is examined in greater detail, under the heading of Emerging themes.

Question 7

One aspect of student engagement in school is participation in the range of activities that are available, especially at high school --- sports, politics, drama, art and so on. Did/do you feel that you were engaged in these activities more or less than your peers? In what ways, if any, do you consider your level of involvement an outgrowth of your APPLE experiences?

Of all the questions, responses to this one provided the greatest contrast of

opinions. They ranged from "yes, I joined almost every club or activity that I could" to "no, I don't like large groups so I'm not a club joiner." About half of the students considered themselves to be moderately involved in extra-curricular activities, often in areas of specific interest. Another student explained that, because of the demands of his semi-professional sports career, he was unable to be involved in other extra curricular activities. It appears that the results from this question remain inconclusive, perhaps more a reflection of individual personalities rather than the influence of APPLE.

Parent Question 7

In your years in APPLE, you were part of a learning community, brought together and held there by your passion for learning. Did these community relationships or attachments lead to other activities – sports, politics, bird walks, gardening – either during your time in APPLE or after they ended. For how long have these connections with members of the APPLE community persisted after you left the program?

It will be recalled this question was directed only to parent participants. None of them responded in the affirmative--it appears, on the surface, that once parents leave APPLE, the connections and networks they have established are not maintained, at least not in an organized fashion. Two parents acknowledged that they maintained a few social ties with members of the community. And there is at least one group of mothers who gather regularly as friends. Indeed, during my interviews there was a ten-year anniversary of this gathering, to celebrate the recent graduation of one of the women. Daniel's mom commented on the value of the support that members of this group provide each other; "being a certain age, you get to know people who are going through similar kinds of experiences." Three of the mothers acknowledged, somewhat regretfully, that they had not maintained ties with members of the APPLE community after their child(ren) had graduated from Grade 6 because "real life just gets in the way. We feel some kind of connectedness, it will always be there," explained Alison's mom. "It's not for lack of love for these people." One of the fathers observed that "APPLE absolutely burns you out, as a parent." Indeed, two other mothers acknowledged that they enjoyed the reprieve from the ten-hours a month volunteer expectation, and were enjoying filling their days with non-APPLE business. Another mother commented--wryly but not regretfully--that she was not the kind of person who keeps in close contact with others; "but that's just us," she said. "I've lost touch with my home birth buddies too." There were nevertheless some interesting ongoing connections that are worth recording. Former APPLE parents reported they were involved with groups that included Habitat for Humanity, Talbot Land Trust, Children of Chernobyl, volunteer lacrosse coaching, leading Boy Scout groups, Homeopathic studies, school councils, preschool exercise groups and even an agency providing small-scale loans to women of India. It appears that, at least in this small cross-section of former APPLE parents, many parents continue to pursue volunteering through a variety of organizations, but do not stay together as a group. I will return to this in Chapter 5. EMERGENT THEMES The above section

reviewed the array of responses to the interview questions. I now turn to explore six themes that emerged during my analysis of the interview transcripts. These did not appear in all transcripts, nor were they responses to specific questions asked of each interviewee. Instead, these themes were embedded in responses to the standard questions or comments offered spontaneously during the course of the interviews. The six themes are listed below and then discussed in greater detail in the following section.

a) Safety: the sense of being protected, safe in the familiar environment of APPLE was seen as both an advantage and a detriment

b) Transition to home school: the transition from APPLE into Grade 7/8 was frequently identified as a challenging experience for students,

c) Learning styles: APPLE was credited with helping students to identify their particular learning style

d) Teacher quality: the quality of an individual teacher, whether within APPLE or outside, was widely recognized as the strongest determinant of student engagement

e) Respect: a sense of respect--of adults towards children and *vice versa*--was developed within APPLE but did not always exist outside

f) Community: the sense of community that APPLE fosters characterized by tolerance and excitement about learning expectations of success

a) Safety Altogether, eight different interviewees brought up this topic directly or indirectly. It arose in the very first interview, with 16-year old Alison. She was responding to the question of transitioning from the Grade 6 APPLE classroom to a Grade 7 classroom in her home school. She described her feelings of being "sheltered in APPLE," and, when pressed further, went on to explain, "APPLE was like a big bubble. Everyone was happy, we all got along, there wasn't any bullying or anything--I think this is taught in the classroom and then it grows because we're always working with parents."

During the interview with a mother of the boy with an anxiety disorder, she commented that Dylan is "very shy, socially. But in APPLE that didn't matter. He was surrounded by peers he had known for his entire school life." Likewise, the mother of Gerald, also diagnosed with a learning challenge, commented that APPLE provided a bubble, "a safe environment in the classroom." When I probed more deeply, to determine if this was a positive attribute, she commented, "It was very helpful for Gerald. There was better supervision, more adult eyes to address inappropriate behaviour, there was no bullying." However, when Gerald left APPLE, "it was hard for him to find and make friends."

Three other comments on detrimental effects of the APPLE safety net deserve attention. One father observed that APPLE children might be "coddled" by their parents, and might remain somewhat naïve to the reality of the larger world. Jason, age 21, commented that he felt that APPLE parents "tend to hang on a little longer--'you're still my little boy,' kind of attitude." He explained that, "the more parents are involved in your life, the less willing they are to let you go out and do crazy things"! Holly, 21, had a similar comment: "my mom had trouble letting go of me. She always wanted to check my homework, that kind of thing." This led to a few bumps in their relationship, she went on to explain, but that they eventually sorted them out.

This section concludes with an observation from a former student that again caused me to laugh out loud. I was discussing this APPLE safety net with 27-year old Jill, from the first APPLE graduating class. When asked about whether APPLE kept kids sheltered from the tough side of the real world, she responded, "It's a cost/benefit thing. You don't give up a great experience just because you know at some point you will have to leave it"! In other words, it is still good to hike up to the top of that mountain even if you know that, at some point, you

must return to the valley below. *(b)Transition to home school* The above topic segues easily into this theme, the abrupt change that students reported experiencing when leaving APPLE at the end of Grade 6 to enrol in their home school. Typically, APPLE students come from various neighbourhoods in London and, following the completion of Grade 6, enroll in their neighbourhood--or home--school. Comments on this transition came from every student interviewed, without prompting, and for many it appeared to be a painful, or at least challenging, time in their young lives. The comments ranged from teaching/learning issues, such as the tedium of sitting at a desk, to social issues of finding like-minded friends, to facing bullying or teasing situations. They also referred to some of the differences that APPLE students perceived between themselves and their peers.

Six students interviewed commented on the contrast between their APPLE teaching/learning experiences and those they encountered in Grades 7 and 8. All of a sudden, going to school, observed Jason, "felt like a job. Sit in your desk, take notes, and then go home and do what you're really interested in. APPLE was never like that--there was always room for my interests as well." Michael, 19, contrasted his APPLE experiences, especially when a parent specialist came into class: "Being in the presence of someone's passion makes the activity less stale," he said. "Rather than...Sit at a desk. The teacher talks. You write it down. You go home. You do homework." Susan, 23, agreed that her Grade 7 and 8 years, were "a letdown," after her APPLE school life.

Some students observed that it was not just that the style of teaching was more stale, it was also that they had developed an attitude towards learning, as reported earlier, that the educational experience should be engaging and rewarding. This enthusiasm for learning seemed somewhat "misplaced" for some. Sally, 18, said she initially engaged the teacher in conversations about specific assignments, trying to add excitement or variety to the assignment or trying to determine what the teacher was looking for. It was the reaction of her peers that caught her by surprise; "they didn't take kindly to that kind of stuff," she commented, laughing, adding that she learned to keep silent rather quickly.

Bill, 14, experienced a similar "disconnect" between his expectations of learning activities and those of his peers. He spoke enthusiastically about the dramatic presentations, especially self-choreographed dances that small groups of APPLE students would perform at assemblies. When opportunities for performance arose in Grade 7, he said, his peers thought "some of my ideas were a little bizarre--whole class dancing, entering dance competitions at the TVDSB." He went on to observe the tendency to conform to a group standard in Grade 7 was unsettling; "in grade 7/8, all the girls owned a [hair] straightener, all the guys had the gel. For the first little bit I was teased because I didn't buy in." Interestingly, Bill maintained that this did not undermine his self-confidence or self-image. Instead, he said, it is now (in high school) more acceptable for him to be a little different.

Four other students commented on how different their Grade 7 classrooms were from APPLE, and also how different were the attitudes and expectations of their peers. Aspects of this were alluded to when discussing responses to Question 2, where students tried to articulate differences they noticed between their peers and themselves as they moved into the traditional classroom programs in middle and high school.

Seven other students commented on the difficulty of establishing friendships in a new school setting in Grades 7 and 8. It was heart-breaking to hear the stories of the struggles that so many of these young people went through to establish themselves in a new

school setting. Rather than re-telling the stories, it is more meaningful to hear 16-year old Alison summarize her experience: "I didn't have any clue who anyone was when I got to Grade 7. I had never experienced how to make friends--we had all been friends since JK." Learning the new social rules was challenging as well. "All the girls are putting on makeup in the bathroom...and guys throwing stink bombs in the hall--I had never experienced stuff like that." Five students referred to being teased, often for being a strong student or, worse it seems, an enthusiastic one. Sally, 18, observed, "I was already a shy person, even in APPLE. [After leaving APPLE],I got really shy, the worst two years of my life...you get into middle school and you get teased and so you become shy." Sally concluded, "I'm not going to talk anymore then." Edward's mom remembers her son "learning how to work the system. He never wanted to get attention. He would try to hide the quality of work he was capable of, to avoid being teased." Two other students confirmed they used similar tactics to avoid being teased. Most reported great relief when they reached high school, were given choices of courses to take, and found peers who were more like-minded. One parent reported that her son, Ned, now 20, has a somewhat quirky personality--"aren't we all a little bit quirky?" his father commented--and is brilliant in the area of technology and applied sciences. During his years in APPLE, Ned had received guidance and even direct teaching from his parents and from his teachers, aimed at developing his social skills--how to make friends, peer group entry skills, thinking about the consequences of his comments: "He'd had so many social challenges [in APPLE] because he'd never concentrated on people, he hadn't focused on getting along with others. But he learned to do that in APPLE," his mother observed. His transition to Grade 7, she went on, was actually fairly smooth, compared to what they had anticipated. Another former student, Holly, 21, credited some of her early experiences for helping develop her sense of self-esteem that she believed contributed to a relatively smooth transition. "I used to be so shy, terrified of everything," she said, "but after being in APPLE, I really learned how to be able to speak my mind in class, ask intelligent questions whereas everybody else, especially in Grade 8, nobody asked questions" (*sic*). When asked whether that set her apart from her classmates, she commented, "Probably, for a time in Grade 8, in the middle, I was teased or shunned for being who I was. But I thought, this is what I know, I'm not doing anything wrong ...and it wasn't everyone who shunned me. I had a few friends." Two other families commented on the smooth transition that their children went through, leaving APPLE and joining a Grade 7 classroom. In both cases, they had anticipated transition issues, especially a lack of excitement in the teaching/learning environment, and had made alternative plans for their children by enrolling them in other alternative style programs. In these two cases, the transitions were smoother, with few of the issues emerging that had been raised by other APPLE students. (c) **Learning styles** It is common enough, in teacher circles, to discuss the various learning styles of students. Differentiated instruction has become a catch-phrase that headlines many workshops at teacher professional development conferences. But I hadn't expected it to have moved into the lexicon of students and their parents. During the interviews, sixteen respondents--over half--made comments on their, or in the case of parents, their child's, learning style. At times they referred directly to a specific attribute--"I'm a visual learner," or "I'm a tactile learner." Other students demonstrated a strong sense of self, an awareness of what they were good at: "I work

best with contracts, a list of tasks that I can accomplish in my own way, at my own speed." "My son learns by reading," one mother commented while her son added, "But the best times [I had] were working with a partner, like in Math with [my friend] Randy.

We would do the questions individually and then compared answers. I learn best that way."

Another mother commented that, in APPLE, students were often "happy with being a little bit different, finding their own niche, discovering how they learn."

The most common descriptor, used by four students, was "hands-on learning." This phrase was used to describe settings where parents set up special activities in the class in which students could participate. At other times it was used to describe field trips, where students experienced a tour of a factory workplace, a hike through autumn woodlots, a backstage pass to the theatre. Whether or not this phrase was an easy catchphrase used to encompass a number of quite different definitions, what was clear was that students and parents alike acknowledged that there was a great variety of learning experiences in APPLE. These experiences provided the opportunity to explore different learning styles, to discover what worked best for them.

One father, who is also a teacher, provided an excellent explanation as to why students experienced this more in APPLE than in other classrooms. Although teachers are typically aware of different learning styles and some try to initiate a variety of differentiated learning techniques, Bob observed that "a lot of the alternate learning styles activities are much more energy-intensive for the teacher to create." He noted that this was true of activities such as Learning Centres, or Technology/Building challenges. "APPLE was able to do way more of that stuff because of the parent resources available- they [APPLE teachers] had a small army waiting, eager to get resources, to make special activities happen," Bob continued. "When it worked well, the teacher was orchestrating the tasks to allow these learning events to happen, kids were exposed to a far greater variety of learning experiences."

(d)Teacher quality

Nine respondents (3 parents, 6 students) touched on the importance of the teacher to the quality of a learning experience and of the learning atmosphere. Most

commented directly on some high quality teachers they experienced in APPLE. Others commented on this more obliquely. Jill, for instance, observed that "there are a lot of ineffective teachers out there," when reflecting on her less satisfying educational experiences after leaving APPLE. Alison presented the corollary: "I've had some awesome high school teachers," she said, contrasting them with her Grade 7/8 teachers who were "less creative." Sally observed that even the teacher she had in her gifted program after leaving APPLE was "not very skilled at getting [parents] involved. He didn't seem to want parents meddling in the classroom."

Three parents brought the issue closer to home, observing that not only could great teaching take place outside of APPLE but also being in APPLE did not necessarily make someone a great teacher. One mother commented that her daughter had had a miserable year with a particular APPLE teacher: "One year, Melanie had a teacher who did not belong in APPLE," she said. "She began not looking forward to going to school.

It was heart-breaking to see my kid coming home devastated. It was poisonous."

Another mother concurred that a specific un-named APPLE teacher was far too conventional, or ineffective, and had done little to stimulate her daughter's interest in learning. Later, in high school, her daughter had received the benefit of a couple of "extraordinary teachers. For me, it's the specific teachers that have the greatest influence, more than having parents in the class."

In conclusion, an APPLE dad equated the alchemy that occurs when magic is happening in a classroom to a "perfect storm" of factors--great parents, great students, great teaching. "The odds of first two factors being present in the classroom," he said,

"are higher in APPLE than in a regular classroom." He cautioned, though, that "there are some teachers who work effectively with parents, and with students, and others do not...

The teacher is by far the greatest single catalyst in the learning equation".

(e) Respect

While this topic of respect did not generate discussions as detailed or passionate as the other emergent themes, the word itself was used by nine different interviewees, parents and students alike. Two students referred to the atmosphere of respect that is created in APPLE. "All the kids are taught to respect their parents, their teachers," Alison said. Sally agreed, although she attributed it not to direct teaching but to familiarity. "You're very comfortable with adults in the class, talking with them, you learn a certain sort of respect". Susan, 23, explained that it was the environment and experiences that built this attitude: "In APPLE, the teachers respected the students, trusted us to do the right things, and students behaved well because they had this respect." She added that she did not encounter this trust relationship with teachers again, until much later in high school. This observation concurs with that of Coleman (1991) where he noted that, under the conditions that produce social capital, norms and standards about how young people should relate with others can come into existence (p. 8). An attitude of respect, for both students and adults, came into existence as a result of the relationships developed in the classroom learning environment.

Michael's mother, when commenting on her experiences outside of APPLE, bluntly stated, "A lot of teachers don't respect kids. They peg kids as trouble makers and they get stuck in a space." Donald's mom saw this phenomenon of respect as a reflection of a world that is not friendly to kids. "The world is not a safe place for kids," she said.

"We see kids as consumers, and as things that need to be controlled. But we do not respect them, their opinions, their thoughts." She further commented on the reaction of her son, Daniel, who spent a portion of his teenage years confronting authorities with differing views, whether questioning the appropriateness of placing a grade on an art assignment, to challenging the local town council to build a skateboard park. "He was shocked," she recalled. "He would speak thoughtfully and respectfully to them, yet he was treated so disrespectfully, as though his opinions were of no consequence."

Not all experiences of confronting an adult world with questions produced this type of reaction. Michael told a story of how, when he was in Grade 12, his high school chose not to mount the extravagant high school musical for which it was well-known. Because

he was passionate about dance and performance, Michael took it upon himself to organize one and he reported receiving both respect and support from his teachers and other adults involved in the project.

(f) Community

This section closes with a discussion of the community of learners in APPLE. In Chapter 2, I made an observation about a unique quality of APPLE's version of parent participation in the education of children, specifically in comparison to Epstein's model of parent involvement. I proposed that a heavy emphasis is placed on the benefits accruing to a community of learners in an APPLE classroom, rather than to a specific parent's individual child. At least 15 respondents made comments that referred directly to the sense of community--of shared values and beliefs--that APPLE fosters. Many of these have been referred to earlier so I close, instead, by identifying two threads that wound their way through many of the interviews--exposure to a variety of ideas and multiple answers; and tolerance and celebration of uniqueness *Exposure to a variety of ideas and multiple answers.* Almost half of the student interviewees--and 14 respondents in total--commented on the value of being exposed to a wide variety of ideas, an experience which they attributed to having parents in the APPLE classroom, working with them, sharing ideas and work experiences. Often, students reported, these ideas were either considerably more advanced than what was typically expected at their age or were unique in some ways. Jill, now 27, recalls some specific details she learned at age 10, from parents or classroom activities, that stick with her to this day. "I still remember types of flowers, names of birds, types of coral... who knows this stuff?" she joked. "Everything I've learned since then [leaving APPLE], I've forgotten"! "

Samantha remembered the unusual environment she experienced for learning about medieval weapons and astronomy. "Do you remember going to the farm?" she asked during the interview, referring to an acreage property on the edge of London owned by an APPLE parent. "We had mock battles there. And didn't we go out at night to look at Mars and the stars through [that APPLE parent's] telescopes?" She commented, sadly, that these types of experiences ended, for her, after leaving the program. Cathy, 20, referred to the breadth of curriculum material that she encountered in APPLE. "We covered a lot," she commented, adding "APPLE was well-rounded, you tried a little bit of everything. I remember that it overlapped right through till I got into high school. I would run into some of the ideas we had talked about in Grade 5 or 6." Sally's mother agreed that APPLE students "gain much more benefit from the array of ideas they encounter, the array of role models of multiple ages, multiple generations, rather than being streamed into groups of identical ages." Two other students commented specifically on how they missed the exposure to higher level thinking, multiple ways of seeing situations and solving problems that parents brought into the classroom in their early years. Alison said that she did not experience that again until further into high school, where she had greater variety in course selection. Jason raised the bar a little higher yet, commenting on the change in the atmosphere surrounding learning after he left the program, observing how many students and teachers were just going through the paces rather than experiencing the joy of learning. "Now that I'm at university, it feels like it's back again," he reported. This shared value of the exploration of a wide range of ideas and unique ways of experiencing them, complements the following attribute of tolerance. *Tolerance.* It is certainly *de rigueur* to foster the value of tolerance and diversity in our multi-cultural Canadian society, and for good reason. Experiencing this value though, and internalizing it, is a greater challenge than teaching it. While it is not touted in the *APPLE Handbook* as an essential element of the program, the quality of tolerance appears to have been embedded in the fabric of the program, a

point considered further in Chapter 5. Bob, a father and high school teacher, had this observation: "Our experience in APPLE was that there was far greater personality diversity among the students. APPLE attracts a larger number of students who struggled in the regular stream and their parents saw APPLE as an alternative that might be more accepting." Rather than seeing this as a liability, though, he said, "Our kids learned way more tolerance and acceptance, regardless of how odd these little ducks were, they need to be accepted. APPLE kids learned more empathy because these kids were together year after year."

Now, lest we conclude that APPLE is composed of a higher percentage of social misfits, I wish to recall the words of parent Laurie, who observed, "We're all a little quirky, as people." Two other parents used the word, "quirky" to describe either the students or parents in APPLE, but not pejoratively. Perhaps

this helps to explain comments made by Edward, 19, about the multi-cultural diversity of friends he developed after leaving APPLE. At times, APPLE has received criticism

for not appealing to visible minorities and recent immigrant populations (personal communication with APPLE parent, July 8, 2008). Without comparative study, it is unclear whether or not the APPLE parent body accurately reflects the cultural diversity of the local population. But tolerance of those who are perceived to be different was a recurring theme. Edward said, "We celebrated different cultures in APPLE, even though we didn't have many opportunities. We had lots of kids who were a little different, and we learned to appreciate differences." After leaving APPLE, he went on to develop close friendships with "a real mixed group that I hang with, one from Trinidad, one from Afghanistan, one from China." Gerald's mother told a personal anecdote

demonstrating the kind of community values that she believes APPLE members share. She observed APPLE parents find themselves in committees or meetings with

individuals with whom they would otherwise have little in common. In her case, she had to work closely with another woman who appeared to her, at first encounter, to be cut

from an entirely different cloth--which worried her. But because of their committee work on a school community park, they grew to appreciate each other's different skills.

"I'm a gardener," she said. "I love getting my hands dirty and making things grow." The other mother, though, knew how to get funding for the park, to fill in the forms, to

discover new sources, and to get new trees and greenery for the park. Without this community goal, "I would have never chosen to work with her," she observed, "and I would have missed out on this opportunity."

Donald's mother, who has a history from the early days of APPLE, was similarly enthusiastic about the value in the

personal growth among APPLE parents, even as their children are working in the classroom. Serving on committees with people from very different backgrounds, and

even personal agendas, "is the best way to develop group skills," she observed. "You learn to clearly explain your own position, to listen to those of others. You learn when

and how to compromise--or not. And you learn that, even in the face of differing opinions, you must reach consensus on a course of action." This particular woman, who

went on to serve on the Provincial Parent Council for two terms, is a vocal advocate for parent rights and educational reform. "Too many volunteer groups get stuck on their

individual differences, and are unable to act," she noted, adding that her APPLE experiences were pivotal in the kind of work she did later as an advocate.

CONCLUSION This chapter sought to provide an extensive examination of responses to the questions posed during the interviews. General statements of the

responses were given, along with the number of respondents on whom the generalizations were based, before each statement was supported with specific details from the interviews. Beyond responses to the set list of questions, six emergent themes surfaced more or less consistently, across the interview transcripts. The following general statements seek to summarize the findings: 1) Students and parents unanimously felt that the learning atmosphere of the APPLE program enriched their lives, encouraging them to think of education as an enjoyable experience, exposing them to a wider range of experiences and ideas than they imagined they would have encountered in other programs. 2) Students especially, but also parents, were hard-pressed to provide memories of specific experiences which formed their attitude towards learning, but were able to readily recall the general learning environment and positive atmosphere 3) Students unanimously agreed that their relationships with their parents, teachers and other adults were strong throughout adolescence; parents also recognized that they felt their children were able to relate more easily with adults than their peers 4) All students felt that they were critical thinkers. Several incidents, which took place after they had left APPLE, bear testimony to this claim. Likewise, parents agreed that their children were critical thinkers, although whether this was directly attributable to their APPLE experiences was uncertain. 5) There was a wide range in the degree of engagement in extra curricular activities identified by the APPLE students interviewed. Without further data, the effect of the APPLE experience on the level of participation of its graduates in after school sports, clubs, drama groups, etc., is unclear. 6) Most parents have not maintained the social networks that were established during their time in APPLE. Many have continued to pursue volunteer work in a variety of agencies. Beyond the themes that characterized responses to the interview questions as summarized above, six other themes emerged during the course of the interviews as follows: 1) A sense of being protected, safe in the familiar environment of APPLE was both an advantage but also a detriment 2) The transition from APPLE into Grade 7/8 was a challenging time for students, unless parents had found alternatives 3) APPLE helped students to identify their unique learning style which they are able to articulate 4) The quality of an individual teacher, whether within APPLE or outside, is the strongest determinant of student engagement 5) A sense of respect--of adults towards children and vice versa--was developed within APPLE but was not perceived as common outside of it 6) The sense of community that APPLE develops--tolerance, excitement about learning expectations of success--is valuable.

Chapter 5

CONCLUSIONS

The chapter begins with a review of the original questions posed and the impetus for posing them. A brief review of the research process is then followed by a summary of the findings from the interviews. These summaries are then explored in search of the

implications for theory, research and practices, specifically APPLE practices. The chapter closes with a reminder of the unique nature of the research that was conducted and how it expands and enriches current understanding of the effects of parent participation, along with a proposal of where further research can yet lead.

THE STUDY

Original questions

The purpose of this study has been both personal and professional. The questions that stimulated my personal interest in the findings of this study were related not only to specific experiences of parent involvement in APPLE, but to questions about the overall effectiveness of this version of alternative education. The passion and enthusiasm which APPLE parents invest in the classroom learning community of APPLE children are obvious. Whether it was making any difference, other than to the level of interest and amusement that APPLE students experienced during their daily school lives, had not been studied. How would APPLE graduates view their experiences in the APPLE Program and the effects of those experiences on their subsequent education and life? Would they see a connection between the types of learning events and daily interactions with adults which APPLE students experience in their first eight years of school and their subsequent attitudes towards learning and relationships with adults? How could these questions be sensibly explored? The specific questions used in the interview process were designed to tease out the answers to these larger questions.

Beyond the immediate effect of this level of parent participation, there was also the

question of how APPLE had been able not only to survive but to expand in both the number of families enrolled and numbers of classrooms. As a matter of personal interest

I had spent many years through my early 20's exploring alternative schools and educational ideas, visiting Summerhill, A.S. Neill's famous alternative school in Britain, a number of private alternative schools in Ontario and the Yukon, as well as private Steiner or Waldorf schools. Often, the lifetime of alternative schools seemed to be short, as they disbanded for a number of reasons. How was it that the APPLE Program was able to continue to exist, and indeed grow, even through the more conservative social and fiscal atmosphere of the 1990s?

Professionally, too, this study addressed questions about the long term effect of APPLE learning experiences on its graduates that had not been examined to date. As APPLE grew in both family numbers and classroom allocation, an increasing number of teachers were needed and administrative costs directed towards maintaining the program. It was not uncommon for the spectre of terminating the APPLE Program to be raised at the senior administrative level of the London, and then later Thames Valley District School Board, as financial resources were restricted and the board considered various means of cutting costs, including eliminating programs. Data on the effectiveness of parent involvement in education had not been part of these considerations and it seemed that both the APPLE parent body and the local board would be well-served by having access to such data. Had such studies been undertaken and what were the results?

The research process

Establishing the effects of parent involvement in education on the academic success of their children turned out to be surprisingly straight-forward. A review of the literature, outlined in Chapter 2, revealed that there is no shortage of studies--three decades worth--on the impact of parent involvement that all arrive at this conclusion: parent involvement in education is strongly related to a child's academic achievement in school.

Discovering a plausible explanation for the growth and strength of the APPLE Program would prove more of a challenge but, again, much background work had already been accomplished. Coleman's (1988) theories of social capital offered compelling explanations for this strength and longevity. These ideas are expanded upon later in this chapter.

The original questions remained: what kind of lingering effects, what types of attitudes and behaviours, what types of relationships do these APPLE graduates go on to develop in adolescence and beyond? Of the range of research options offered by educational research theory, the key informant approach, where data are gathered from specific key individuals within a community, was appealing for a number of reasons. Criteria were established for the selection of appropriate key informants and to minimize bias or prejudice. In addition, variables such as age and gender of the informants were to be accommodated. A discussion of the effectiveness of this key informant approach

follows later in this chapter.

Lastly, a list of questions was developed to probe the long term influences of the APPLE program on its participants.

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

Summary statements for each question and each of the emergent themes are listed below, based on the detailed reviews presented in Chapter 4.

Themes addressed in responses to the interview questions

1) *The APPLE Program has been successful in developing, or at least supporting, in its students, a positive attitude towards learning.* Seventeen former students, almost all, commented on the positive attitude they held towards learning and especially their expectations for a school classroom environment. Likewise, ten of the 11 parents reported seeing this in their children. Often students found it difficult to articulate a specific attitude towards school, although four of them used the words, "excitement," or "fun," to describe the learning environment. Overwhelmingly, all but one student and one parent attributed this positive attitude to the influences of their early experiences in APPLE. Students agreed that parents make unique contributions that expose APPLE students to new ideas and a variety of experiences. In addition, the outside-the-classroom-walls nature of learning, generated through frequent field trips, was seen as vital to the alternative nature of the APPLE Program.

This positive attitude towards learning and expectations about what school

should look like was seen by most students as an asset rather than a handicap, but three students reported that it accentuated difficulties in the experience of transition to a regular Grade 7 classroom.

2) *The transition from the APPLE program to a home school is difficult.* Every student interviewed commented on the difficulty of the transition from APPLE to their home schools in Grade 7, and eight parents agreed that this transition was challenging both for their child and for themselves. Following their graduation from APPLE at the end of Grade 6, former students were in a position to observe the attitudes and behaviours of non-APPLE students in their home school. The difficulties students faced ranged from being teased by their peers--especially for being enthusiastic about learning--to feeling left out of the social groups that existed at their home schools, to acquiring the social skills of how to make friends after having spent many years in a classroom with a consistent group of peers.

3) *Students seldom recalled specific experiences that developed their attitudes towards learning, but rather spoke of a pervasive classroom atmosphere.* Only two respondents recalled specific instances from their APPLE experiences, and both followed prompting by a parent. It was more common to recall the general learning atmosphere that students associated with APPLE, the anticipation of going to school each day, the excitement of traveling with friends on field trips, the comfort and support of parents.

There are some possible explanations for this finding. In some cases, students were trying to recall incidents from over 15 years ago; it may well be that the learning

atmosphere is easier to remember than specific incidents. It might have been that the question was worded inappropriately, since it is reasonable to suspect that one specific experience would be insufficient to establish in a student an identifiable "attitude towards learning." Broadening the question, to ask students to recall experiences that were more vivid in their memory from their APPLE times, without establishing the goal of discovering an attitude towards learning, might have provoked more focused responses.

Lastly, it is also possible that this learning atmosphere that APPLE seeks to create requires a particular kind of alchemy that is somewhat intangible, more of a collection of influences rather than specific experiences.

4) APPLE students have strong, healthy relationships with parents and with other adults. Responses were unanimous among both students and parents to the latter portion of this question. All students acknowledged that they feel comfortable talking with adults in a variety of settings. All of them commented specifically that this was established at an early age in APPLE, through daily interactions with adults in the classroom.

This result is hardly surprising. It stands to reason that the APPLE classroom atmosphere is conducive to developing a high degree of comfort as students regularly engage in conversation with parents in this familiar, safe setting and as they observe other student/parent interactions. Indeed, Jason observed that parents seemed to expect students, even young ones, to have "rational, mature conversations" with them, and they responded accordingly. That these bonds would be sufficiently strong to be maintained

through adolescence attests to the resilience and formative power of early classroom experiences.

Most students, 16 of 18, also reported they have a strong relationship with their parents and parents supported this. Before this research project was undertaken, it was uncertain whether the close relationships between parent and child that develop throughout the early years in APPLE could be maintained through the more turbulent years of adolescence. Overwhelmingly, interviewees confirmed their close ties with their parents continue to this day--in some cases, parents were present in the room during the interview process and, whether the interviewee was 14 or 20, it was common for there to be comfortable banter between parents and their teenage children.

In the cases of two interviewees, the parents of both of these students had gone through difficult times in their marriage, coming to a head after the students had left APPLE, both times resulting in separation and divorce. In these two cases, the former students, both now in their 20's, reported that their relationship with their parents had been severely compromised; further, each reported that they have arrived at a more stable, though still fragile, relationship with their mothers.

5) *APPLE students see themselves as critical thinkers.* All 18 students interviewed reported that they saw themselves as critical thinkers, and all parents concurred. Difficulty arose when two further questions were explored--how do students demonstrate this? Is the development of critical thinking skills an outgrowth of experiences in APPLE?

Students were reticent to provide direct examples of their thinking skills, but some evidence of an ability to think critically arose upon closer examination of interview transcripts. Characteristics such as a willingness to engage in classroom debate despite championing an unpopular opinion, an eagerness to take initiative and fill a leadership role, and a tendency to weigh the merits of responses even while speaking them peppered the interviews.

The second part of the question, focusing on the source of the development of these skills, was even less readily answered. Students and parents were uncertain of the role that APPLE played in the development of critical thinking, and considered other factors such as individual personality and home environment to be equally influential.

6) It is unclear whether APPLE students are engaged to a greater or lesser extent than their peers in extracurricular activities. Three students reported that they were, or are, heavily involved in a wide range of school activities, including political (student council work, community liaison groups), artistic (drama, dance) and sports. Seven respondents acknowledged that they were either marginally involved or not at all. The remaining eight responses fell in between. Without further comparison data, it is unclear whether or not APPLE students are more inclined to participate in extracurricular activities than their peers.

7) The social capital generated within the APPLE program does not appear to have fostered the establishment of additional formal organizations once parents leave the program. All parents interviewed acknowledge that they no longer maintained ties with other APPLE parents in any formal way. One group of mothers acknowledged that

they continue to meet regularly, on a social basis, to maintain the friendships that were formed during their time in APPLE. These parents continue to provide support and encouragement to each other, although whether this is a true legacy of Coleman's social capital is unclear.

What is clear is the number of APPLE parents who, having left the program, have invested their time into a wide variety of social agencies, from the London Men's Mission, to small-scale loans to Indian women, to land trust organizations, to community garden projects. One parent specifically reported that the adult group working skills that she developed during her time in APPLE were vital to the effectiveness of the student advocacy group she later went on to join. This may well be an unanticipated consequence of the social capital generated by the APPLE parent body.

Themes which emerged during the interviews

1) Students see the APPLE classroom as a safe, nurturing environment. A small but notable number of interviewees, eight out of the 29, spontaneously referred to the sense of safety and familiarity generated in APPLE classrooms. They reported an absence of bullying, a comfort with their peers with whom they shared classroom space for up to eight years, and extra adult supervision of student behaviour because of the lower adult-to-student ratio.

2) The transition from APPLE into their home school was an extremely challenging time for students. All students commented on the transition that took place at the end of Grade 6, with most reporting it to be a difficult experience. Six students commented on the lacklustre teaching/learning experiences in Grade 7, possibly attributable to unconscious comparisons with the higher engagement level of their APPLE experiences. Others acknowledged that the social adjustments were difficult,

establishing new friendships, encountering teasing and bullying or dealing with the unfamiliar situation of being inappropriately enthusiastic about school life. 3)

APPLE helped students to identify their unique learning style which they are able to articulate. Sixteen interviewees made either direct or indirect observations of their learning styles, and attributed this consciousness to the wide range of educational experiences that APPLE offered. This was often accompanied with a strong sense of self, an awareness of being a unique learning individual. It was proposed that effective APPLE teachers make use of parent volunteers to undertake the extra work of organization and preparation required to offer educational opportunities in a variety of learning settings.

4) *The quality of an individual teacher, whether within APPLE or outside, is a strong contributor to student engagement.* Nine respondents made statements similar to this assertion. Although most referred to the high quality of teaching they experienced in APPLE, in a few cases, they were referring to high quality teachers they encountered, as either students or parents, at high school and university classes.

5) *A sense of respect, of adults towards children and vice versa, was developed within APPLE but did not always exist outside.* Seven students commented either directly or indirectly on the respect which they were shown during their time in APPLE, by both teachers and parents. Three parents also addressed this issue, observing the respectful way APPLE students addressed not only their teachers but also parents in the classroom. Some students remembered this being taught directly during class times, while others saw it more as a general atmosphere created in the classroom. 6)

The sense of community that APPLE develops--tolerance, excitement about learning expectations of success--is valuable. Over half of the respondents, 15 in all, made comments that referred directly to the sense of community--of shared values and beliefs--that APPLE fosters. This sense of community was supported by specific practices, including an atmosphere of acceptance and tolerance, exposure to wide range of ideas attributable to the diverse parent group, and opportunities to engage in cooperative learning activities with different students and parents.

The summary statements offered above, while providing valuable insight into the long term influence of the parent participation on the lives of APPLE students, also bear various implications. These are addressed in the following section under the headings of implications for research, theory and practice, specifically APPLE practices.

IMPLICATIONS FOR RESEARCH—THE KEY INFORMANT APPROACH

Again, the journey that this research project took has been both personal and professional. Personally my tenuous theoretical awareness of the nature of key informant approach to gathering data evolved into a tangible, rich experience with its

specific qualities and its implications. And professionally, this approach provided a serviceable tool to explore connections between the APPLE Program experience and the attitudes and behaviours of its graduates. By establishing appropriate criteria for selection of participants and proactively addressing the liabilities that other researchers have associated with this approach, data gathered using this approach can be considered empirically sound and educationally valuable.

A charge that could be labeled against the key informant approach is its perceived lack of objectivity. Informants are not selected arbitrarily out of the community; instead, they are chosen for specific insights or knowledge they bring to the research, based on the unique position they hold within the community. Thus, informants chosen for this research project were not names chosen at random off old APPLE class lists, nor familiar favourites of either the APPLE Executive or this researcher, but instead were uniquely-positioned individuals.

Although this approach of selecting informants was seemingly straight-forward and simple to apply, the standards for selection were relaxed in order to fulfill other requirements of the study. In the case of at least two interviewees, I remembered them as students who were somewhat uncomfortable with abstract concepts in class as preadolescents, and wondered whether they would actually be in a position to provide useful data on abstract ideas such as "attitude towards learning" or "critical thinking experiences." They would not have been selected as key informants except for the fact that they filled in essential gaps in the age range and gender balance of the study, thereby contributing to the authenticity of the study.

Limitation to key informant approach--reliance on interview skills. The key informant approach places a heavy reliance on the interview skills of the researcher, unlike more positivist approaches, such as administering a survey. One of the perceived advantages to using tools such as surveys to gather data is that it removes the researcher from needing to take an interactive role in the gathering of said data. The role of the researcher, once the survey has been designed and responses gathered, is to organize the data using mathematical tools, and to use statistical methods to analyze it. Observations about the distribution of the data can be made and possible conclusions drawn. There is a comfort in the transparency of the process; the skills of the researcher, other than care in entering the data into a spreadsheet or other organizational tool, are not brought into question. This is not to suggest that results from this type of research are beyond questioning; it is, instead, to affirm that it is not incumbent upon the researcher to be personally engaged with the data provider, nor to make spontaneous alterations to the data collection process *in situ*.

Not so in the case of key informant studies. None of the questions posed in the interview sessions was intended to yield Yes/No responses. Each was designed to open the door for further reflection on the part of the interviewee, with responsibility placed on the interviewer to probe more deeply into these reflections. I suspect that what distinguishes an outstanding interviewer is his/her skill at identifying when the guest has said something important, or unusual or even contradictory, and then focusing further questions to shed light on the matter raised. Such opportunities presented themselves during the interviews, but I found myself questioning whether I had truly reached the heart of the topic I was seeking to explore, not only at the time of the interview but also

listening to the recordings later. Doubts surfaced about whether I had encouraged the interviewee to dig deep enough, or to explain him/herself with the greatest clarity. Great interviewers know when to let silence build at appropriate moments, to wait for the interviewee to fill in the silent gap with further information that he/she had omitted or withheld until that point. Again, I found myself wondering whether a more skilled interviewer could have discovered buried gems that I had overlooked.

Overall endorsement of key informant approach to data collection. Despite the personal limitations I experienced and the pressure I felt to keep the dance moving, between comfortable conversation and deep thoughtful reflection, the key informant approach was undoubtedly an effective and valid means to gather information. Admittedly, it places a heavy reliance on the interview skills of the researcher, which can be a detriment but also an asset to the quality of the findings. The rich texture of the information gleaned using this approach, the depth of questions that can be posed and the freedom that this approach allows respondents for expressing opinions, provided a wealth of research material for analysis.

One of the challenges of this study was the question of whether a causal link between the experiences of students in the APPLE Program and their attitudes, behaviours and relationships could be established. Neither interviews or some more positivist approach can determine if the attitudes and behaviours that former APPLE students recognized in themselves as they journeyed through adolescence--the comfort with which they would communicate with adults, the openness of their relationship with their parents, their quest for the joy in learning--were attributable to the experiences they

had in APPLE, or whether these were instead created by forces outside of APPLE, such as their home environment or their specific personalities.

Over the course of the interviews, it became evident that APPLE students and parents alike were uncertain of the source of the attitudes and behaviours being explored. Eleven interviewees brought this topic up spontaneously, as an adjunct to responding to other questions. Daniel himself posed the question, "How much of it was APPLE? How much of it was myself?" Cathy made a similar observation about the kind of work ethic she and her sister developed, and the expectations they placed on themselves to embrace learning: "it's hard to tell if our attitude is symptomatic of APPLE, or if we were in the APPLE program because our parents have this kind of work ethic, high expectations." Nineteen-year old Michael agreed that APPLE attracts people into the program who are "looking for that kind of close relationship with kids" when he was explaining the comfort level that APPLE students have in talking with adults.

Parents raised similar questions. Michael's mom said, "It would be easier to answer that question if I'd had a kid who'd gone through regular school" so that she could directly compare results!

One mother was willing to give somewhat greater credit to the APPLE program, when discussing the development of thinking skills in her daughter. "She's always been a great thinker," Melanie's mom mused, "She's always turned on by random thoughts and possibilities.... If APPLE didn't develop this ability, at least it didn't squash it"! This sentiment is echoed by Bob, whose daughter was always "such a voracious learner

to begin with. I will never know [the effects of APPLE], but I suspect that she would have been significantly bored in a conventional classroom."

It is difficult to envisage how one could actually tease out those attributes which developed specifically because of APPLE, and which were latent in the individual already. A causal link cannot be made between the APPLE Program and the attitudes, behaviours and relationships that so many of its graduate students seems to share. Nonetheless, the key informant approach emerged as an excellent method of *identifying* those themes, not only the attributes that were suspected before the research began, but also those raised by students and parents.

Lastly, specific themes or influences have been identified over the course of this study. It is reasonable to conceive a more positivist study, one using a survey with a sliding scale of responses, which could be used to expand the study beyond the range of 25-30 individuals. By expanding the study to include all APPLE graduates, it is likely that more definitive conclusions can be determined. It was surprising to observe the willingness, indeed the enthusiasm that all potential interviewees displayed when they were contacted. It seemed that virtually all of the former students and parents that were interviewed were eager to tell their stories, to share their reflections and to find out who else had been interviewed.

IMPLICATIONS FOR THEORY

This section is divided into two separate discussions, implications for Coleman's theory of social capital and then Epstein's theory on six levels of parent involvement.

Social capital

Coleman's (1988) theory of social capital was used to frame this study of the establishment and legacy of the APPLE Program. Certainly the early years of APPLE seemed to correspond to the social capital model--a group of like-minded individuals coalescing around a specific cause, establishing relationships and connections which empowered the group to achieve collective action on its goal, the establishment of this parent participating program.

In examining the growth and solidification of the APPLE Program, through the late 1980s and 1990s, it is plausible to propose that the APPLE parent body actually overstepped the vision that Coleman had for social capital. Lee and Bowen (2006) stated that "Coleman viewed social capital as a means to an end, for example, a means by which parents can promote their children's school achievement and educational attainment" (p. 196). In the case of APPLE, it appears that parents were motivated only to a marginal extent in promoting their children's educational attainment. Certainly they did not wish APPLE to be a detriment to their children's academic success, but the *APPLE Handbook* (2005) does not once refer to the academic success of children. Instead, its mission statement declares that "children will experience a joy of learning in a curriculum enhanced by the personal expertise of parents" (p. 5). It aims to "foster a community of lasting relationships and promote critical thinking skills, creativity and personal development" (p. 6). This goal widens the more limited definition of academic achievement, that is, improvement on test scores, to a broader vision of promoting citizenship in our society.

Although this statement establishes the APPLE goal as somewhat divergent from Coleman's original vision, at least in the interpretation of Lee and Bowen (2006), it seems fair to observe that the process by which APPLE arrived at its mission statement, belief statements and system of governance conforms to social capital theory. Casey and Christ (2005) argue that "social capital is in fact a quality possessed by communities, not just individuals, converting the concept from a private into a public good" (p. 828). From a somewhat disparate group of individuals who shared one basic belief--the value of parent participation in the classroom--the APPLE parent group evolved into a community with "generalized bonds of trust" (p. 829). To use the words of Coleman (1988), "norms and standards can come into existence about what young people should do, in school and out" (p. 8). While Coleman was referring specifically to the type of community that develops within a Catholic school, it is a short step to see its application to the APPLE experience.

Over its years of growth and internal struggle, the APPLE parent body succeeded in hammering out norms and standards that were agreed upon by its members and formalized in the APPLE Handbook. It is arguable that this process strengthened the social capital of APPLE and helps to explain its survival, and indeed thriving, during an era when many other alternative schools foundered.

A further connection can be made between Coleman's theory of social capital and the APPLE program. Coleman (1991) asserted that "social capital among parents, once created, will not always reinforce school goals, nor should it. A strong body of parents is a force in the community that will often act in accord with the school--but as

an agent for the children of the community, it also acts as a check on the actions of the school” (p. 2). Coleman's statement brings to mind several issues that were confronted by APPLE during the 1990s. Here is one case in point: a considerable number of APPLE parents have a distrust of testing in general and specifically any kind of standardized test. Other parents feel that this kind of testing and the pressure that it places on children would cause undue harm to their children [personal communication with at least fifteen APPLE parents from 1989-2002]. When the Ontario Ministry of Education instituted the current program of provincial testing of all students in Grades 3 and 6, a small number of APPLE parents withdrew their children from the testing regime, skewing the data that was generated at Brick Street School. These parents acted as agents for the children of the community. This did not reinforce the school goal of school improvement, and, at that time, led to increased tension between school administration and the APPLE Program.

Another example of the periodic cross purposes of the school and the APPLE community was a reading incentive program proposed at one time by the school administrator. The program involved a competition between students to read more pages or books than students in other classes. Again, some parents saw this as being a detriment to their children and an affront to APPLE's stated philosophy of non-competitive activities and opposed it, acting as a check on the school's actions. These examples reinforce Coleman's observations on the influence of social capital.

Before concluding this discussion on social capital, it is worth noting a subtle degree of deviation from social capital theory that arose. Coleman (1988) proposed that,

once having acquired a degree of social capital based on their coalescing around a specific cause or focus, groups often go on to invest that capital in other causes with a different focus. In the interviews with APPLE parents, this did not appear to be the case; once APPLE parents left the program, they did not continue to function as a political group, although many strong friendships remained. However, seven individual members acknowledged that they had become parts of other groups, often engaged in collective action, whether building land trusts for environmental protection or supporting children from Belarus to come to Canada. Daniel's mother, who became an advocate for children's education and later a member of a parent council, observed that it was the group skills that she developed during her time in APPLE that proved invaluable to her efforts in raising collective action in other groups. It is arguable that this 'skill set' associated with successful group work is an unanticipated form of social capital.

In summary, Coleman's theory of social capital proved to be an insightful organizational frame for analyzing the success of the APPLE Program. Many elements of social capital--norms and standards, reciprocity, trust--can be seen in the APPLE community and have helped to strengthen the program, contributing not only to its longevity but also to the reported strength of student/adult relationships that persist through adolescence into adulthood.

Epstein's model of parental involvement

In contrast, the typology of parental involvement in education advanced by Epstein (1995) was less useful. Granted, the research on which Epstein drew and the political momentum which her organization has gathered has been instrumental in

leading to the acceptance, or at least formal recognition by government educational bodies, of the benefits of parent involvement. The old model, of dropping the kids at the door of the school and leaving professionals to educate the children, has been shown to be insufficient.

A comforting aspect of Epstein's model is that it is based on a large body of research that clearly shows any level of parent involvement is better than none at all. Simple tactics such as setting aside a dedicated homework time and space for children, attending parent/teacher conferences, even returning phone calls from the school, are recognized as components of parent involvement. This must serve as an encouragement to those families, now the majority, of single parents or those of two parents working outside of the home. Epstein's model is certainly sufficiently expansive to include more engaged forms of parent involvement, such as volunteering or joining political decision-making bodies, but this is not the major focus. Although her ideas appear to be less than startling, Alberta Teachers' Association president Booi acknowledges that "Epstein's major impact has been in the area of action," (p.1), claiming that her emphasis on the value of partnerships, between school, parents and community, has been instrumental in transforming education into a collaborative effort.

Additionally, it is worthwhile observing that the goal of Epstein's work is to promote student achievement, to increase student success on quantifiable measures. At times this same goal has marched under the banners of school reform and teacher accountability. Indeed, some of Epstein's language is similar to that of purveyors of teacher accountability. For example, in an oft-cited summary of Epstein's six levels, the

Colorado Department of Education web-site (2008) under Level 4, Learning at Home, one of the results for teachers is said to be "better design of homework assignments [and] respect for family time" along with "satisfaction with family involvement and support" (¶1). Certainly the goals of generating high-quality homework assignments and increasing sensitivity to the home environment are laudable; linking them to parent involvement in education certainly pushes the discussion into the camp of school reform and teacher accountability.

For the purposes of this study, Epstein's model proved less insightful for analyzing the effects of level of the parent involvement typical of APPLE parents. The intensity of parent involvement in APPLE, both in terms of time and in classroom contact with students, is significantly higher than the levels proposed by Epstein.

Additionally, Epstein's model focuses on the benefits accruing to the individual children of parents, in the form of academic achievement, and on the benefits to the school community, in the form of teacher accountability and improved school scores.

The APPLE Program was not founded for either of those purposes. The Mission Statement of APPLE, as stated in the *APPLE Handbook* (2005) is to "foster a community of lasting relationships and promote critical thinking skills and knowledge, creativity and personal development" (p.15). To that end, parents are actively engaged in the classroom environment, nurturing a "community atmosphere of acceptance and belonging, providing students with a sense of security and personal worth as well as teaching them to respect and care for others" (p. 5). The benefits accruing from parent participation in APPLE classrooms are bestowed on the community of learners in the

classroom, not simply to the individual student and to the larger school community.

This community emphasis was highlighted earlier in Table 2-4, where the specific activities in which APPLE parents are engaged were contrasted with the parent involvement activities identified by Epstein in her framework of parent involvement. It is reasonable to conclude that relationships that were established early between adults and children, the norms of behaviour, the trust, the expectations reinforced by community standards, in short, all the attributes of social capital proved sufficiently strong and resilient to persist long after students left the APPLE program. They may have even been somewhat responsible for so many of the students absorbing, or at least maintaining, a particular attitude towards learning, and their expectation that it should be enjoyable and engaging. These types of attributes are not addressed in Epstein's model, neither the model of community-building activities, nor the long term influences of such activities. For these reasons, Epstein's model proved less useful than Coleman's for understanding the strength and influence of parent involvement in the early years of their children's education.

The less-than-tangible goals articulated in the APPLE Mission Statement are difficult to quantify using an objective testing instrument. This research project did not examine academic success of APPLE students that was attributable to parent involvement. Instead, the long term influences that were examined in this study lay in the affective and behavioural domains. The findings of the research were summarized at the outset of this chapter.

IMPLICATIONS FOR PRACTICE

An analysis of the conclusions presented at the outset of this chapter leads to the following proposals. They have been divided into two categories: four current APPLE practices that need to be maintained and strengthened, and four proposed practices that need to be implemented.

Current practices

1) *APPLE must maintain and foster the practice of incorporating parents into daily classroom experiences.* While this statement appears to be stating the obvious, it is worth noting that this very attribute was brought into question on a regular basis during the period in which I taught in APPLE. Administrators were, at times, uncomfortable with issues of confidentiality that arise when parents are in the classroom. Teachers, understandably, are not always comfortable with being open to scrutiny by parent volunteers in the classroom every day. And parents have not always handled the degree of empowerment with sensitivity and wisdom. But the benefits of parent participation are undeniable, and are worth the risks and discomfort. The influence of sharing the classroom environment in one's early years with a variety of caring adults emerged consistently over the interviews: students develop--or at least maintain--comfortable, trusting relationships with adults, including their parents, through this interaction, and this comfort level persists through adolescence, even among students who describe themselves as "quite shy."

Given the unambiguous nature of the respondents to these questions, it appears clear that the PP in the APPLE acronym--parent participating--plays a key role in, if not establishing then at least, supporting these lasting relationships. Not only are APPLE

students exposed to the wide range of ideas and personalities of these individuals, but they also have the opportunity to develop and practice their communication skills with adults. It is doubtful that those key individuals who brought to fruition 25 years ago the idea of establishing an elementary parent participating program could have foreseen the enduring quality of this influence.

Granted, this level of participation requires sacrifice on the part of participating parents. It also demands more of the APPLE teacher, to organize quality activities for parents, to accommodate the various personalities of parents, to deal with the at-times inappropriate behaviour of inexperienced APPLE volunteers. This extra devotion of time and attention to parent volunteers is acknowledged as a greater burden for an APPLE teacher, and perhaps requires informal compensatory strategies. But the unique aspect of APPLE philosophy, its heavy reliance on daily classroom parental involvement, is critical to developing this attribute and must be maintained and strengthened

2) The current practice of collecting and tracking of parent volunteer hours must be maintained. This practice provides valuable data for researchers and also confirms this unique quality of the APPLE Program--mandatory participation. Although some parents have, in the past, objected to this perceived over-regulation of the program, this practice strengthens the program and is worth preserving.

3) Teachers use of the "small army of volunteers" to set up special events, catering to a variety of learning styles, has been instrumental in helping students identify their own personal best methods of learning. This has proven valuable to

APPLE students after they have left the program, giving them a greater level of self-confidence and self-awareness. Although they require greater organizational effort on the part of the teachers, and an extensive time commitment on the part of parents, these events serve to strengthen the community and leave an impression on students that persists well beyond their graduation from the program.

4) Exposure to a wide array of ideas and practical applications is seen as a great attribute to the APPLE Program by students and parents alike. Activities such as field trips, visits by guest speakers, especially parents in their field of expertise, were commonly cited by students for their lasting effects.

Proposed practices

1) APPLE should establish a program in Grade 6 to prepare its graduates for the transition out of the program. APPLE students experience a level of disorientation and confusion, at times coupled with feelings of rejection by their peers, when they leave the APPLE Program and become enrolled in their home school for Grade 7. APPLE needs to become proactive in addressing this issue by establishing a program in Grade 6 which will prepare its graduates for this resettlement.

The implications of these results are two-fold, one providing guidance for the APPLE Program itself and the other aimed at larger, pedagogical questions. APPLE, while providing a rich and stimulating learning environment for its students, would do well to better prepare its graduates for the world they will encounter once they leave the

program. In the same way that programs such as VIP (Value, Influences, Peers) expose all TVDSB Grade 6 students to the challenges that adolescents face and provide a forum for discussing adolescent issues, and the Grade 5/6 Sexual Education program acknowledges the physical changes that accompany adolescence, it would be prudent for APPLE teachers, parents, students and administration to develop a program for this unique transition that APPLE graduates face. It could incorporate discussions with counselors on adolescent group entry skills, which are different from their early childhood counterparts, and on clique formation. It might involve bringing guest speakers, such as former APPLE students, to class to discuss the challenges and some successful strategies. Of greatest benefit, though, is merely the opportunity to discuss the situation, students' fears as well as their strengths, and to acknowledge that the situation exists--and others have gone before!

A counterpoint to this concept surfaced during a conversation with Lynn Thompson, the principal of Brick Street School, and hence the APPLE Program. It appears that in the school year 2008-2009, the TVDSB will make a final decision on whether or not to close Brick Street School, a JK-Grade 6 school because of declining enrolment. It has been proposed that all current students, including APPLE ones, be housed in nearby Woodland Heights Public School, which is a JK-Grade 8 school. Ms. Thompson [personal communication, August 2008] observed that one of the challenges APPLE faces is, "How will this program fit within a larger school? Currently APPLE numbers are 130-140 kids, almost half of the school population." This will not be the case at Woodland Heights, a significantly larger school. That said, it does open the door to expanding APPLE to Grade 7 and 8, "which is what many APPLE parents seem to

want," something she also supports. "If we move in 2009, that's the year Grade 7 APPLE should open," she concluded, after observing that some APPLE families leave the program earlier than Grade 6 because they see the need to return to their home school. "Change is always hard," Ms. Thompson commented, but this would reduce the transition stage down to just one grade, Grade 9, a transition that all students go through, and for which high schools are often prepared and proactive in addressing student feelings of displacement and disorientation. To conclude, the APPLE Program needs to address this issue of the transition of graduating students from APPLE into their home school at the end of Grade 6.

The larger, pedagogical implications of the experiences reported by several students are more difficult to define. This researcher was surprised by the number of students--at least six--who commented on the drudgery of teaching practices they encountered in Grade 7. Phrases such as "listening to the teacher talk," "copying stuff off the board," "sitting in your desk," might be expected from disengaged students who are bored with school. However, the students making these comments had previously been highly engaged in their learning and had experienced the joy and passion that can accompany it. If these types of students are being turned off by the teaching practices they encounter at the Intermediate Division of Grades 7 and 8, this reflects poorly on the profession. While it is beyond the scope of this study to remind Faculties of Education and school administrators of the need for innovation and quality teaching at the Intermediate Division level, this observation by former APPLE students serves as a reminder that all teachers, and especially teachers of adolescents, must be engaged in developing strong classroom programs that are innovative, interactive and engaging for

students.

2) *An alternative to the above proposal would be to expand APPLE to Grade 7 and 8 at the earliest opportunity.* It appears that there is potential for this to take place, should Brick Street Public School close at the end of 2008-2009 and the APPLE Program shift to the Woodland Heights, or another JK-Grade 8, location. Expanding to Grade 7 would pose its own challenges; it is likely that the nature of the tasks that parents perform for this grade level needs to be examined. It is likely that parents could be involved more in the role of 'specialists'--math enrichment, guest speakers, background work--rather than as heavily involved in the daily activities as they are in younger grades. Another option might be, following Principal Thompson's suggestion, for APPLE parents to reduce their monthly participation hours from ten down to five, or to help out by volunteering in the community school. This might also help to build bridges between the APPLE community and the local school community.

Expanding the APPLE Program has always been somewhat challenging. Because of enrollment numbers, it requires a split grade, in this case a 6/7, which is somewhat awkward as it overlaps two curriculum divisions (4 – 6), Junior and Intermediate (7 – 10). It would nonetheless be worth pursuing this option, as this format would provide a transition for APPLE graduates into the mainstream education system at Grade 9, a transition which all interviewees agreed was less disruptive than the one which currently takes place at Grade 7.

3) *The quality of teachers assigned to APPLE is critical to its success.* While not demeaning the skills possessed by teachers in regular classrooms, it is undeniable that

APPLE places unique demands on its teachers: organizational skills to coordinate the number of volunteers; interpersonal skills, to ensure that parents are engaged in activities which suit their personalities and skills; the additional time demands that accompany the APPLE Program including five or six parent meetings each year, to name the most obvious. It is imperative that teachers hired for the program understand and, indeed, embrace these unique demands, not with an attitude of self-sacrifice but with a recognition that this is how the APPLE Program works, how it builds a sense of community and why its graduates are successful, academically and socially.

Principal Thompson has taken some significant steps to ensure that teachers being placed or hired into APPLE are indeed choosing it voluntarily. She explained that the two components of staffing at Brick Street School--the community school and APPLE--are now being staffed separately, requiring that APPLE teachers are placed according to seniority and Brick Street teachers also are assigned by seniority. This ensures that no Brick Street teacher will be 'bumped' into an APPLE classroom assignment, against his/her wishes, as Brick Street enrolment declines. This policy must be maintained at the new location, should Brick Street School be closed.

Beyond this, there are other institutional pressures being applied to the APPLE Program that did not exist when it was founded almost 25 years ago. The additional time demands placed on teachers--the Program Enhancement meetings--can be seen as an extra-curricular activity. Ms. Thompson explained that, when interviewing teachers, she informs them that "there's an expectation of 5 or 6 meetings a year. Participation at these meetings is entirely voluntary, but keep in mind, that this builds the sense of

community, strengthens the classroom climate." She added that, given the climate of acrimony that has existed between the teachers' union and local and provincial governing bodies, "I don't think you can mandate it." When political actions occur, work to rule campaigns, for example, these meetings which are fundamental to building and maintaining the sense of classroom community among parents do not take place, undermining the strength of the program.

It is imperative that APPLE teachers understand the nature of the learning community that is created within the program. These five or six classroom Program Enhancement meetings are an integral part of the program and provide opportunity for parents to establish the information channels based on relationships, agreed-upon obligations and expectations, that are vital to creating social capital. The number of meetings must not be allowed to dwindle until the meetings become meaningless.

4) The APPLE Program would do well to consider and implement methods of attracting participants from a less homogeneous base, reaching out to the non-dominant cultures within the London community. Currently, with its predominant population of white, middle-class suburban families, APPLE is open to the charge of elitism, of being a program catering to a limited socio-economic range and largely white collar backgrounds. Admittedly, in the early days of the Program, the attention of the parent body was directed towards the day-to-day functioning of the program, resolving parent/teacher issues, establishing protocols and methods of operation. Working to attract members outside of the cultural community of the founding members was a low priority.

In addition, it must be noted, some researchers suggest that there are social and cultural barriers to involving families of the non-dominant culture; Lareau (1989) argues that "schools are largely middle-class institutions with middle-class values, organizational patterns, and forms of communication...Middle class parents are more likely to feel comfortable relating to teachers and being involved in school activities" (p. 2).

Even so, in their study of over 1000 eighth- grade school classrooms in America, Ho Sui-Chu and Willms (1996) concluded that, given appropriate incentives to become involved, "our findings little support the assumption that parents from ethnic-minority groups participate less than do White parents" (p. 134). This would suggest that parents outside of the dominant class which is currently the source of APPLE families would be a welcome addition to the program.

Broadening the base of support among the population of London families can only strengthen the program, not only in the eyes of the public and the TVDSB. It also speaks to the strength of the APPLE program, as perceived by the interviewees; qualities such as tolerance and acceptance of others, celebration of differences and exposing children to a wide array of ideas and values were mentioned specifically by respondents. This would only be enhanced by establishing connections with the wider community of recent immigrants, visible minorities and working class families.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

At the conclusion of their 1989 study of APPLE's first five years, Allison and Beaujot (1989) noted that numerous studies existed that documented the growing

influence of parents in education and the change in organizational structures this has caused. But they also observed that "there have been very few studies which have addressed the differences in the classroom experience" (p. 66). Their study concluded with a proposal that APPLE launch such a study, once "the program [becomes] fully established and has weathered its growth phase" (p. 66).

This study, almost 20 years since the previous one, has examined precisely those attributes--and more. Over the course of interviews with 29 of these former participants, it became evident that graduates from APPLE share a number of qualities, among them being a tolerance and even embracing of individual differences, a willingness to take the path less traveled, an ability to think critically, and an eagerness to find learning opportunities in diverse situations.

APPLE is a distinctive program which has already been the source of at least three post-graduate studies by students from the University of Western Ontario. It has provided, and continues to provide, a unique window into the nature of parent participation in education. Graduates from the program, while too young to have had a significant impact on the larger society, demonstrate some of the finest qualities of citizenship. Data from further studies would be useful not only to the APPLE Program itself, as it persists in developing and expanding within the political structures of the Thames Valley District School Board, but also to the educational community at large.

REFERENCES

Allison, P., & Beaujot, E. (1989). Alternative Parent Participating London Elementary

program 1989. OISE/UWO Educational Leadership Centre, Toronto.

Allison, P., & Vernon, M.L. (1986). The first year experiences of the Alternative Parent

Participating London Elementary program. Unpublished masters' dissertation,

University of Western Ontario, London.

ALPHA Alternative School. Retrieved August 30, 2008, from Toronto District School

Board Web-site: <http://schools.tdsb.on.ca/alpha>

Anoka-Hennepin School District. (2003). School family community partnerships

supporting student success together. Retrieved August 23, 2008, from Minnesota

Department of Education web-site:

<http://www.anoka.k12.mn.us/education/dept/dept.php?sectionid=10792#top>

APPLE Handbook. (2005). Retrieved July 14, 2007, from Thames Valley District

School Board Web-site: <http://www.tvdsb.on.ca/brickstreet/apple/index.htm>

Armor, D., Conry-Oseguera, P., Cox, M., & King, N. (1976). Analysis of the school-

preferred reading program in selected Los Angeles minority schools. Rand

Corporation.

Avondale Alternative Elementary School (2003). Retrieved July 18, 2007, from Toronto

District School Board Web-site: <http://schools.tdsb.on.ca>

Becher, R. M. (1984). Parent involvement: A review of research and principles of

successful practice. Urbana, IL: ERIC Clearinghouse on Elementary and Early

Childhood Education. ED 247 032.

Brooklyn Free School (2003) Retrieved February 14, 2008 from Brooklyn Free School

web-site: <http://www.brooklynfreeschool.org>

California Council of Parent Participation Nursery Schools, Inc. (2004). Retrieved

February 15, 2008 from CCPN Web-site: <http://www.ccppns.org/index.html>

Casey, T., & Christ, K. (2005). Social capital and economic performance in the

American states. *Social Science Quarterly*, 86, (4), 826-845.

Churchill Alternative School (2006). Retrieved July 18, 2007, from Ottawa Carleton

District School Board Web-site:

<http://www.churchillalternative.ocdsb.ca/index.php?id=18>

Coleman, James S. (1988). Social capital in the creation of human capital. *The American*

Journal of Sociology, (94), 26 pages.

Coleman, James S. (1991). A federal report on parental involvement in education. *The*

Education Digest, 57(3), 2-12.

Colorado Parent Information and Resources Center. (2008). Retrieved August 23, 2008,

from CPIRC web-site: <http://www.cpirc.org/>

Cotton, K., & Savard, W. (1982). Parent involvement in instruction, K-12: research

synthesis. Northwest Regional Education Lab., Portland, Oregon.

Cotton, K., & Wikelund, K.R. (2001). Parent involvement in education. Retrieved

August 2, 2008, from Northwest Regional Laboratories web-site:

<http://www.nwrel.org/scpd/sirs/3/cu6.html>

Downtown Alternative School. Retrieved July 17, 2007, from Toronto District School

Board Web-site: <http://schools.tdsb.on.ca/downtownalt/home.html>

Edmonton Public Schools Philosophy (2007). Retrieved March 8, 2008, from Edmonton

Public School Web-site: <http://districtsite.epsb.ca/root/philosophy.cfm>

Epstein, J. L. (1995). School/family/community partnerships. *Phi Delta Kappan*,
76, (9), 701-713.

Erickson, E., & Gutierrez, K. (2002). Culture, rigor, and science in educational
research. *Educational Researcher*, 31(8), 21-24.

Ertl, H. (1999). Parental involvement and children's academic achievement in the
National Longitudinal Survey of Children & Youth, 1994-1995. *Education
Quarterly Review*, 6, (2), 35-50.

Giles, H. C. (1998). Parent engagement as a school reform strategy. *ERIC Digest*.

Retrieved February 23, 2008, from ERIC Clearinghouse:

<http://www.ericdigests.org/>

Gillman, R. M., Schooley, D. E., & Novak, P. D. (1977, April). The effects of parental
involvement on student achievement in three Michigan performance contracting
programs. Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Educational
Research Association. ED 144 007.

Goodson, I.F. & Mangan, J.M. (1996). Exploring alternative perspectives in educational research. *Interchange*, (27), 41-59.

Government of Ontario (2008). Retrieved August 11, 2008, from Government of Ontario web-site: <http://ogov.newswire.ca/ontario>

Grant Alternative School (2008), Retrieved August 30, 2008, from Ottawa Carleton District School Board Web-site: <http://www.grantalternative.ocdsb.ca>

Grolnick, W. S., & Slowiaczek, M. L. (1994). Parents' involvement in children's schooling: a multidimensional conceptualization and motivational model. *Child Development*, 65, (1). 237-252.

Henderson, A., Marburger, C., & Ooms, T. (1986). *Beyond the bake sale: an educator's guide to working with parents*. National Committee for Citizens in Education.

Herman, J., & Yeh, J.P. (1980, April). Some effects of parent involvement in schools. Center for the Study of Evaluation. ED 206 963.

Heyrman, J. & Goedhuys, J. *The multiple key informant survey: A method for the comparison of international qualitative data*. Retrieved March 16, 2008, from EURACT web-site: <http://www.euract.org/index.html>

Ho, S-C, E., & Willms, J.D. (1996). Effects of parental involvement on eighth-grade achievement. *Sociology of Education*, 69(2), 126-141.

Holt, J. (1964). *How children fail*. London: Pitman Publishing Company.

Holt, J. (1980). Retrieved August 23, 2008, from Natural Child web-site:

http://www.naturalchild.org/guest/marlene_bumgarner.html

Illich, I. (1971). *Deschooling society*. U.K.: Marion Boyars.

Kugler, J., & Flessa, J. (2007). Leadership for parent and community involvement:

Lessons in recent research. *Ontario Education Today*, 19, (1), p. 16-20.

Latour, B. (1999). *Pandora's hope: Essays on the reality of science studies*.

Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Lee, J-S., & Bowen, N. (2006). Parent involvement, cultural capital, and the achievement gap among elementary school children. *American Educational*

Research Journal, 43, (2), 193-216.

Lilly Endowment, Inc. (2006). Education Division. Retrieved August 23, 2008 from

Lilly Endowment web-site: <http://www.lillyendowment.org/education.html>

Michigan Department of Education. (2001). What research says about parent involvement in children's education in relation to academic achievement.

Retrieved July 15, 2008 from Government of Michigan web-site:

http://www.michigan.gov/documents/Final_Parent_Involvement_Fact_Sheet_1473

[2_7.pdf](#)

Michigan State University Extension, Issue Identification Information - III00004

(1999). Retrieved March 7, 2008, from Michigan State University web-

site: <http://www.msue.msu.edu/portal/>

Miles, M.B., & Huberman, A.M. (1984). Drawing valid meaning from qualitative data:

Toward a shared craft. *Educational Researcher*, 13, (5), 20-30.

Ministry of Education, Ontario (2008). How can I get involved? Retrieved February 14,

2008 from Government of Ontario web-site:

<http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/parents/linvolve.html>

Ontario Education. (2005). Developing partners in education: Ontario parent involvement policy, December 1 (v.2). Retrieved July 14, 2008 from Ontario

Ministry of Education web-site:

<https://ospace.scholarsportal.info/bitstream/1873/1969/1/257921.pdf>

Organization for Parent Participation in Childcare and Education, Ontario

Retrieved August 30, 2008 from OPPCEO web-site: www.oppceo.org

Postman, N., & Weingartner, C. (1969). *Teaching as a subversive activity*. New York,

NY: Dell.

Sherry, S. (1999). Getting the lay of the land on health – a guide for using interviews to gather information (key informant interviews). 1-16.

Retrieved March 7, 2008, from Boston College web-site:

<http://www.accessproject.org/>

Siegle, D. (2007). *Principles and methods in education research: A web-based course from the University of Connecticut*. Retrieved February 23, 2008, from University of Connecticut web-site: [/www.gifted.uconn.edu/siegle](http://www.gifted.uconn.edu/siegle)

Simmons-Morton, B. G., & Crump, A. D. (2003). Association of parental involvement and social competence with school adjustment and engagement among sixth-graders. *The Journal of School Health, 73, (3)*. 121-126.

Smith, M. K. (1997, 2002). Paulo Freire and informal education. *The encyclopaedia of informal education*. Retrieved August 11, 2008 from web-site:

www.infed.org/thinkers/et-freir.htm.

Svidal, S. (2000). Epstein identifies keys to successful school-family-community partnerships. *ATA News (34), 16*. Retrieved August 23, 2008 from Alberta

Teachers' Association web-site:

<http://www.teachers.ab.ca/Quick+Links/Publications/ATA+News/Volume+34/Number+16/In+the+News/Epstein+identifies+keys+to+successful+school+family+community+partnerships.htm>

UCLA Center for Health Policy Research Health DATA Program – Data, Advocacy and Technical Assistance. Retrieved March 8, 2008, from

UCLA web-site:

www.healthpolicy.ucla.edu/HealthDATA/ttt_prog24.pdf

University of Illinois Extension Service-Office of Program Planning and

Assessment (2004). Using key informant interviews. Retrieved March 7,

2008, from University of Illinois web-site:

ppa.aces.uiuc.edu/pdf_files/Informant1.PDF

University of Wisconsin key informant approach (). 38-41.

Retrieved March 23, 2008, from University of Wisconsin web-site:

www.uwex.edu/ces/pdande/progdev/pdf/keyinform.pdf

USAID Center for Development Information and Evaluation (1996). *Conducting key informant interviews*. Retrieved March 15, 2008, from USAID web-site: www.coregroup.org/working_groups/Qualitative_Resources.pdf

van Maanen, J. (1988). *Tales of the field: On writing ethnography*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Walberg, H. J., Bole, R. E., & Waxman, H. C. (1980). School-based family socialization and reading achievement in the inner city. *Psychology in the Schools, 17*. 509-514.

Walson, T., Brown, M., & Swick, K. J. (1983). The relationship of parents' support to children's school achievement. *Child Welfare, 62*. 175-180.

Name:	Bernard W. Lawrence
Post-secondary Education and Degrees	Trent University, Peterborough, Ontario, Canada 1975-1978 B.A. The University of Western Ontario London, Ontario, Canada 1988-1989 B.Ed. The University of Western Ontario London, Ontario, Canada 2006-2008 M.Ed.
Honours and Awards	Trent University Entrance Scholarship 1975 1999 Prime Minister's Award for Teaching Excellence
Related Work Experience	Grades 3-6 Classroom Teacher Thames Valley District School Board

London, Ontario

1989-2002

Grades 3-5 Classroom Teacher

Shanghai Community International Schools,

Shanghai, China

2002-2008

A.P.P.L.E.

Alternative Parent Participating Learning Experience