

PARENT-TEACHER CONFERENCES: A DESCRIPTIVE STUDY
OF STUDENT, PARENT AND TEACHER OPINIONS

By

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ABSTRACT

This study surveyed students, parents and teachers on a variety of matters that bear directly on the parent-teacher conference as a process of reporting pupil progress. To this end 669 pupils from grades 4, 7 and 10; 298 of their parents; and 101 of their elementary and secondary teachers (from a British Columbian school district covering rural and urban areas) responded to the questionnaires. Its primary purpose was to survey and to describe pupil, parent and teacher perceptions and feelings about a number of dimensions of communication between the three parties about pupil performance at school; and to explore the data for patterns that might indicate matters upon which efforts could be focussed for the improvement of communication and collaboration between the parties. The latter instruments were constructed specifically for the purposes of the investigation and yielded the data collected. Gender, grade level, perceived best and worst grades and school (French Immersion and degrees of socio-cultural advantage or disadvantage) were variables analyzed for students. Parent responses were analyzed by gender, total number of school-aged children and school. Years of teaching experience, educational level, school and gender were analyzed for teachers. Aggregate descriptive results indicated on average that while 40% of students, 52% of parents and 51% of teachers were comfortable with the parent-teacher conference, 40% of students and parents and 30% of teachers reported discomfort or dissatisfaction with matters pertaining to parent-teacher conferences. The following issues were identified and discussed: (a) communication skills in-servicing for teachers; (b) time

length for conferences; (c) provision of receiving assistance to parents for discussion of student performance with pupils; and (d) alternate conference formats (e.g., student-led conference).

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DEDICATION

For my wife,

Therese Marie

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

The content of this chapter is organized to include the following topics: (a) overview of reporting pupil progress, (b) statement of the problem and (c) purpose of the study.

Overview of Reporting Pupil Progress

The most common inquiry directed to educational agencies concerns the reporting of pupil progress to parents (Goodlad & Anderson, 1987). Although there exists numerous methods to report student progress, such as report cards, telephone calls, newsletters, open houses and notes, Gallup's (1980) findings indicated that eighty-five percent of the American public favour parent-teacher conferences. Parents reported a preference to "meeting with school personnel before each new semester to examine the grades, test scores, and career goals for each child and to work out a program to be followed both at home and in school" (Gallup, 1980, p. 37).

This preference for pre-arranged parent-teacher conferences to discuss progress was not always commonplace. Black and Nicklas (1980) have noted that when cities were smaller and community life prospered, there existed more impromptu opportunities to discuss student's progress. Informal discussions took place at church picnics, country fairs and other community events (Canady & Seyfarth, 1979). As large metropolitan centers developed, and teachers began to reside outside the school community, parents and teachers seldom met informally and the need for parent-teacher conferences became apparent.

Kroth and Simpson (1977) have indicated that ninety percent of teachers use scheduled parent-teacher conferences to report

pupil progress. Crotts and Goeldi's (1974) research indicated that parents "strongly favour" parent-teacher conferences as a means to discuss pupil progress. It has also been shown that parents rank parent-teacher conferences as the most effective means of communication (Sibert, 1979). Parents and teachers perceive that more information regarding a student's progress is transmitted during a conference than the report card (Erickson, 1973). Perhaps this occurs because a conference setting may facilitate two-way or "real communication" while a report card is limited to one-way communication (Cawelti, 1966). Truax and Wargo (1966) concluded from their research on human encounters which change behaviour that sensitive and genuine two-way communication allows participants to grasp the meaning and significance of what is being communicated. The literature considered thus far has provided groundwork for investigating a more complete understanding of this type of communication as it pertains to parent-teacher conferences.

Statement of the Problem

Despite the general acceptance of parent-teacher conferences as an effective means to report pupil progress, several authors have noted that parents, teachers and students are not comfortable with the process. Black and Nicklas (1980) have suggested that because parents have had unpleasant experiences as students themselves, many parents harbour deep-seated resentment toward the educational system. Barron and Colvin (1984) described parent-teacher conferences as "monsters hovering on school calendars" (p. 76). Finally, Goodlad and Anderson (1987) discussed student anxieties surrounding report cards and parental reactions to them.

Two conditions gave rise to the problems this study addressed: (a) the limitations of existing knowledge regarding parent-teacher conferences in general and (b) the absence of knowledge of pupils' views of parent-teacher communication and a consideration of such views in conjunction with parent and teacher views on the same subject in particular.

Conventional practice entails use of both report cards and parent-teacher conferences to report pupil progress. Report cards are frequently studied and revised or changed but parent-teacher conferences have never been studied carefully and thoroughly. The present study addresses the latter subject with the view of reducing the size of the lacuna of information.

Purpose of the Study

The specific purpose of this study was to survey student, parent and teacher opinions on a variety of matters that bear directly on the parent-teacher conference as a process of reporting pupil progress at three grade levels: mid-elementary (Grade 4), late elementary (Grade 7), and mid-high school (Grade 10). The author's employment in the Langley School District (#35) afforded access to a sample that served the study's purposes.

Students

With respect to students, the present study attempted to gain a more complete understanding of the extent they report a sense of discomfort about report cards and parent-teacher conferences. Consideration was also given to whether their responses differed by grade level, gender, perceived best and worst letter grades or school.

Parents

As with students, the surveying of parents also considered the degree to which they experience a sense of discomfort during parent-teacher conferences. Questions additionally addressed were: (a) are certain kinds of student behaviour more difficult to discuss; (b) is the time allocated for the conference adequate and; (c) are parents satisfied with communication during the conference? Parent opinions were also analyzed by gender, school and number of school-aged children.

Teachers

Research questions pertaining to teachers were the same as parents. The teacher data was analyzed by gender, years of teaching experience and level of education. Finally, a comparison of parent and teacher opinions about parent-teacher conferences was also given attention.

CHAPTER TWO: REVIEW OF RESEARCH AND RELATED LITERATURE

The following review contains an overview of the research and related literature focussing on the general topic of parent-teacher conferences. A computer search was run on Educational Resources Information Center (ERIC) and Dissertation Abstracts data bases. Upon completion of the review, it was concluded that the research could be classified into five subtopics that are pertinent for present purposes: (a) home-school relations; (b) importance of the conference; (c) teacher in-service; (d) procedural guidelines; and (e) conference effectiveness.

Home-school Relations

Rich (1987) compared the relationship between family and school to that of the right and left hemispheres of the brain. "Both are necessary to each other - complementary, nonduplicative, unique and vital" (p. 9). Since parent-teacher conferences are a valued communication strategy linking the home and school (Berger, 1986; Gallup, 1980), a brief consideration of the literature pertinent to this relationship will now be addressed. Barriers to home-school communication will also be identified.

After reviewing thirty-five studies that attempted to access the impact of "parent involvement in school affairs," Henderson (1988) concluded that there seems to be a positive relationship between achievement and parental involvement. "Children whose parents are in touch with the school score higher than children of similar aptitude and family background whose parents are not involved" (Henderson, 1988, p. 149).

Moles' (1982) synthesis of fourteen studies on parent participation in children's education indicated that although

there is still much to be learned about the specific types of home-school relations which positively affect student achievement, there is ample reason for optimism and development of improved communication techniques. He specifically identified the need for improvement of parent-teacher conference strategies.

The coming together of parents and teachers to discuss children's progress does not guarantee success (Kline, 1979). Henderson, Marburger & Ooms (1986) said that a barrier to enhancing home-school relations, through conferences, lies with the attitudes and expectations of teachers and administrators. Glendinning (1988) cited a 1987 Metropolitan Life Survey (American) which revealed that fifty-five percent of parents surveyed perceived that schools only contact parents when there is a problem with their child. Barron and Colvin (1984) claimed that low levels of skill at conversation inhibit teachers and impair their home-school interactions. McDaniel (1982) indicated that there is an occasional tendency for teachers to preach or pass judgement on parents during parent-teacher conferences. Sonnenschein (1981) reported that barriers exist when teachers misperceive parents. In particular when parents are regarded as: patient, adversarial, vulnerable, less intelligent and responsible for the child's condition, difficulties can grow. When barriers (either teacher or parent initiated) exist, contacts between home and school are often avoided; and, "unfortunately many unanswered school-related problems become compounded by neglect" (Rotter, 1982, p. 6).

Emerging from the literature is an identification of the need for two-way (not one-way) communication; and communication that is

characterized by empathy, active listening and encouragement. This is also supported by Albert (1984 & 1989), Dreikurs, Grunwald & Pepper (1982) and Elksnin & Elksnin (1989). When genuine collaboration exists, benefits emerge. As Elksnin and Elksnin (1989) stated: "Collaborative consultation between teacher and parent promotes cooperative problem-solving activities that benefit students..." (p. 268).

In British Columbia, collaborative consultation between home and school was given consideration by The Sullivan Royal Commission on Education (Sullivan, 1988), which made several recommendations for changes concerning parent involvement. For the first time in British Columbia, legislation established the right of parents to create Parent Advisory Councils in order to advise educators of parental views. In addition to parents' legal right to collaboration, The Royal Commission's Report recommended parents as valued members of the school community. Provincial Department of Education publications (The Year 2000: A framework for learning, 1990; The primary program, 1990; Changes in education, 1991) reflected government acceptance of the commission's recommendations. In particular, each of these documents identified the importance of parent-teacher conferences and emphasized two and three-way collaborative communication.

Importance of the Conference

The importance of parent-teacher conferences was identified by The twelfth annual Gallup poll of the public's attitude toward public schools (1980). Respondents were asked to indicate their opinions concerning the most important elements of education. "Good parent-teacher relationships" was ranked fourth on a list of

14 elements (Gallup, 1980). In a study by Elam and Gough (1980), the same questions were given to 400 members of Phi Delta Kappa. Educators ranked home-school relationships as the third most important element in education.

Carlson and Hillman (1975) summarized the importance of good parent-teacher relations as both gains for parents and gains for teachers. During the conference, parents and teachers can focus on the growth characteristics and needs of specific age groups as well as the educational program that are addressed to those characteristics. While the teacher may additionally learn about family values and how the child is motivated at home, parents can learn about how their child is viewed outside the home.

In a survey of British Columbian secondary schools, Kaushal and Larsen (1977), discovered that one to four parent-teacher conferences per school year are held in 80% of secondary schools. Kroth and Simpson's (1977) estimation that at least 90% of American school districts utilize parent-teacher conferences is slightly higher. Despite the apparent importance of parent-teacher conferences, Kaushal and Larsen's (1977) study further indicated that parent participation in formal parent-teacher conferences is far from satisfactory. Parental participation of less than twenty-five percent is reported by forty percent of the British Columbian schools sampled. The authors suggested that parents are uncomfortable in schools due to earlier childhood experiences. Other authors (Firth, 1985; Long, 1976; Rathbun, 1978) identified the unrefined character of teacher diplomacy skills as a primary reason for parent dissatisfaction and recommend teacher in-service.

Teacher In-service

Researchers recommended in-service training for teachers to improve their diplomacy (Borgstrom, 1986; Chow et al, 1979; McCabe, 1978; Witherspoon, 1983). Studies demonstrating the effectiveness of in-service training are scant. Three of the five studies described in Dissertation Abstracts International will now be discussed. The first is McCabe's (1978) qualitative study which described a field-based in-service program for teachers that incorporated the following elements: goals, performance objectives, lessons, learning activities, and both process and outcome evaluations. He concluded his discussion by pointing out that the program's strength centers on providing inservice training to a much neglected area of teacher education.

Another comprehensive in-service system was designed by Chow, Haggerty and Sorensen (1979) containing a facilitator's manual, a participant's workbook and a resource book. Their qualitative research indicated that teachers benefitted from involvement in in-service training and recommended further research in this area.

Rotter (1982) commented on a major American study by Prichard (1977) involving 400 teachers which concluded that "the majority of educators felt better about their conferencing abilities after receiving some training in specific skills that provide open communication" (Rotter, 1982, p. 10).

Witherspoon (1983) evaluated the effect of a communication skills teacher training program on teacher performance during parent-teacher conferences. The training consisted of ten two-hour sessions in which twenty pre-school teachers and their students' parents participated. Results of the study indicated

that teachers who had participated in the communication skills training program were perceived by parents to be more effective in attending, listening, initiating and responding.

The foregoing discussion of studies that support in-service training suggests that both teachers and parents benefit; more specifically, they may experience increased diplomatic and tactful communication during conferences. It is anticipated that the results of the present study may indicate specific topics to be addressed during in-service training of teachers.

Procedural Guidelines

There exists an abundance of literature identifying procedural guidelines for successful parent-teacher conferences. These are directed at both teachers and parents. A discussion of teacher guidelines will address both general and comprehensive guidelines and parent-teacher conference models. Suggested guidelines for parents will also be discussed.

General Teacher Guidelines

According to Borgstrom (1986) the literature's earliest example of general parent-teacher conference guidelines was offered by D'Evelyn (1945). She recommended that teachers: (a) assume responsibility for the success of the conference, (b) arrange for privacy, (c) not sit behind a desk, (d) welcome parents in a relaxed manner, (e) listen attentively, (f) draw out parents' thoughts and feelings about the child, (g) follow through if a parent is worried about a child, (h) accept parents' reasons for the child's behaviour, (i) accept parents' plan of action, (j) not argue with parents, (k) not assume the parents want to help, (l) not criticize, (m) not give advice, (n) not get ahead of

parents' thinking, (o) avoid embarrassing the parent, (p) not show surprise or disapproval, (q) seek additional help if necessary, and (r) end the conference on a positive note (pp. 95-96).

The literature which followed expanded upon D'Evelyn's (1945) guidelines and emphasized the two-way communication aspect of parent-teacher conferences. Long (1976) emphasized twenty "do's and don'ts" to reduce anxiety during conferences and develop home-school partnerships. Rathbun (1978) offered fourteen suggestions for avoiding conflict. Cramer (1978), McSweeney (1983) and Reis (1988) additionally suggested general guidelines for encouraging parent participation and enhancing effectiveness of parent-teacher conferences.

Black and Nicklas (1980) presented their guidelines through case examples contrasting effective and ineffective conferences. The first case exemplified ineffective communication where the teacher was unprepared and not sensitive to the parent's needs. The second case illustrated the value of attending to relational aspects of the conference. Re' (1975) also offered two case studies where positive teacher communication skills were modelled. Re's discussion of these examples focussed on attending to non-verbal communication during the parent-teacher conference.

Another strand of the procedural guidelines literature focussed on interviewing skills and empathy. Cawelti (1966) claimed that; active listening during the conference is the teacher's responsibility. Barron and Colvin (1984) emphasized responding skills and the use of language to communicate empathy and understanding. This was also supported by Dinkmeyer and McKay, (1976); Gordon, (1970); and Rogers, (1963). Stewart (1978)

suggested identifying positive follow-up plans to support students and offered a case study to illustrate this process. Davis and Davis (1981) described the "rhetorical approach" to viewing parent-teacher conferences from the parents' vantage point. Their approach underscored the interplay of roles and circumstances.

Rotter (1982) said that warmth, empathy and respect are the three primary conditions of effective parent-teacher conferences. Demonstrating care, primarily through nonverbal behaviour (Rogers, 1963), communicates warmth to parents during the conference. Empathy is experienced by parents when teachers listen attentively and reflect back to parents both the content and affect of what they heard (Rogers, 1963). Parents feel respected when they sense that teachers trust in their capability to solve their own problems (Adler, 1930). Respect involves a collaborative rather than a dependent relationship, where teachers genuinely work with parents and avoid assuming the expert role (Dreikurs et al, 1982). Once these conditions of a positive psychological climate are met the teacher may work to be concrete, genuine, immediate, appropriately self-disclosing and open to effective confrontation (Rotter, 1982).

The preceding discussion of teacher guidelines for conferencing recommended practical advice for the improvement of parent-teacher conferences and particularly brought attention to empathic communication. This study will later consider whether parents and teachers report experiencing two-way communication during the conference.

Comprehensive Teacher Guides

When reviewing the literature which stressed the interviewing process, two teacher guides appeared particularly comprehensive. Kroth and Simpson's (1977) guide is insightful because they have drawn upon leading individuals in the counselling literature to explain the interview process as it pertains to parent-teacher conferences. They also offered several role-playing scenarios in which teachers can practice their communication skills. The second guide offered by Canady and Seyfarth (1979) welcomed disagreements in the parent-teacher conference and suggested approaches to sensitively resolve conflict. They presented several examples covering a broad range of potential conflicts.

The Michigan Association of Middle School Educators offered a comprehensive teacher guide to conducting parent-teacher conferences (Hamachek & Romano, 1984). Although it set forth perceptual alternatives, or positive ways to discuss students' negative behaviours, it did not appear to emphasize many of the communication skills described by the previous authors.

The Toronto Board of Education (1982) offered a comprehensive guide which highlights relationship building in the interview process. Topics such as parents of different ethno-cultural backgrounds, angry parents, punitive parents, parents who discuss family problems, the presence of the child during the conference and participation of other professionals were included. Specific suggestions are offered. The British Columbia Teachers' Federation has also published a general guide for elementary teachers (Poulton & Lombardi, 1981).

Of particular interest to the present discussion is the lack of research presented by these guides to support their recommendations. It appears that they offer recipe-like approaches to conducting effective conferences which are not empirically validated. The present study will provide a more thorough understanding of parent-teacher conferences and suggest specific recommendations based on survey data.

Models for Conducting Parent-teacher Conferences

Numerous models for conducting parent-teacher conferences are presented in the literature. They may be categorized as traditional or alternative models. Gelfer and Perkins (1987) presented a nine-step model in which specific suggestions are discussed for each component. The suggestions are aimed at reducing discomfort and confusion while creating a productive working relationship. In particular, they recommend that parents be allowed to talk without interruption (teachers should not try to respond to every issue) and send a conference summary home to parents to clarify the resulting plan of action. Other models emphasized similar suggestions. Mayers and Pawlas (1989) reported that teachers tend "to monopolize parent-teacher conferences by talking 75 to 98 percent of the allotted time" and that this "expert" role can hinder parent participation (p. 67). Kline (1979) and Meyers and Pawlas (1989) identified three-step models which also recommended a conference summary or action plan to implement outcomes of the conference.

Alternate models for conducting parent-teacher conferences suggested more parent collaboration, counsellor assistance and student participation. Elksnin and Elksnin (1989) outlined a

collaborative consultation model, consisting of an eight step process where the parent-teacher conference is reconceptualized to focus on parents and teachers as mutual problem-solvers. They caution the teacher from assuming an expert role but recommend a consultant role; thus recognizing the benefit of parent and teacher collaboration.

Involving counsellors in selected parent-teacher conferences was suggested by Carlson and Hillman (1975). Their parent-teacher-counsellor model utilized the helping skills of a trained counsellor to facilitate mutual support, collaboration and modelling of effective communication skills. They recommended (a) clarifying the purpose of the meeting; (b) exploring the issues in a non-threatening manner which avoids blaming and fault-finding; (c) asking specific questions to pull together data; (d) assisting parent and teacher to understand the contingencies of the child's behaviour; and (e) obtaining a plan for reorientation.

Camp (1958) and Glasser (1969) have advocated that students be active members of conference teams. Hogan (1975) also supported this approach and suggested the following advantages: (a) students experience parent and teacher working as a team for his or her benefit; (b) the aura of secretiveness is eliminated; (c) expectations become clear to all interested parties; (d) student involvement encourages ownership of actions mutually decided upon; and (e) an open relationship between home and school is facilitated (p. 313).

Freeman's (1975) description of three-way communication (student-parent-teacher) included preparation guidelines for teachers and students. She advocated student rehearsal through

roleplaying in a variety of groupings. Hubert (1989) further suggested that parents, teachers and students each be oriented in preparation for the conference.

Readdick, Golbeck, Klein and Cartwright (1984) presented a child-centered, developmental three-way conference model for mildly disabled, normal and gifted children in preschools and elementary schools. Included in this model are suggestions for responding to active, passive and reactive modes of child involvement. They also identified the need to be sensitive to a child's developmental level; for example, younger pupils will likely assume a more passive role during the conference. Wyatt and Wyatt (1985) reported a three-way conference model and emphasized that secondary students may also be active participants. Their model differs from the previous one (Readdick et al, 1984) as it is teacher-centered and does not include students in the pre-conference phase. The teacher decides the agenda, presents student profile and encourages three-way dialogue.

Little (1986) developed the student-led parent-teacher conference model which places students of all grade levels in a key leadership position, as they assume the role of reporting school progress to parents. The primary goal of these conferences is to "teach students the basic principles of accepting responsibility for the work they do at school, to help students learn new concepts and skills, and to offer students the opportunity to show their achievement to parents" (p. 210). Little (1986) claimed that this approach to reporting student progress is based on the Adlerian view that children are social

beings whose behaviour is purposeful and self-determining, thus they are capable and willing to take responsibility for their experience (Dinkmeyer & McKay, 1976). Little's (1986) original work was elaborated by Little and Allan (1989), who reported that "this program improved not only home-school communication patterns but also the educational climate of the school during the conference time" (p. 217). Little and MacDonald (1991) also discussed how positive home-school relationships may be encouraged by implementing student-led conferences. Guyton and Fielstein (1989) successfully implemented Little and Allan's (1989) student-led parent-teacher model and reported that all parties were satisfied with the approach.

Parent Guidelines

There are several guidelines for parents that contribute to positive outcomes of parent-teacher conferences. The United Federation of Teachers (1989) offered a comprehensive parent guide for parent-teacher conferences at all grade levels of public education. The manual suggested: (a) potential questions to ask the teacher, (b) exchanging information about behaviour at home, (c) what should be noticed during the conference, (d) participation in the parents' association, and (e) guidelines for home discussion.

Firth's (1985) discussion entitled "The dreaded parent-teacher conference: You both win or your child loses" suggested the development of sixteen skills for active parent participation during conferences. He advises parents to: overcome feelings of intimidation; relax and be prepared; facilitate cooperative problem-solving; encourage or assume leadership if the teacher is

struggling; and direct conference time toward constructive action and effective solutions (pp. 57-69). Albert's (1984) chapter on establishing an effective home-school partnership offered parents practical suggestions and guidelines for effective communication. She accentuated honesty and respect.

Conference Effectiveness

The various studies of conference effectiveness gave emphasis to five topics: parent and teacher satisfaction; parent and teacher attitudes; effects on parent attitudes toward school; perceived problems; and comparison of methods.

Parent and Teacher Satisfaction

Homfeld (1953) surveyed parents and teachers to evaluate the effectiveness of a newly initiated program of regularly scheduled parent-teacher conferences in the Menlo Park School District. Of the twenty-four teachers surveyed 90.2% indicated that both parents and teachers' understanding of the schools and children had increased. Favorable outcomes from the conference were reported by 93% of parents surveyed.

Haake's (1958) survey was larger (even if remote in time - pre-1960 - and circumstances - New York): 838 parents and 211 teachers were included. He found that nearly 97% of the parents were satisfied with the conferences when the content items important to parents were covered and procedures parents considered to be important were followed. The more teachers had conferred with parents, the more favorably the parents responded. Both parents and teachers were in substantial agreement on the importance of conference content items.

Rundberg (1979) examined how certain dimensions of parent-teacher conferences related to satisfaction with those conferences. These dimensions included usefulness, reciprocal influence and accurate perceptions. Eighty-three parents paired with 12 elementary school teachers completed a post-conference survey. Results indicated that a majority of parents and teachers found their conferences satisfying, with parents more satisfied than teachers. Parents were found to consider themselves more influenced by teachers. Both groups reported accuracy in perceiving one another's responses to the conferences.

In a more recent study, Borgstrom (1986) evaluated 270 parent responses from the Anaka-Hennepin School District to pre and post-questionnaires on parent-teacher conferences. Responses were analyzed in total and in relation to parents' economic level and child's grade level. She concluded that parent expectations are not met at the conference and responses differ according to economic level but not to child's grade level. She found that parents of lower economic levels expected more from conferences. Specifically, they held greater expectations with respect to child's physical growth, teacher behaviours, and, particularly, conference format. Borgstrom (1986) made the following recommendations: (a) inservice training for teachers (with special emphasis on communicating with parents of lower economic levels); (b) parent and teachers exchange information prior to the conference to determine objectives; (c) develop specific guidelines; and (d) include the number of school-aged children in the respondent's family and years of teacher experience in future studies. The present study included number of school-aged

children in respondent's family and years of teacher experience as variables to be analyzed.

Parent and Teacher Attitudes

A comparison of parent and teacher attitudes toward parent-teacher conferences in selected California Seventh-day Adventist schools was conducted by Revel (1986). The study sampled 516 parents and 73 teachers and concluded that parents were less satisfied with current conferencing practices than were teachers; and perceived a greater need for these practices to be improved than did teachers. Parents were consistently more interested than teachers in the high potential quality of Christian education. The author recommended that teachers become better acquainted with the philosophy and culture of their school community.

Gerdes (1956) attempted to discover if the attitudes of parents and teachers were associated with success in the parent-teacher conference. The sample consisted of 22 teachers and 44 parents. Attitudes were measured with the Minnesota Teacher Attitude Inventory: Form A (1956). The focus was in terms of agreement and understanding. Gerdes concluded that agreement was not primary in successful parent-teacher conferences; rather, understanding, particularly that of parent by teacher, was of greater significance. This agrees with the literature (discussed previously) that advocated active listening (e.g. Gordon, 1970; and Rogers, 1963). Gerdes (1956) found that teachers in general were better predictors of parent attitudes than parents were of teacher attitudes toward the conference.

Erickson (1973) compared parent and teacher attitudes to discover what types of information were thought to be gained from report cards and parent-teacher conferences. The sample consisted of 328 parents and teachers of 11 schools. Both parents and teachers indicated a preference for parent-teacher conferences over report cards. It was reported that while the achievement level of the student seems to most affect teacher responses, gender of the child most affects parent responses. Parents of girls agreed more often than parents of boys when responding to information conveyed during the conference. Teacher responses regarding conferences tend to be more uncertain with parents of low achievers than with parents of average or high achievers.

Effects on Parent Attitudes Toward School

Kitchens (1961) attempted to determine whether existing parent attitudes toward schools could be positively changed as a result of successful conferences. Pre and post-questionnaire results indicated that parents who participated in a structured conference had more favorable attitudes toward school and teachers than did other parents surveyed. His evidence also indicated that regularly scheduled unstructured conferences may have more negative impact on parent attitudes toward school than structured conferences.

A similar study by Grant (1963) found that parent attitudes toward five specific aspects of school are not significantly changed as a result of structured parent-teacher conferences. Rather, teachers who are "doing a good job" and using a structured conference were shown in some instances to change parental attitudes. He further indicated that no significant change is

produced by "good" teachers using an unstructured conference, nor by "poor" teachers using a structured conference.

Perceived Problems

Beals (1973) attempted to gain an understanding of parents' views of parent-teacher conferences and to relate those problems to selected parental background factors. Her survey of 239 elementary school parents indicated parental confidence in the district's use of parent-teacher conferences. She also found that parental opinion was not influenced by age, education, gender, family-relationship or the number of conferences held in 1971-72. Parents indicated a preference for more conference time in which to discuss student progress (unfortunately, the amount of conference time was not specified).

In another study, Kleifeldt (1975) investigated problems perceived by parents concerning parent-teacher conferences. In addition to 154 parents, this sample included 8 administrators and 122 teachers. Results indicated that parents and teachers hold differing expectations toward the purpose and procedures of conferences. Specifically, reported differences between parents and teachers concerned the discussion of intimate topics related to the development of the child, purpose of the conference and procedure for discussing student progress at the conference.

Comparison of Methods

Robitaille's (1959) study compared three differing methods of reporting pupil progress at the fourth, fifth and sixth grades: report card, report card and parent-teacher conference and report card and parent-teacher-student conference. Results indicated that there was a tendency for parents to prefer a parent-teacher

conference when combined with a written report. Unfortunately, this study did not investigate which method students preferred. This present study will report the extent that students experience discomfort during the reporting process.

Ruttman (1987) later compared structured and individually stylized parent-teacher conferences. Structured conferences consisted of four components: (a) subjective data; (b) objective data; (c) assessment of data; and (e) a plan of action. Individually stylized conferences were defined as a myriad of approaches employed by teachers (the control group). Unfortunately, the variety of these approaches was not clearly identified. No significant differences between approaches were found. Both experimental groups indicated that while homework and class assignment were the most frequent problems discussed, substance abuse issues were least reported.

Summary

This chapter reviewed literature on parent-teacher conferences, addressed through the following subtopics: (a) home-school relations, (b) importance of the conference, (c) teacher in-service, (d) procedural guidelines, and (e) conference effectiveness. Some of the conclusions that may be drawn from each subtopic can be summarized as follows: (a) There exists a positive relationship between effective parent-teacher conferences and positive home-school partnerships; (b) Parents and teachers report valuing parent-teacher conferences as a means to report pupil progress; (c) Teachers benefitted from involvement in in-service training; (d) The literature is filled with suggestions, guidelines and models for conducting both

traditional and alternative conferences (most of which emphasized collaborative communication and mutual problem-solving): (e) Comprehensive teacher guides address all grade levels and specific communication issues; (f) Some writers also offered guidelines for parents; and (g) With the exception of Borgstrom (1986) and Revel (1986), studies revealed that sample proportions of parents and teachers expressing some degree of satisfaction or no dissatisfaction with parent-teacher conferences ranged from 90% to 97%. This researcher doubts that on average only ten percent of parents or teachers are dissatisfied with the present approaches and limitations of parent-teacher conferences.

It is interesting to note that the previously discussed studies on parent-teacher conferences do not examine whether students are satisfied with the reporting process, despite "the well known fact that children sometimes have anxieties about their 'report cards' and the ways their parents will react to them" (Goodlad & Anderson, 1987, p. 136). Richardson's (1955) report of the Cooperative Council on In-service Education claimed: (a) that children want parents and teachers to know one another; (b) that children wish to participate in the reporting conference; (c) that some children are anxious about the conference; and (d) that children want parents to appreciate their efforts.

At this time, reports on empirical investigations of these matters are extremely hard to find. The only one found is that of Anderson and Steadman (1950), who surveyed seventy-six grade eight students from Illinois with a questionnaire about the practice of sending achievement records to parents. The study concluded that students hold reservations about report cards and additionally

indicated that children report discomfort about discussing report cards with parents. They claimed that valuable information could be obtained by surveying student opinions and attitudes concerning the parent-teacher conference. This present study is designed to obtain student opinions about parent-teacher interaction; and it conveys such information in conjunction with parallel data from parents and teachers.

CHAPTER THREE: RESEARCH METHOD

The substance of this chapter is organized into the following sections: (a) research questions; (b) instrument construction; (c) sampling procedure; (d) data collection; and (e) data analysis.

Research Questions

This study addressed the following questions for each sampled group:

Students

1. In what ways and to what extent do students report a sense of discomfort about home-school communication concerning their school progress? Specifically, what is the extent of concern about the following:

- a. reporting in general;
- b. teacher's written comments about performance;
- c. the pupil's communication with parent?

2. In what ways and to what extent do students report a sense of discomfort about parent-teacher conferences? Specifically, what is the degree of concern about the following:

- a. parent-teacher conferences in general;
- b. what will be discussed in the student's absence;
- c. communication with parent?

3. In what ways and to what extent do student opinions of the reporting process differ by gender, grade level, perceived best and worst letter grades and school?

Parents

4. To what extent do parents report a sense of discomfort when discussing their child's progress during the parent-teacher conference?

5. In what ways and to what extent do parents report difficulty in discussing matters pertaining to their child? Specifically,

a. do parents report difficulty discussing: (i) their child's behaviour; (ii) the limitations of their child's abilities; and (iii) their child when he/she falls short in achievement; and

b. to what extent do parents perceive that teachers have such difficulties discussing students who: (i) have limited capabilities; (ii) achieve above average; (iii) misbehave; (iv) are average; and (v) achieve below average? 6. To what extent do parents desire more time for discussing student progress at the conference?

7. With respect to communication during the parent-teacher conference, in what ways and to what extent do parents report dissatisfaction with the following dimensions of parental participation:

a. the adequacy of teachers' responses to parent questions;
b. how well teachers listen to what parents say;
c. teachers being too positive or too critical about pupil performance; and

d. clarity and directness of teacher's comments?

8. With respect to parent-teacher conferences, do differences become evident when the views of parents, whose children attend schools that have fewer behavioural disorder referrals and

relatively higher achievement indices, are compared with the views of parents, whose children attend schools with more behavioural disorder referrals and relatively lower achievement indices?

9. To what degree does the number of respondent's school-aged children or respondent's gender affect parent's reported opinions of parent-teacher conferences?

Teachers

10. In what ways and to what extent do teachers report difficulty discussing matters pertaining to students? Specifically,

a. do teachers report difficulty discussing student's: (i) behaviour; (ii) limitations of ability; and (iii) falling short in achievement;

b. do teachers report difficulty discussing students who: (i) have limited abilities; (ii) achieve above average; (iii) misbehave; (iv) are average; and (v) achieve below average; and

c. to what extent do teachers perceive that parents have such difficulties?

11. To what extent do teachers desire more time for discussing student progress at the conference?

12. With respect to communication during the parent-teacher conference, in what ways and to what extent do teachers report dissatisfaction with the following dimensions of parental participation:

a. the adequacy of parent's responses to teacher questions;

b. how well parents listen to what teachers say;

c. expression of disproportionately negative (overly critical) views of the child;

d. understanding of teacher comments?

13. To what extent do years of teaching experience, educational level or respondent's gender affect teacher responses to survey items?

Parents and Teachers

14. In what ways and to what extent do parent and teacher opinions differ with regard to parent-teacher conferences as assessed by the parent and teacher survey instruments?

Instrument Construction

Three instruments were required for this study: one for each of the three groups of participants (students, parents and teachers). Care was taken to ensure that these instruments would yield two types of data: that is, each was designed to yield information that reflected the views that are particular to the status of teacher, parent or pupil; and, at the same time, each was designed with comparability between the three groups on given topics (of concern to all). Accordingly, after preliminary explorations with the three groups and appropriate consultations with researchers, the author's sense of the contents that warranted close scrutiny was augmented and refined.

The composition of items and the formulation of the instruments used reflected considerations derived from consultation with: faculty; pilot studies (see Appendix A); and discussions with concerned parties.

Each of the surveys utilized a Likert-type scale which permitted degrees of agreement and disagreement. A central response point also allowed respondents to indicate neutrality.

The Student Survey (see Appendix B) is comprised of fifteen items concerning the following: report cards (4 items); parent-teacher conferences (6 items); and topics permitting further analyses (e.g., "My best letter grade is..."). The Parent Survey (see Appendix C) consists of 12 items reflecting concerns expressed by parents during preliminary investigations. The Teacher Survey (see Appendix D) has 10 items which also reflected their concerns. Each of the surveys began with background questions about the respondent.

Sampling Procedure

Approximately 20% (n=750) of the district's 3,695 pupils (in three grade levels - see below) was deemed to be an adequate sample for purposes of (and in keeping with the constraints on) this study. Three grade levels were chosen to provide a rough cross-section of stages in schooling: grade 4 comes at the end of primary schooling and the middle of elementary school; grade 7 signals the end of elementary schooling and the transition to secondary schooling; and grade 10 marks the middle of secondary schooling. Accordingly, 250 pupils from each of these three grade levels were sought as the fulfillment of the 20% sample goal.

After securing the approval and cooperation of school district officials (see Appendix E) schools were identified as catchment sources for participants in the study (five elementary and two secondary schools). Just prior to administering the Student Survey, two of the selected elementary schools indicated that three grade seven classes would not be able to participate in the study due to unforeseen circumstances. Two additional schools

were selected for convenience of access (elementary schools #6 and #7).

To ensure that the sample included an adequate number of children from homes that were not blessed with socio-cultural advantages, schools that served such children in greater numbers than is typical in the district were included. Numerous studies indicate that socio-cultural disadvantages are well-known correlates of lower academic achievement (Jencks, 1972; Bourdieu, 1984; and Gray, MacPherson & Raffee, 1983). Jencks (1972) has stated that culturally advantaged families (i.e., white, middle class, academically talented) tend to select homes in middle to high-income neighbourhoods where their children will attend schools with culturally advantaged schoolmates; just as culturally disadvantaged families tend to live in lower-income neighbourhoods where their children attend schools with other disadvantaged schoolmates. As a district counsellor the writer was in a position to know which schools were in culturally disadvantaged neighbourhoods.

On the basis of achievement indices on two provincial assessments and referrals to the district's behavioral disorder program three such schools were selected. The specific criteria for selecting these elementary schools was: (a) below district and provincial mean performance for grades four and seven students on British Columbian assessments of social studies (1989) and reading (1988); and (b) more than average number of district referrals to the district's behaviour disorder program (1990 and 1991). Table I outlines provincial indices and numbers of behavioral disorder

Table I
 Grades 4 & 7 Percent Scores on Provincial Assessments of
 Reading (1988) and Social Studies (1989) and
 Number of Referrals to District Behavioural
 Disorder Program by School

School	Grade	Reading	Social Studies	Behavioural Disorder
#1	4	* 64%	* 57%	@ 6
	7	* 65%	* 55%	
#2	4	* 70%	* 63%	@ 4
	7	* 67%	* 60%	
#3	4	72%	67%	1
	7	73%	66%	
#4	4	NA	NA	0
	7	NA	NA	
#5	4	77%	74%	1
	7	* 70%	71%	
#6	4	73%	* 61%	@ 2
	7	* 68%	* 59%	
#7	4	NA	NA	1
	7	NA	NA	
District	4	71%	66%	1
	7	72%	63%	
Province	4	71%	68%	NA
	7	73%	65%	

Note: (a) percent scores are rounded to nearest whole number
 (b) * = below district mean
 (c) @ = above district mean
 (d) NA = data not available

referrals for elementary schools. The reader will note that data are not included for the two secondary schools.

Research on French Immersion students has indicated that these pupils are socio-culturally advantaged (Cummins, 1984; Genesee, 1984; and Cummins & Swain, 1986). Cummins (1984) found that student success in French Immersion programs appeared to be related to socio-cultural factors "such as the degree of ambivalence viv-a-vis home and majority cultures" (1984, p. 87). Genesee (1984) concluded that the majority of immersion programs in Canada are populated by students who are culturally advantaged (he indicated they were primarily middle to upper-middle class families) not because of their economic status but because of their parents' cultural aspirations. This notion has also been supported by Cummins and Swain (1986) who agreed that immersion students are culturally advantaged. They indicated that the families of immersion students perceive greater cultural value and prestige of immersion programs.

Two schools (#1 and #6) which offered French Immersion programs were included in the sample to permit contrasting of student responses according to differing school programs. School #1 had a small grade seven immersion population (n=12), while School #6's program was somewhat larger (grade 4, n=48; grade 7, n=23). It is interesting that both these schools were also selected as schools which had below average scores on provincial assessments and above average numbers of referrals to the behavioural disorder program. It is important to note that because the immersion programs are located through out the

district, students who do not live within the school's catchment area are entitled to enroll.

Parents of the entire student sample were requested to complete the Parent Survey and teachers of participating schools were requested to complete the Teacher Survey. Participation in this study was voluntary and anonymous for students, parents and teachers.

Data Collection

Students

Once participating schools were selected a five day schedule for surveying students was developed. The survey was administered to students and distributed to parents and teachers the week prior to the dispersement of report cards in March. Consideration had been given to conducting the research after report cards had been dispersed and parent-teacher conferences conducted, however, during that week which followed students and teachers were preparing for Spring Break (a one week holiday). It would have been difficult to obtain cooperation of the concerned parties during this week.

The writer followed the established protocol for administering the Student Survey (Appendix I) to grades four and seven students, while a contact at each secondary school administered the Student Survey to grade ten students. Both of these secondary teachers were trained by the researcher to administer the Student Survey. The survey items were read out loud by the writer to grade four students to ensure items were understood. Grades seven and ten students read the survey items without assistance. Pupil surveys took an average of 20 minutes

for grades four students and 10 - 15 minutes for grades seven and ten students to compete. Provision for clarifying student questions about the study was made after surveys were completed.

Parents

After completing the survey, students were issued an envelope containing the Parent Survey (Appendix B), a letter of introduction from the Assistant Superintendent (Appendix G) and were requested to take the envelope home to parents and later return the surveys to their classroom teacher.

Teachers

Except for one of the secondary schools, all surveys were distributed to teacher mailboxes by the writer. Each teacher received a letter of transmittal (Appendix H) from the researcher and a Teacher Survey (Appendix C). The contact at one secondary school chose to administer the survey at a staff meeting, which resulted in a thirty percent increased teacher participation rate. A discussion of how the responses from this school differed from the remainder of schools will be addressed in the chapter discussing results. Teachers from two of the elementary schools (#5 and #7) were not surveyed as members from these schools attended an inservice presented by this researcher on communication with parents and may have been influenced by such participation. All data was meticulously entered into the university's mainframe computing system by the researcher.

Data Analysis

Descriptive statistics and inferential analyses of the data were derived utilizing the Statistical Package for Social Sciences: Extended version Release 3.0 (Under MTS).

The Chi-square statistic was used to analyze the data, and the criterion for judgement of statistical significance was $p < .05$, in all cases.

Student grade level was one variable addressed in this study. The grade levels were placed into three groups: grades four, seven and ten. Another variable addressed in this study was school, as defined by below district mean scores on provincial assessments, number school referrals to behavioral disordered programs and participation in French Immersion programs. Student self-perceptions of best and worst letter grades usually received were also considered. The number of school-aged children per family was also considered in the analysis of parental responses. Variables specific to teachers were years of teaching experience and level of education. Gender was considered in the analyses of students, parents and teachers.

The reader may notice provision for respondents to make general comments at the completion of the surveys. Due to time and resource constraints and objectives of this study, the comments were not systematically analyzed for purposes of this document.

CHAPTER FOUR: RESULTS

This study was designed to survey student, parent and teacher opinions on a variety of matters that bear directly on the parent-teacher conference as a process of reporting pupil progress. A description of the sample will first be discussed, followed by a presentation of student, parent and teacher survey responses, as they relate to the fourteen research questions earlier outlined.

Sample Description

The Township of Langley and City of Langley are located in the Fraser Valley, about fifty kilometers east of Vancouver, British Columbia and have populations of 63,000 and 19,000, respectively. The school district that encompasses both township and city is a mix of rural and urban development. While little abject poverty is to be found in the area, there is a range of prosperity or affluence, and a concomitant range of cultural capital is to be found in the homes. Table II presents a summary description of the sample.

Students

As of February 1991 the Langley School District served 17,092 students (11,136 elementary and 5,956 secondary students) in thirty-two elementary schools and seven secondary schools.

Of the potential grade four sample in five elementary schools (n=250), ninety-six percent (n=241) completed the survey. Due to absence, nine students did not complete the survey.

Table II
Frequency Summary of Student, Parent and Teacher
Respondents by School

School	Grade 4	Grade 7	Grade 10	Parents	Teachers
Elementary					
#1	38	49	-	35	8
#2	46	-	-	28	10
#3	55	52	-	58	11
#4	-	34	-	17	11
#5	33	28	-	45	-
#6	69	23	-	65	12
#7	-	41	-	22	-
Secondary					
#8	-	-	86	7	15
#9	-	-	115	21	34
Total					
Sample	241	227	201	298	101
Gender					
Male	139	110	100	69	39
Female	102	117	101	229	62

Ninety percent (n=227) of grade seven students from six elementary schools completed the survey. Twenty-three students were absent.

Eighty percent (n=201) of grade ten students from two secondary schools completed the survey. Forty-nine of these were absent and or were outside of the classroom during administration of the survey. This was expected as secondary students are often involved in extra-curricular activities which may at times take them away from class.

Fifty-two percent of student respondents completing questionnaires were male (Gd.4: n=139, 57%; Gd.7: n=110, 48%; Gd.10: n=100, 50%).

Parents

Of the surveys (n=468) distributed to elementary school parents, fifty-seven percent were returned (n=268). The secondary parent response rate of fourteen percent (n=28) was significantly lower. This low rate of return might have been improved had the postal system been utilized to return completed surveys. No incentives were provided for the return of parent surveys.

Seventy-seven percent of total parent respondents completing surveys were female. Data pertaining to family characteristics was also collected. Table III presents the frequency and percent of total number of children per family by school.

Table III
Frequency and Percent of Total Number of
School-aged Children per Family by School

School	Children per Family	
	1-2	3 +
Elementary		
#1	18 (54.1%)	17 (45.9%)
#2	17 (60.7%)	11 (39.3%)
#3	39 (67.2%)	19 (32.8%)
#4	12 (70.6%)	5 (29.4%)
#5	21 (46.7%)	24 (53.3%)
#6	47 (72.3%)	18 (27.7%)
#7	13 (59.1%)	9 (40.9%)
Secondary		
#8	5 (71.4)	2 (28.6)
#9	16 (76.2%)	5 (23.8%)
Total	188 (63.1%)	110 (36.9%)

Teachers

Fifty-one percent (n=101) of all teachers in the schools surveyed (n=200) returned surveys. Fifty-nine percent (n=50) of secondary teachers responded while forty-one percent (n=51) of elementary teachers returned surveys. This might be explained by differential circumstances: When the surveys were distributed elementary teachers were completing student report cards; one secondary school administered the Teacher Survey at a staff meeting rather than to individual teacher mailboxes.

Table IV summarizes demographic information about teacher respondents by school. The following demographics characterized the sample of teacher respondents returning completed questionnaires: 61% female; 5% hold a three year teaching certificate; 77% have a bachelor's degree; while 18% have a master's degree. Years of teaching experience ranged from one to twenty-eight years, with a mean of about ten years experience ($SD=5.6$).

Student Results

In the aggregate results on average, 40% of students expressed discomfort and 40% indicated no such feelings with the reporting process as it is addressed in the Student Survey. Students' responses (as are parent and teacher) have been collapsed to a three point scale (e.g., 1 & 2 for agree; 3 for neutral; and 4 & 5 for disagree) during the following discussion, except where it is helpful to distinguish between the two choices of agreement (strongly agree and agree somewhat) and disagreement (strongly disagree and disagree somewhat). Five point scale responses are presented in tabular form.

Table IV
Teachers' Years of Experience and Level of Education
by School (in percent)

School	Years of Experience				Levels of Education*		
	0-5	6-10	11-15	16+	1	2	3
Elementary							
#1	37%	13%	25%	25%	0%	87%	13%
#2	44%	-	44%	12%	11%	89%	-
#3	45%	9%	9%	37%	27%	55%	18%
#4	18%	18%	46%	18%	9%	64%	27%
#5	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
#6	30%	40%	10%	20%	0%	90%	10%
#7	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Secondary							
#8	23%	15%	23%	39%	0%	73%	27%
#9	15%	21%	18%	46%	0%	79%	21%

* Levels of education: 1=three year certificate; 2= Bachelor of Science, Arts or Education; 3=Master of Arts or Education.

Data for schools #5 and #6 not provided as these teachers were not surveyed.

Research Question 1

Table V summarizes results pertinent to research question one: "In what ways and to what extent do students report a sense of discomfort about home-school communication concerning progress?" The survey items which yielded data that asked students to express reactions to (a) reporting in general, (b) teacher's written comments about performance, and (c) the pupil's communication with parent are reported here. These are items numbered 2, 8, 9 and 1 (see Appendix B).

a. reporting in general?

The results of item two (I feel relaxed around report card time) indicated that while 43.6% of students felt relaxed, 39% did not feel relaxed and 17.4% of respondents were neutral.

b. teacher's written comments about performance?

Responses to item eight revealed that 44.5% of students worried about what their teacher would write about them on their report card, 37% did not worry and 18.5% were neutral. This matter will be further considered in the discussion chapter.

c. the pupil's communication with parent?

While 45.4% of students liked explaining their report card to parents (item nine), 35.3% did not and 19.3% remained neutral on this item.

The results of item one found that 35.2% of students felt uncomfortable talking to their parent about their report card, 49.3% did not and 15.5% were neutral.

Table V

Student Feelings About Communication Concerning
Pupil Progress (in Frequency and Percent)

Item	Student Responses*				
	SA	A	N	D	SD
2. "I feel relaxed around report card time."	123 18.4%	169 25.3%	116 17.3%	159 23.8%	102 15.2%
8. "I am worried about what my teacher will write about me on my report card."	148 22.1%	150 22.4%	124 18.5%	128 19.1%	119 17.8%
9. "I like explaining my report card to my parent."	131 19.6%	173 25.9%	129 19.3%	123 18.4%	113 16.9%
1. "I sometimes feel uncomfortable in talking to my parent about my report card."	67 10%	168 25.1%	104 15.5%	162 24.2%	168 25.1%

* Student responses: SA=strongly agree; A=agree; N=neutral;
D=disagree; and SD=strongly disagree.
Student Survey - see Appendix B.

Research Question 2

The results of this second research question are presented in Table VI. "In what ways and to what extent do students report a sense of discomfort about parent-teacher conferences?"

Specifically, what is the degree of concern about the following:

(a) parent-teacher conferences in general; (b) what will be discussed in the student's absence; and (c) communication in general? Items 4, 5, 6, 11, 12 and 13 were deemed to yield data pertinent to this question.

a. parent-teacher conferences in general?

Responses to item eleven (I look forward to my parent/guardian talking to my teacher about my report card) may be summarized as follows: 28.3% positively anticipated the discussion, 54.7% did not look forward to it and 17% were neutral. Student apprehension will be further discussed in the final chapter.

b. what will be discussed in the student's absence?

This researcher was impressed by the numbers of students who reported worry about home/school communication as it pertained to parent-teacher conferences. The largest proportion of students (53.8%) said that they worried about what would be said about them (item six), while only 31.5% did not worry and 14.6% were neutral.

c. communication with parent?

The results of item five (I enjoy it when my parent/guardian talks to me about the conference) indicated that 46.3% of students enjoyed conversing with parents about the conference, 33.6% of students did not and 20% were neutral.

Table VI

Student Anticipation of Parent-teacher Conferences
(in Frequency and Percent)

Item	Student Responses*				
	SA	A	N	D	SD
11. " I look forward to my parent talking to my teacher about my report card."	72 10.8%	117 17.5%	114 17%	174 26%	192 28.7%
6. "I worry about what will be said about me at the conference."	183 27.4%	177 26.5%	98 14.6%	99 14.8%	112 16.7%
5. "I enjoy it when my parent talks to me about the conference."	160 23.9%	150 22.4%	134 20%	128 19.1%	97 14.5%
13. "Talking about the conference with my parent is enjoyable."	89 13.3%	122 18.2%	157 23.5%	147 22%	154 23%
12. "After the conference I worry about what I'll say to my parent."	86 12.9%	138 20.6%	147 22%	138 20.6%	160 23.9%
4. "I feel frustrated when I talk with my parent about my report card after the conference."	89 13.3%	149 22.3%	126 18.8%	146 21.8%	159 23.8%

* Student responses: SA=strongly agree; A=agree; N=neutral; D=disagree; and SD=strongly disagree.
Student Survey - see Appendix B.

While 31.5% of students enjoyed talking about the parent-teacher conference with their parent (item thirteen), 45% did not and 23.5% were neutral.

To item twelve (After the parent-teacher conference I worry about what I'll say to my parent/guardian) 33.5% of students agreed, 44.% disagreed and 22% were neutral.

Student responses to item four (I feel frustrated when I talk with my parent/guardian about my report card after the parent-teacher conference) indicated that 35.6% felt frustrated, 45.6 were not frustrated and 18.8% were neutral.

Research Question 3

In what ways and to what extent do student opinions of the reporting process differ by (a) gender, (b) grade, (c) perceived best or worst letter grades or (d) school (differences between elementary or secondary schools)?

The only significant difference in total aggregate student opinions by gender was found with item four: "I feel frustrated when I talk with my parent/guardian about my report card after the parent-teacher conference" ($X=14.80995$; $df=2$; $p=0.0006$; $n=669$). Reported differences to this item may also be summarized by the following data: 38.1% of males and 32.8% of females agreed; 39% of males and 52.8% of females disagreed; and 22.9% of males and 14.4% of females indicated neutrality.

With respect to items one to thirteen, significant differences between grades were found on all items except item ten (My parent/guardian knows how I work at school). Tables VII and VIII summarize the foregoing results.

Table VII
Summary of Chi-square Analysis of Student Opinions
by Grade Level *

Item	Chi-square	p-value
1.	37.12139	0.0000
2.	20.80656	0.0003
3.	31.07307	0.0000
4.	29.79486	0.0000
5.	66.08280	0.0000
6.	37.87864	0.0000
7.	53.74410	0.0000
8.	42.71800	0.0000
9.	14.70076	0.0054
11.	51.52156	0.0000
12.	37.58865	0.0000
13.	94.56024	0.0000

* Note: n=669; df=4

Table VIII
Student Opinions on Items One to Thirteen by Grade Level
(in percent)*

Item	Grade	Student Responses*		
		Agree	Neutral	Disagree
1.	4	41.5%	17.3%	51.0%
	7	29.1%	14.5%	56.4%
	10	34.3%	26.4%	39.3%
2.	4	52.7%	13.7%	33.6%
	7	44.9%	17.2%	37.9%
	10	31.3%	21.9%	46.8%
3.	4	63.5%	12.9%	23.7%
	7	65.2%	15.4%	19.4%
	10	83.6%	10.4%	6.0%
4.	4	39.0%	10.8%	50.2%
	7	30.0%	18.9%	51.1%
	10	37.8%	28.4%	33.8%
5.	4	59.3%	13.3%	27.4%
	7	52.4%	15.4%	32.2%
	10	23.9%	33.3%	42.8%
6.	4	53.9%	7.9%	38.2%
	7	56.4%	12.3%	31.3%
	10	50.7%	25.4%	23.9%
7.	4	82.6%	6.2%	11.2%
	7	71.8%	16.3%	11.9%
	10	51.7%	25.9%	22.4%

* Note: grade 4, n=241; grade 7, n=227 and; grade 10, n=201.

table continued...

Table VIII (continued)

Student Opinions on Items One to Thirteen by Grade Level
(in percent)*

Item	Grade	Student Responses*		
		Agree	Neutral	Disagree
8.	4	48.5%	12.4%	39.0%
	7	45.8%	11.9%	42.3%
	10	38.3%	33.3%	28.4%
9.	4	52.3%	12.4%	35.3%
	7	44.5%	22.5%	33.0%
	10	38.3%	23.9%	37.8%
10.	4	67.2%	15.4%	17.4%
	7	70.5%	13.2%	16.3%
	10	73.1%	18.9%	8.0%
11.	4	41.9%	10.0%	48.1%
	7	27.8%	18.5%	53.7%
	10	12.4%	23.9%	63.7%
12.	4	36.5%	14.1%	49.4%
	7	35.7%	17.2%	47.1%
	10	27.4%	36.8%	35.8%
13.	4	47.3%	11.6%	41.1%
	7	35.2%	21.6%	43.2%
	10	8.5%	39.8%	51.7%

* Note: grade 4, n=241; grade 7, n=227 and; grade 10, n=201.

Student Survey - see Appendix B.

Except for items two and nine all significant p-values were reported at a level of 0.0000.

When elementary students (grades four and seven) were compared to secondary students (grade ten), significant differences were found with all items. Table IX presents a summary of the Chi-square analysis for elementary and secondary responses to survey items one to thirteen.

A MANOVA analysis of the survey items by student gender and grade level indicated that there was no significant interaction between gender and grade level.

Students who perceived that their best grade letter grade was a 'C' (n=73) were compared with students who perceived that their best letter grade was an 'A' (n=310). This analysis yielded significantly different reported opinions to 10 items. Table X presents the data on this matter. Non-significant differences were found on items 5 (enjoys parent talking about conference to child), 10 (parent knows how child works at school) and 13 (enjoys talking with parent about conference).

A similar comparison was made with students who perceived that their worst letter grade was a 'C' (n=350) to those who perceived that their worst letter grade was a 'B' (n=122). This investigation found significant differences to all items except item 3 (I could work harder in school). Table XI summarizes the data for this analysis.

Table IX

Summary of Chi-square Analysis
 of Subjects on Items One to Thirteen
 for Elementary and Secondary Students (n=669) *

Item	Chi-square	p-value
1.	34.45804	0.0000
2.	20.69023	0.0004
3.	31.80330	0.0000
4.	26.35958	0.0000
5.	71.66644	0.0000
6.	28.64104	0.0000
7.	74.65297	0.0000
8.	45.11625	0.0000
9.	15.33019	0.0041
10.	28.00945	0.0000
11.	38.31460	0.0000
12.	47.33044	0.0000
13.	86.62363	0.0000

*

Note: (a) Elementary (n=468); Secondary (n=201)
 (b) df=4 (except for item 10: df=5)
 (c) See Appendix B for Student Survey

Table X

Summary of Chi-square Analysis of Subjects on
Survey Items for Perceived Best Letter Grades ('C' & 'A') *

Item	Chi-square	p-value
1.	12.35683	0.0149
2.	19.07142	0.0008
3.	15.35515	0.0040
4.	18.96357	0.0008
5.	2.72402	0.6050
6.	20.56439	0.0004
7.	9.73455	0.0451
8.	15.82257	0.0033
9.	12.41239	0.0145
10.	7.24238	0.1236
11.	18.13740	0.0012
12.	21.25026	0.0003
13.	7.07743	0.1319

- * Note (a) 73 students perceived their best letter grade was a 'C'; 310 students perceived their best letter grade was an 'A'
 (b) df=4; n=669
 (c) See Appendix B for Student Survey

Table XI

Summary of Chi-square Analysis of Subjects on
Survey Items for Perceived Worst Letter Grades ('C' & 'B') *

Item	Chi-square	p-value
1.	25.97151	0.0000
2.	14.72812	0.0053
3.	3.65403	0.4548
4.	25.08890	0.0000
5.	18.47415	0.0010
6.	19.64781	0.0006
7.	24.23489	0.0001
8.	30.11515	0.0000
9.	14.05514	0.0071
10.	18.52992	0.0010
11.	35.21819	0.0000
12.	16.38247	0.0025
13.	30.38577	0.0000

- * Note (a) 350 students perceived their worst letter grade was a 'C'; 122 students perceived their worst letter grade was an 'B'
- (b) df=4; n=669
- (c) See Appendix B for Student Survey

With respect to differences amongst elementary schools, schools #1, #2, and #6, or Group A schools (which were identified as those with below district mean scores on two provincial assessments and above district mean totals for referrals to a behaviour disorder program) were compared to schools #3, #4, #5 and #7, or Group B schools (which had above average scores and below average referrals). A significant difference was only found with item two (I feel relaxed around report card time): $X=16.614$; $df=4$; $p=0.0023$; $n=469$. The researcher was surprised to learn that while 54.4% of students from Group A schools ($n=226$) reported that they felt relaxed around report card time, only 43.6% of students from Group B schools ($n=243$) felt comfortable around report card time. This will later be discussed in more detail.

Responses of grade four French Immersion students ($n=48$) were compared to those of regular grade four students ($n=194$). Only item six (I worry about what will be said about me at the parent-teacher conference) revealed a significant difference ($X=13.83685$; $df=4$; $p=0.0078$). While only 39.6% of French Immersion students worried about what would be said about them at the conference, 57.7% of regular students held the same concern; 56.3% and 33.5% disagreed respectively. On this same item the most frequent response was "strongly disagree" (41.7%) for immersion students, while for regular grade four students the most frequent response was "strongly agree" (31.4%).

When responses of grade seven French Immersion students ($n=35$) were compared with those of regular grade seven students ($n=192$) items 6, 10 and 11 revealed significance: (item six: $X=10.98396$; $df=4$; $p=0.026$); (item 10: $X=9.73888$;

df=4; p=0.045); and (item 11: X=15.94369; df=4; p=0.003).

A comparison of grade ten student responses at the two secondary schools found no significant differences.

Parent Results

Parent responses to all survey items typically reported that while approximately 50% of parents were satisfied with parent-teacher conferences, approximately 40% were not.

Research Question 4

Results for research questions four and five are presented in Table XI. This question asked: "To what extent to parents report a sense of discomfort when discussing their child's progress during the parent-teacher conference?" Results from item one (I sometimes feel uncomfortable when discussing my child's report card at the parent-teacher conference) reported that 31.5% of parents felt uncomfortable, while 54.1% reported no such feelings. That approximately one-third of the parent sample reported discomfort impressed the researcher and will be later discussed.

Research Question 5

This question asked: "In what ways and to what extent do parents report (a) difficulty in discussing matters pertaining to their child, or (b) that teachers have difficulties?" Discussion focussed on their child's behaviour, limitations and achievement are treated separately below.

a. (i) Do parents report difficulty discussing their child's behaviour?

In discussing matters pertaining to their child, parents reported the most difficulty discussing their child's behaviour.

Item seven (My child's behaviour at school can be difficult to discuss with teachers at the parent-teacher conference) addressed this question and may be summarized in the following manner:

31.2% agreed; 58.4% disagreed; and 10.4% were neutral.

a. (ii) Do parents report difficulty discussing the limitations of their child's abilities?

The results of item eight (The limitations of my child's abilities can be difficult to discuss with teachers at the parent-teacher conference) indicated that 28.5% of parents found it difficult to discuss the limitations of their child's abilities and 65.5% did not find this matter difficult.

a. (iii) Do parents report difficulty discussing their child when he/she falls short in achievement?

Parent responses to item nine (If my child falls short in his/her achievement I find it difficult to discuss at the conference) found that 24.8% of parents agreed and 65.5% disagreed. Results of research question 5 a may be found in Table XII.

Table XII

Summary of Self-Reports of What Troubles Parents in Parent
School Communication (in Frequency and Percent)

Item	Parent Responses*				
	SA	A	N	D	SD
1. "I sometimes feel uncomfortable discussing my child's report card at the conference."	23 7.7%	71 23.8%	43 14.4%	64 21.5%	97 32.6%
7. "My child's behaviour at school can be difficult to discuss with teachers at the conference."	19 6.4%	56 18.8%	43 14.4%	79 26.5%	101 33.9%
8. "The limitations of my child's abilities can be difficult to discuss with teachers at the conference."	15 5%	70 23.5%	54 18.1%	78 26.2%	81 27.2%
9. "If my child falls short in his/her achievement I find it difficult to discuss at the conference."	12 4%	62 20.8%	29 9.7%	100 33.6%	95 31.9%

* Note (a) n=298

(b) SA=strongly agree; A=agree; N=Neutral;
D=disagree; and SD=strongly disagree

(c) See Appendix C for Parent Survey

b. Item eleven requested that parents indicate whether or not they noticed teachers having difficulties discussing students who: (i) have limited abilities; (ii) achieve above average; (iii) misbehave; (iv) are average; and (v) achieve below average. Each of these topics are discussed in turn below.

(i) Perceived teacher difficulty with discussion of limited capabilities: Results for this section reported that 23.5% of parents perceive that teachers have difficulty discussing students who have limited capabilities.

(ii) Perceived teacher difficulty with discussion of above average achievement: A smaller group of parents (11.4%) perceive that teachers have difficulty discussing students who achieve above average.

(iii) Discussion of misbehaviour: Parent response to this topic received the most attention: 30.2% of parents perceived that teachers have difficulty discussing students who misbehave.

(iv) Common or average performance or ability: Nineteen and a half percent of parents reported that teachers have difficulties with students who are average.

(v) Below average achievement: Of the parents surveyed, 23.5% indicated that teachers have difficulties discussing students who achieve below average.

Parents perceived that teachers have most difficulty discussing student misbehaviour and the least difficulty discussing above average achievement. Table XIII summarizes the data on parent perceptions of teacher difficulties.

Table XIII

Frequency Distribution Summary of Parent Perceptions *
of Teacher Difficulties

Perceived Difficulties		
Discussing...	Frequency	Percent
Student misbehaviour	90	30.2%
Limited capabilities	70	23.5%
Below average achievement	70	23.5%
Average achievement	58	19.5%
Above average achievement	34	11.4%

* n=298; see Appendix C for Parent Survey

Research Question 6

To what extent do parents desire more time for discussing student progress at the conference? While 61% of parents agreed that "I would like to have more time for discussion during the conference" (item four), 12% disagreed and 26.8% were neutral.

Research Question 7

Results of this question are presented in Table XIV. With respect to communication during the parent-teacher conference, in what ways and to what extent do parents report dissatisfaction

with the following matters: (a) the adequacy of teachers' responses to parent questions; (b) how well teachers listen to what parents say; (c) teachers being too positive or negative about pupil performance; and (d) clarity and directness of teacher's comments?

a. The adequacy of teachers' responses to parent questions: Approximately 20% of parents reported that teachers did not really answer their questions about pupil progress (item 10); that only 62% of parents indicated teachers did answer their questions will be later discussed.

b. How well teachers listen to what parents say: Results of item 12 (Teachers really listen to what I have to say about my child) found that while 62.4% of parents were satisfied on this matter, 15.7% of parents felt teachers did not listen to them.

c. Teachers being too positive or too critical about pupil performance: With respect to being too positive, item three found that 28.5% of parents reported that teachers were too positive about their child's progress; a larger proportion (40.3%) of parents did not find teachers to be overly positive. As for being too critical, item five (Teachers can be overly critical when discussing my child's progress) reported that 18.4% of parents agreed with the statement and 56.7% disagreed.

d. Clarity and directness of teacher's comments: The greatest proportion of parents expressed dissatisfaction with this matter. Results of item six reported that 31.2% of parents experienced difficulty understanding what the teacher was saying about their child's progress; almost double that proportion (58.4%) expressed comfort.

Table XIV

Summary of Parent Opinions on Communication Matters
(in Frequency and Percent)

Item	Parent Responses*				
	SA	A	N	D	SD
10. "Teachers really answer the questions I have about my child."	63 21.1%	122 40.9%	54 18.1%	51 17.1%	8 2.7%
12. "Teachers really listen to what I have to say about my child."	61 20.5%	125 41.9%	66 22.1%	35 11.7%	11 3.7%
3. "Teachers can be too positive about my child's progress."	15 5%	70 23.5%	93 31.2%	81 27.2%	39 13.1%
6. "It is difficult to understand what the teacher is trying to say about my child's progress."	17 5.7%	76 25.5%	31 10.4%	101 33.9%	73 24.5%

* Note (a) n=298

(b) SA=strongly agree; A=agree; N=Neutral;
D=disagree; and SD=strongly disagree

(c) See Appendix C for Parent Survey

Research Question 8

Do parent responses differ by school achievement level? Specifically, with respect to parent-teacher conferences, do differences become evident when the views of parents, whose children attend schools that have fewer behavioural disorder referrals and relatively higher achievement indices (Group B schools), are compared with the views of parents, whose children attend schools with more behavioural disorder referrals and relatively lower achievement indices (Group A schools)?

When parent responses from Group A schools (#1, #2, & #6; n=128) were compared to parents from Group B schools (#3, #4, #5 & #7; n=142) significant differences were found on four survey items. Parents from Group A schools reported that 41.4% of parents sometimes felt uncomfortable discussing their child's progress, 44.5% expressed comfort on this matter and 14.1% were neutral. Responses to the same item by parents from Group B schools indicated that 21.1% sometimes felt uncomfortable, 64.4% felt comfortable and 14.8% were neutral ($X=13.72604$; $df=2$; $p=.0010$; $n=270$).

Item four (I would like to have more time for discussion during the conference) found that parents from Group A and B schools responded as follows, respectively: 69.5% and 51.4% indicated a desire for more conference time, 8.6% and 15.5% were not interested in more time and 21.9% and 33.1% were neutral ($X=9.35949$; $df=2$; $p=.0093$; $n=270$).

Parents of Group A schools reported that 18.8% agreed to item five (Teachers can be overly critical when discussing my child's progress), 50% disagreed and 31.3% were neutral. Responses to the

same item by parents from Group B schools indicated that 11.3% agreed, 66.2% disagreed and 22.5% were neutral ($X=7.47928$; $df=2$; $p=.0238$; $n=270$).

Item six (It is difficult to understand what the teacher is trying to say about my child's progress) found that parents from Group A and B schools reported the following: 39.8% and 21.8% agreed, 48.4% and 70.4% disagreed and 11.7% and 7.7% were neutral, respectively ($X=13.71796$; $df=2$; $p=.0010$; $n=270$).

Research Question 9

To what degree does (a) the number of respondent's school-aged children, or (b) respondent's gender affect parent's reported opinions of parent-teacher conferences?

a. No significant differences to survey items were found when parents with one or two school-aged children ($n=188$) were compared with parents with three or more school-aged children ($n=110$).

b. With respect to gender, the only significant difference was found with item 11 ($X=4.15433$; $df=1$; $p=.0415$; $n=298$). Of the male parent sample ($n=69$) 33.3% indicated that they have noticed teachers have difficulty discussing children who have limited abilities, while 20.5% of female parents ($n=229$) reported this same concern.

Teacher Results

When opinions expressed by teachers on survey items 1, 2 and 5 through 10 were summarized in general terms the data revealed that approximately 60% of teachers were comfortable with parent-teacher conferences and approximately 25% were not.

Research Question 10

In what ways and to what extent do teachers (n=100) report difficulty discussing matters pertaining to students?

Specifically:

a. Do teachers report difficulty discussing student's (i) behaviour, (ii) limitations of capability and (iii) falling short in achievement? Table XV presents the data for the first part of research question ten.

With respect to discussing student behaviour, teacher responses to item one (A student's behaviour is difficult to discuss with parents during parent-teacher conferences) indicated that 30.7% found behaviour difficult to discuss 61.2% did not and 8.2% were neutral.

Teacher responses to item six (The limitations of a student's capability are difficult to discuss with parents during parent-teacher conferences) found that 34.4% agreed with the item, 51.5% disagreed and 14.6% were neutral.

Item two pertained to difficulty discussing students who fall short in their achievement. Approximately 41% of teachers reported experiencing difficulty with this matter, 52.1% did not and 7.1% were neutral.

The second and third part to research question ten concerned teacher self-reports of student matters which they found most difficult to discuss with parents at conferences and teacher perceptions of matters that parents had most difficulty discussing. Table XVI summarizes the results of research question 10b and 10c.

Table XV

Teacher Self-reported Difficulties

(in Frequency and Percent)

Item	Teacher Responses*				
	SA	A	N	D	SD
1. "A student's behaviour is difficult to discuss with parents during the conference." (n=98)	4 4%	27 27.3%	8 8.1%	31 31.3%	29 29.3%
6. "The limitations of a student's capability are difficult to discuss with parents during the conference." (n=97)	4 4.1%	30 30.9%	14 14.4%	38 39.2%	11 11.3%
2. "It can be difficult to discuss students who fall short in their achievement." (n=99)	5 5.1%	36 36.4%	7 7.1%	28 28.3%	23 23.2%

*

Teacher responses: SA=strongly agree; A=agree; N=neutral;
D=disagree; and SD=strongly disagree.

See Appendix D for Teacher Survey.

To what extent do teachers report that they have the most difficulty discussing students who: (i) have limited capabilities; (ii) achieve above average; (iii) misbehave; (iv) are average; and (v) achieve below average? (item four on survey). As indicated in Table XVI, teachers expressed most difficulty discussing students who misbehaved and the least difficulty with students whose achievement was average.

To what extent do teachers perceive that parents have the most difficulty discussing students who: (i) have limited capabilities; (ii) are above average; (iii) misbehave; (iv) are average; and (v) are below average achievers? (item three on survey). Teachers reported that they perceived parents had the most difficulty discussing students with limited capabilities and those who misbehaved and the least difficulty with students whose achievement was above average. Table XVI presents the results of teachers' self-reported difficulties and teachers' perceptions of parent difficulties.

Research Question 11

To what extent do teachers desire more time for discussing student progress at the conference? Approximately 36% of teachers indicated satisfaction with the amount of time allotted for conferencing with parents (item 5), 57% were dissatisfied and 7% were neutral.

Table XVI

Summary of Teacher Self-reported Difficulties and
Teacher Perceptions of Parent Difficulties
(in percent; n=101)

Difficulties Discussing		
Students Who:	Teacher*	Parent*
Misbehave	30.7%	19.8%
Have limited capabilities	22.8%	20.8%
Are below average achievers	13.9%	9.9%
Are above average achievers	5.9%	5.0%
Are average	5.0%	10.9%

* Data source: Item 4 for teachers; item 3 for parents (see Appendix D for Teacher Survey).

A significant difference was found when comparing elementary (n=50) and secondary (n=48) teachers on the matter of time allocation for the conference ($X=9.73292$; $df=4$; $p=0.0452$; $n=98$). While 70% of elementary teachers indicated that there was not enough time only 43.8% of secondary teachers held the same concern. This finding will later be discussed in chapter five.

Research Question 12

Table XVII summarizes the data on the following question. "With respect to communication during the parent-teacher conference, in what ways and to what extent do teachers report dissatisfaction with the following topics: (a) the adequacy of parent's responses to teacher questions; (b) how well parents listen to what teachers say; (c) expression of disproportionately negative views (overly critical) of the child; and (d) parent understanding of teacher comments?"

While 66.3% of teachers found that parents really answered questions about the pupil (item 10), only 9.2% indicated that parents did not answer questions.

An even larger porportion (74.3%) of teachers reported that parents really listened to what they had to say about students (item 9). Only 4.2% of teachers perceived that parents did not listen to them.

With respect to parents being overly critical of their child's progress (item seven), 45.9% of teachers reported that parents were too negative and only 17.4% perceived that they were not overly critical.

Table XVII

Teacher Opinions of Communication During the
Parent-teacher Conference (in frequency and percent)

Item	Teacher Responses*				
	SA	A	N	D	SD
10. "Parents really answer questions I have about their child." (n=98)	11 11.2%	54 55.1%	24 24.5%	8 8.2%	1 1%
9. "Parents really listen to what I have to say about their child." (n=97)	28 28.9%	44 45.4%	21 21.6%	2 2.1%	2 2.1%
7. "Parents can be overly critical of their child's progress." (n=98)	10 10.2%	35 35.7%	36 36.7%	14 14.3%	3 3.1%
8. "I doubt whether parents really understand my comments about their child during these conferences." (n=97)	2 2.1%	18 18.6%	23 23.7%	36 37.1%	18 18.6%

* Teacher responses: SA=strongly agree; A=agree; N=neutral; D=disagree; and SD=strongly disagree. See Appendix D.

While 20.7% of teachers doubted whether parents really understood their comments about a pupil in question (item 8), 55.7% of teachers reported that parents appeared to understand their comments.

Research Question 13

To what extent do (a) years of teaching experience, (b) educational level or (c) respondent's gender affect teacher responses to survey items?

Teacher survey responses were analyzed by years of teaching experience at five year intervals (0-5; 6-10; 11-15; and 16 or greater years). Significant differences were found with only two items (2 & 6) and are summarized in Table XVIII. Results to item 2 (It can be difficult to discuss students who fall short in their achievement) reported: $X=15.82041$; $df=6$; $p=.0148$; and $n=93$. While only approximately 23% of teachers with 16 or greater years experience indicated difficulty discussing students who fall short in their achievement, about 71% of teachers with 0 to 5 years experience reported difficulty.

In response to item 6 (The limitations of a student's capability are difficult to discuss with parents during parent-teacher conferences) differences with experience were noticed: $X=13.00115$; $df=6$; $p=.0430$; and $n=91$. Approximately 46% of teachers with 0 - 5 years of experience reported difficulty; 50% of teachers with 5 - 10 years experience indicated difficulty; 15% of teachers with 11 - 15 years expressed difficulty; and 29% of teachers with the most experience found the limitations of a student's capability difficult to talk about.

Table XVIII

Summary of Teacher Responses to Items Two and Six
by Years of Experience (in frequency and percent)

Item	Experience	Agree	Neutral	Disagree
2. It can be difficult to discuss students who fall short in their achievement. (n= 93)	0 - 5	17 70.8%	1 4.2%	6 25.0%
	6 - 10	6 35.3%	2 11.8%	9 52.9%
	11 - 15	9 42.9%	0 0%	12 57.1%
	16+	7 22.6%	2 6.5%	22 71.0%
6. The limitations of a student's capability are difficult to discuss with parents during the conference. (n=91)	0 - 5	11 45.8%	5 20.8%	8 33.3%
	6 - 10	8 50.0%	3 18.8%	5 31.3%
	11 - 15	3 15.0%	2 10.0%	15 75.0%
	16+	9 29.0%	2 6.5%	20 64.5%

See Appendix D for Teacher Survey.

Educational level was analyzed in three categories: B.Ed. (n=31), B.A. (n=31), and M.A or M.Ed. (n=18). No significant differences were found.

When teacher responses were examined by gender it was discovered that significant differences did not exist.

Parent and Teacher Comparative Results

Research Question 14

In what ways and to what extent do parent and teacher opinions differ regarding aspects on parent-teacher conferences when measured by the Parent Survey and Teacher Survey? The present discussion will address parallel items which indicated that there was more than a 10% difference in agreement. Greater than 10% differences in agreement were reported on the following topics: (a) to what extent to parents and teachers report difficulty discussing matters pertaining to their child/pupil; and (b) to what extent to parents and teachers indicate dissatisfaction with communication. The reader will note that Table XVIII summarizes parent and teacher opinions on the above matters.

Item 9 on the parent survey and item 2 on the teacher survey concerned whether or not respondents found it difficult to discuss students who fell short in their achievement. While 24.8% of parents agreed that this topic was difficult, 40.8% of teachers agreed (a 16% difference).

Parent survey item 12 and teacher survey item 9 concerned whether teachers and parents really listen to what the other had to say. Approximately 62% of parents agreed that teachers really listened to their comments. A greater proportion (74.3%) of

teachers agreed that parents really listened to their comments (an 11.9% difference).

Item 5 on the parent survey and item 7 on the teacher survey concerned whether parents and teachers perceived that each other were overly critical of student progress. While 18.4% of parents agreed that teachers were too negative, a greater proportion (45.9%) of teachers reported that parents were overly critical (a 27.5% difference).

Table XIX

Summary of Parent and Teacher Opinions On
Three Parallel Survey Items *

Survey Item		Agreement		Disagreement	
Parent	Teacher	Parent	Teacher	Parent	Teacher
9	2	24.8%	40.8%	65.5%	51.5%
12	9	62.4%	74.3%	15.4%	4.2%
5	7	18.4%	45.9%	56.7%	17.4%

* Parents (n=298); Teachers (n=98)

See Appendix C for Parent Survey & Appendix D for Teacher Survey

Missing Data

Respondents who completed less than 80% of a survey were to be excluded from the study. No respondents fit such a category. In several instances however, teacher and parent respondents missed two or three items. This rarely occurred with student respondents. In all cases nonresponses were excluded from statistical analyses.

CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION

The primary interest of this study was to survey the opinions of students, parents and teachers on a variety of matters pertaining to the pupil reporting process, and in particular, parent-teacher conferences. Results of the 1068 returned surveys were analyzed and presented in the previous chapter. This final chapter is divided into four sections: (a) Interpretation of results; (b) Limitations of the study; (c) Recommendations; and (d) Directions for future research.

Interpretation of Results

The interpretation of results begins with consideration of student responses. Following this a discussion of parent and teacher outcomes ensues.

Discussion of Student Findings

"Children should not be reminded of their littleness or of their lack of knowledge and ability." (Adler, 1931, p.38)

Studies and literature pertaining to student opinions of the reporting process are limited. The authors who have considered this matter (Anderson & Steadman, 1950; Goodlad & Anderson, 1987; Richardson, 1955) have indicated that students are frequently unsettled by and uncomfortable with the reporting process and discussion of report cards with their parents in particular. At this time no studies or literature could be found which reported student views on parent-teacher conferences. The current investigation surveyed just under 700 students at mid-elementary, late elementary and mid-high school regarding the perception of and feelings about a variety of aspects of the reporting process and parent-teacher conferences.

Before commencing a discussion of the significant student findings, it is helpful to briefly step back and consider what student responses yielded in general. Just over forty percent of sampled students reported experiencing a sense of discomfort and approximately 40% indicated no discomfort regarding communication as it pertained to the reporting process. This magnitude of student discomfort with these matters warrents further attention.

Moreover, this writer ponders whether these dissatisfied students experience fear of failure or criticism, or a sense of insignificance and or disconnection from the reporting process. Might their report card or discussions with parents about their achievement remind them of their "littleness", their shortcomings, or their "lack of knowledge and ability"? These, and other associated questions will be reflected upon, during the following discussion of student findings. Meanwhile, it appears that this aggregate result alone speaks to the need for further consideration of this matter and the development of procedures which are more sensitive to and demonstrate consideration for pupil's feelings, perceptions and concerns.

Student Discomfort

In addition to being impressed by the extent of student apprehension and discomfort with the reporting process, this researcher found that student opinions on several items were particularly worthy of attention. The three survey items in which students responded with the highest proportions of discontent (items 11, 6 and 8; see Appendix B) concerned anticipation of the reporting process. Approximately 55% of students reported that they did not look forward to parent-teacher

discussions about the degree and character of their progress. Just over 54% of students said they worried over what would be said about them in their absence. Finally, just under half of the students said they worried about teachers' written comments about their performance. Unfortunately, a discussion of these findings in conjunction with other studies is not possible as the research on this topic is practically nonexistent.

At this point it is important to note that some student anxiety and apprehension with respect to the reporting process may be helpful. Travis (1991) has stated that superego anxiety is necessary for achievement, civilized living and peaceful social life.

The findings of the present study support the ideas of Goodlad and Anderson (1987), who suggested that students hold anxieties about the reporting process because of their lack of knowledge of what is to be exchanged in their absence. To this end they have recommended student participation in the reporting process in the forms of teacher-student (to prepare the pupil for what will be exchanged between teacher and parent) or student-parent-teacher conferences (to involve students in the process).

Student responses to these three items became even more interesting to consider when their perceptions of achievement level was considered. Students who perceived their best letter grade was a 'C' were compared to those who perceived their best grade was an 'A'. It is not surprising to this researcher that comparatively 20% more 'C' students than 'A' students indicated greater apprehension to these three items. It could be speculated

that the present reporting system in general has served to remind lower achieving students of their failings and academic misgivings. Goodlad and Anderson (1987) have cited several studies indicating that the labeling of students with lower letter grades may serve to discourage and hinder their development of sound lifelong learning attitudes. Although this may be true for some students, for others it may serve as a signal to buckle down and strive.

School

Only one significant finding was identified for students who attended schools characterized by (a) lower achievement indices and more frequent behavioural disorder referrals and (b) higher achievement indices and less frequent behavioural disorder referrals. Results indicated that students from lower achieving schools felt more relaxed around report card time (item 2 of Student Survey) than students from higher achieving schools. Approximately 11% more students from lower achieving schools expressed feeling relaxed around report card time. One might speculate that students from higher achieving schools were more anxious when reports were being completed because of their heightened vigilance and awareness of possible ramifications. Perhaps these students feel more pressure to achieve. Responses to this item underscore the importance of not assuming that student discomfort with respect to the reporting process is not necessarily deleterious. It is also important to note that school climate might also affect student responses to the reporting process.

French Immersion

With respect to differences associated with school language programming a significant difference was only found with the item concerning students who worried about what might be said about them at the conference (item 6). A smaller proportion (approximately 20%) of French Immersion students indicated worrying about what might be said about them in their absence than regular english program students. The most frequent responses of both these groups indicated opposite views of item six. About 42% of immersion students "strongly disagreed" that they worried while about 32% of regular students "strongly agreed" that they worried. This differing view might be better understood when parental involvement is considered. Genesee (1984) has stated that parents of French Immersion students are often more involved in their children's education. Perhaps immersion students were less worried about what might be said about them at the conference because they were already aware of what their parents thought about their progress?

Communication with Parents

According to Elkind (1989) in United States working parents spend an average of 9 to 10 minutes per weekday involved in quality communication with their children. To the extent that parents in general devote such limited time to communication in the home, it becomes meaningful to consider a discussion of student perceptions of communication between child and parent concerned with pupil achievement. More than one-third of student respondents expressed discomfort and frustration in discussing their report cards with their parent. Moreover, almost half of

the students indicated that they did not enjoy talking with their parent about the parent-teacher conference.

These findings are in keeping with Anderson and Steadman's (1950) study which found that 41% of students experienced discontent with parent reactions to their achievement report. They also concluded that 49% of students perceived that the reporting process did not help parents to better understand their school performance (p. 138).

The present study clearly discovered, that from a student's perspective, a substantial proportion of children and their parents have difficulty communicating about pupil progress. This matter warrents further empirical investigation. For the purpose of the present discussion however, it could be speculated that perhaps parents attach a great deal of significance to school letter grades and teacher comments without fully understanding the child's perspective and daily experiences. It is perhaps when parents hold limited impressions of their child's school progress, based on letter grades and teacher comments, they might miss the overall context of the child's school experience and important features of it from the child's point of view. Adler (1957) speaks of the child being at once the picture and the artist. He said that by focussing on the whole child (and not simply letter grades and teacher comments), we "avoid the problem of trying to understand the significance of a few individual notes torn from the context of an entire melody" (p. 25). Reporting methods need to take into consideration the complete or whole child.

Gender

Based on the earlier work of Anderson and Steadman (1950), whose study of grade eight students indicated that 20% more boys than girls were dissatisfied with parent responses to letter grades, it was anticipated that student responses to the current questionnaire items might differ by gender. With the exception of item four, no significant differences by gender were found. This item found that, on average, approximately 6% more boys experienced frustration in talking with parents about their report card after their parent attended the parent-teacher conference than girls. It could be surmised that Anderson and Steadman's (1950) results might be questionable due to their limited sample size ($n = 76$), which may not have been representative of the general student population. Because the gender ratios differ somewhat between grade levels the current study analyzed student responses to survey items by grade level and gender and found no significant interaction.

Grade Level

The comparison of student responses by grade level yielded significant differences on all items. It appears that as students get older they express higher levels of discomfort and apprehension about the reporting process. These results suggest changes to the reporting process be foremost considered at the secondary level.

Summary

The foregoing discussion of student results has provided a rationale for student participation in the reporting process to minimize their apprehension. Recently, several authors (Guyton &

Fielstein, 1989; Hubert, 1989; Little & Allan, 1989; Little & MacDonald, 1991) have even advocated that students assume a central role in facilitating the conference. Little and MacDonald (1991) suggested that the intent of the student-led conference model is to give significance to the student's role and in particular their ability to assume developmentally appropriate responsibility for achievement. Glasser (1969) and Dreikurs et al (1982) have also advocated increased student recognition for improvement and self-reporting. Student performance may be enhanced by developing self management, responsibility for learning and communication skills to dialogue with significant others. Although this present discussion has advocated student participation and leadership to enhance school performance, it is imperative that teacher and parent roles also be considered.

Discussion of Parent and Teacher Findings

"When parents are summoned to school on
account of their children they come
feeling like accused criminals."
(Adler, 1930, p. 241)

Before commencing a discussion of the numerous findings which pertained to parents and teachers, it is helpful to first consider what the results yielded in general. While on average 40% of parent respondents expressed dissatisfaction with the reporting process, a smaller proportion of teachers (30%) indicated discontent. More parents and teachers were satisfied with the reporting process than those who were not: approximately 52% of parents and teachers were satisfied. These results contradict those of Haake (1958), Homfeld (1953), and Rundberg (1979) who

generally found greater proportional levels of elementary parent and teacher satisfaction with parent-teacher conferences; for example, Haake (1958) found that almost 100% of parents surveyed were satisfied. The current results generally support the more recent findings of Borgstrom (1986), who reported that a greater proportion of parents were dissatisfied with parent-teacher conferences than those who indicated content. Having first considered these results collectively, the present discussion will now address specific details.

Before discussing individual findings it is important to realize that even though there was no specific referral to home-school communication per se in the individual survey items, the overall meaning of the questionnaire bears significance on the home-school partnership.

Time Factor

Rotter (1982) has stated that a common pitfall of parent-teacher conferences is insufficient time for parents and teachers to discuss student progress. Only 12% of parents and 35% of teachers were satisfied with the amount of time presently available for conferences. While just over 60% of parents in the present investigation reported that they desired more time to converse with teachers, about the same proportion (57%) of teachers indicated that they wanted more time. These findings disagree with that of Beals (1973) whose investigation on this matter suggested that parents wanted more time for conferences than did teachers. Given that often times rushing through the parent-teacher conference creates misunderstandings

requiring additional time to follow-up and clarify concerns, it makes sense that in some instances more time be allowed for meaningful communication in the first place (Rotter, 1982).

An interesting difference between elementary and secondary teacher opinions regarding time was discovered. Approximately 70% of elementary teachers expressed interest in more time to converse with parents while just over 40% of secondary teachers reported the same desire. This difference might be explained by the number of students each group of teachers work with. While elementary educators teach one classroom of 25 to 30 students, secondary educators work with several equally large groups of children permitting less opportunity to know individuals and possibly less information to report to parents. Unfortunately, due to the small secondary parent response rate a comparison between parents of elementary and secondary pupils could not be adequately made. However, the finding that almost 50% of parents and teachers wanted more time to discuss childrens' progress warrents flexibility to increase the time allocated to confer in the spirit of enhancing communication between home and school.

Discussing Concerns About Students

Both parents and teachers reported similar degrees of discomfort with discussing several matters pertaining to pupil progress. Approximately one-third of parents and teachers indicated that they found it difficult to discuss students behaviour and the limitations of student abilities. This is in contradiction with the work of Kleifeldt (1975), who found that parents and teachers held differing opinions about this matter. The current study did however find that parents and teachers held

differing views with regard to students who fell short in their achievement. While approximately 40% of teachers found this topic difficult to discuss, approximately 25% of parents expressed a similar concern. It could be hypothesized that perhaps teachers perceive lower student achievement as a reflection of their professional competence, especially in light of the recently identified societal pressures for teacher accountability of students' academic achievement (Elkind, 1989). Parents alternatively might view a child's school performance more holistically and consider achievement diminutions in light of the child's overall history.

No studies could be found which questioned parents and teachers regarding their perceptions of each others' difficulties in discussing student performance. The present study concluded that about 10% more parents were critical of teacher difficulties than teachers of parents. Both groups reported perceptions that the other experienced the most difficulty with discussing students who misbehaved and those who had limited capabilities. Teacher self-ratings on these matters also indicated that discussing student misbehaviour was the most difficult. Albert (1989) has suggested that student misbehaviour is the most difficult to discuss because both parties can feel powerless to facilitate change, and thus they tend to blame each other for student misgivings. On this matter the literature has clearly recommended improved teacher communication skills.

Communication Skills

The present study surveyed parent and teacher on a variety of matters pertaining to diplomacy. Given that adults typically

spend 60% of their daily communication activities listening (DeVito, 1976), an investigation of this matter with respect to parent-teacher interaction during the conference seemed relatively important. It was discovered that nearly twice the proportion of parents were critical of teachers' responses to their questions about student progress than teachers of parents. Also, four times more parents were dissatisfied with teachers' listening abilities than teachers of parents' listening abilities. These results agree with DeVito (1976) who also noted that in actual practice most adults are relatively poor listeners and that listening could be improved. Witherspoon (1983) has reported that teachers who were trained in conference listening and diplomacy skills were perceived by parents to be more effective at communicating. The finding that parents in this present study have reported dissatisfaction with teacher listening suggests that teachers be trained in listening.

The literature on procedural guidelines for conferences has recommended that teachers spend an increased amount of time listening to parent concerns. Berger (1986) has suggested that teachers devote at least 50% of the conference time listening to parents. It could be speculated that this would require teachers to refocus the purpose of parent-teacher conferences from imparting information about student performance to genuinely listening and collaborating with parents. Perhaps another conference concept and format, such as the student-led conference, might increase the quality and amount of time teachers spend listening to parents and children discuss school life and general progress.

One-third of parents surveyed indicated that they had difficulty understanding what the teacher was communicating at the conference. Albert (1989) reported that when parents listen to teachers who describe student behaviour in subjective terms they are sometimes uncertain of what is being said. Her home and school action plans, which model effective communication, advocate that teachers become more effective at objectively describing student behaviour. Subjective language (i.e.: "Your child seems lazy" or "Your child appears slow to pick up new ideas") often serves to wedge distance and creates confusion between parents and teachers. "A comprehensive description includes exactly what the student does ...when the student usually does it, and approximately how often the student does it" (Albert, 1989, p. 21).

While approximately one fifth of parents reported that teachers were too critical of their child's progress, almost fifty percent of teachers surveyed expressed concern with the degree of parent negativity about student progress. Because the student-led conference procedure focuses on building existing student strengths and abilities, parents might be persuaded to consider more positive aspects of their child's performance. This may also contribute to parents viewing teachers as less critical and threatening.

With respect to parent opinions about the clarity and concreteness of teacher comments during the conference just over one-third of parents expressed dissatisfaction. Could it be that teachers are not effectively responding to parent concerns due to an inaccurate or incomplete understanding of what it is parents

want to know? Rotter (1982) has indicated that listeners often focus their concentration on what they wish to say rather than genuinely hearing another's concern. In fact DeVito (1976) has commented that most people respond to another's communication before decoding the incoming message. An individual's desire to protect their psychological integrity in all personal interpersonal contacts also hinders their ability to receive what is being said (Marks et al., 1985). From the foregoing discussion it might be hypothesized that parent dissatisfaction with teacher explanations is associated with listening problems and the teachers inability to place parent concerns (not teacher concerns) in the foreground of the conference's discussion. It may also be speculated that some teachers lack the ability to be concrete and courageous in their communication with parents on delicate matters.

Demographic Factors

No significant differences were found with teachers' opinions by gender, education level or amongst elementary schools and only two findings indicated differences amongst teachers of greater and fewer years of teaching experience. However several impressive differences were discovered between parents of children who attended schools whose indices of achievement on two provincial assessments place them below average and whose referrals to the district's behavioural disorder program are above average and parents of children who attended schools that had higher scores and fewer referrals. Jencks (1972) has stated that students who attend such schools might be identified as socio-culturally disadvantaged or advantaged. It is also important to note that

variations in school climate might also contribute to a student's socio-cultural experience.

Cultural Factors

Parents of children in socio-culturally disadvantaged schools reported that they experienced more: (a) teacher criticism of their child's performance; (b) general discomfort at the parent-teacher conference; (c) difficulty understanding teacher comments at the conference; and (d) dissatisfaction with time allotted for the conference. On average 20% more parents of children in the disadvantaged schools indicated the above concerns than did parents of children attending more socio-culturally advantaged schools.

According to Jencks (1972) it is likely that parents of socio-culturally disadvantaged children also attended similar schools when they were children. These parents may have retained resentments toward the educational institution and later as adults experience difficulties in communicating with teachers (Black & Nicklas, 1980; Kaushal & Larsen, 1977). Kirman (1977) has stated that for such parents, conferences concerned with their own children (who often repeat their educational attainment pattern) may be an emotionally charged experience. Furthermore, he also suggested that the sense of inadequacy parents feel about their own children may be projected onto the teacher and that if the teacher responds defensively the parent may view this as a confirmation of the teacher's guilt.

Limerick's (1989) discussion of "busybodies, antibodies and nobodies" has explored several avenues in which schools may encourage increased participation of socio-culturally

disadvantaged parents and contribute to their lifestyle and perception of self-worth. To this end, Johnson (1991) has underscored the importance of parental participation during the primary years; not to complete mundane "keep-busy activities" but to become in touch with their child's (and perhaps review their own) sense of wonder and joy in learning. For working parents, an evening wherein they may explore their child's classroom can provide them with the opportunity to feel as though they are in touch with the pulse of their child's experience (Johnson, 1991). Positive home-school partnerships established outside of the parent-teacher conference will benefit communication during the conference.

The present finding that parents of children attending socio-culturally disadvantaged schools report the previously discussed opinions once again speaks to the need for educators to enhance their diplomacy skills and find additional ways to conference with parents in non-threatening manner. Focussing on student strengths and capabilities (as opposed to deficiencies) in the manner that the student-led conference method advocates might be a non-threatening way to meet the needs of parents of culturally disadvantaged children. Such an approach may also begin healing potential negative childhood school experiences of these parents. This is not however to suggest that student deficiencies and shortcomings be avoided and overlooked. Such issues must be faced squarely with sensitivity and generosity of spirit.

Summary

This study began with the observation that despite the apparent popularity and preference for parent-teacher conferences amongst parents and educators, problems have existed with the process. Parents have sometimes experienced alienation from the educational system and perhaps even harbored resentment toward teachers from previous experiences (Black & Nicklas, 1980). Teachers have experienced frustration in diplomacy regarding a myriad of student concerns and have therefore negatively anticipated conferences (Barron & Colvin, 1984). Finally, students have expressed estrangement and general discomfort about the reporting process (Goodlad & Anderson, 1987).

While literature identified concerns with communication between home and school and proposed suggestions for improving the communication skills of teachers in particular, empirical studies have offered little insight into these matters. Furthermore, for the most part, student opinions have been excluded from discussion in the literature and research.

From the empirical investigation in this present study, the following conclusions are summarized.

Students

1. While 40% of student respondents reported discomfort, 40% of students also expressed comfort with communication as it pertains to the reporting process in general.
2. Approximately 55% of students negatively anticipated discussing their progress with parents while about 28% positive anticipation.

3. Twenty percent more students who perceived that their best letter grade was a 'C' indicated increased apprehension about discussing their performance with parents in contrast to students whose best letter grade was perceived to be a 'B'.
4. In general, grades four and seven French Immersion students do not indicate significantly different opinions than regular grades four and seven students.
5. While about 50% of students disliked talking with their parents about the parent-teacher conference after it has occurred, 43% liked the experience.
6. Student's gender was not a variable associated with significantly different opinions of survey items.
7. Grade level was found to yield significantly different opinions on all items. Discomfort and dislike of the reporting process was found to increase with grade level.

Parents and Teachers

8. In general, 40% of returned parent surveys and 25% of returned teacher surveys expressed discomfort with the present reporting process, and approximately 52% of parents and teachers indicated comfort with the reporting process.
9. Just over 60% of parents and 35% of teachers wanted more time in which to conference about student progress.
10. About one-third of parents and teachers reported difficulty discussing students' behaviour and limitations of ability.
11. About 25% of parents and 40% of teachers indicated difficulty discussing children who fall short in their ability.

12. Nearly twice the proportion of parents were critical of teacher responses than teachers to parent responses with respect to their questions during the conference.

13. Thirty percent more teachers found that parents were too critical of student progress than parent dissatisfaction with teachers on the same matter.

14. Parents were more dissatisfied (four times more) with teacher listening abilities during the conference than teachers of parent listening abilities.

Parents

15. The total number of parent respondent's school-aged children was not found to be significantly related to parent opinions reported on the surveys.

16. When parents of children attending socio-culturally disadvantaged schools were compared to those of advantaged schools, approximately 20% more parents of disadvantaged students experienced increased: (a) general discomfort during the conference; (b) teacher criticism of their child's progress; (c) difficulty understanding teacher comments about their child's progress; and (d) desire of increased time for conferencing with teachers.

Teachers

17. Thirty percent more elementary teachers than secondary teachers wanted increased time for conferences with parents.

18. Teacher gender or educational level were not variables associated with significantly different opinions on the surveys.

19. Years of teaching experience yielded only two significant differences on survey items pertaining to discussing

students who fall short in their achievement or student limitations.

Limitations of the Study

The significance and generalizability of these conclusions are limited by the following factors:

1. As no attempt was made to follow-up why some parents and teachers did not complete surveys the representativeness of the parent and teacher sample may be drawn into question.
2. The sample was one of convenience and not random (as is usual nowadays given the necessity of having volunteer respondents).
3. Because surveys were delivered to homes by students it is possible that some surveys never arrived home and some parents did not have the opportunity to complete or to not complete the survey.
4. The secondary parent response rate was low compared to other respondent groups.
5. Student, parent and teacher expressed opinions about parent-teacher conferences were limited to survey items.
6. Although responses were voluntary and anonymous, some respondents may have still responded in a socially desirable manner.
7. The opinions expressed by respondents reflect their views of parent-teacher conferences just after report cards were distributed and before conferences were held.
8. Student degree of socio-cultural advantage and disadvantage was defined by school indices on two grades

four and seven provincial assessments and number of school referrals to the district's behavioural disorder program. A more refined definition is desirable.

9. Validity and reliability assessments of survey items were not conducted.

10. Despite training two secondary teachers to administer the student survey they may have administered the surveys in subtly different manners affecting student responses.

Recommendations

The findings discussed in this chapter have suggested the following recommendations:

1. That teachers receive conference inservice training with emphasis on the following matters: (a) listening skills; (b) sensitivity in discussing student misbehaviour, limitations of student capabilities and underachievement; and (c) encouraging parents of socio-culturally disadvantaged children.
2. That school counsellors work with teachers to develop effective communication skills.
3. That alternate reporting methods focus on identifying student strengths and capabilities.
4. That alternate reporting methods (such as the student-led conference model) be considered to involve students as active and respected members of the home-school partnership. Results indicate that this recommendation might especially benefit lower achieving students.
5. That consideration to developing alternate reporting methods for the secondary population be given priority.

6. That in some instances the amount of time allocated for conferencing be lengthened.
7. That parents become more cognizant of their child's daily school experiences and receive support from educators to further develop communication skills so that they might be more effective at discussing student progress with their child.

Directions for Future Research

The current research provided the formulation of several questions which should inform future work:

1. Consider utilizing a pre and post-survey design to better assess changes in opinion as a result of conference experiences.
2. Consider the matter of communication between parent and child further to more fully understand family communication dynamics.
3. Follow-up on non-respondents.
4. Utilize the postal system for parent respondents, especially at the secondary level.
5. Include in the instruments a social desirability or lie scale.
6. Further investigate the responses of socio-culturally advantaged and disadvantaged students utilizing family economic level.
7. Assess validity and reliability of instruments.

In conclusion, the current study has contributed some insight into better understanding student, parent and teacher opinions of the reporting process and in particular, parent-teacher conferences. Home/school communication as it pertains to the

reporting process will benefit from further research and discussion.

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Appendix A: Pilot Studies

Student Survey

During September of 1990, classes of grades four and seven from West Langley Elementary were asked to volunteer anonymous accounts of what they liked and disliked about parent-teacher conferences. This school was selected for convenience as the researcher's counselling role at the elementary school enabled him to communicate with students, parents and teachers.

From the opinions expressed by responding students (n=90) common themes could be identified. Approximately half of the students' statements about parent-teacher conferences were concerned with the following themes: (a) appreciation for parent and teacher meeting to discuss student performance; (b) positive value of follow-up discussions with parents; and (c) appreciation of feedback about their performance through the report card.

The remainder of pupil opinions expressed discouragement and less than positive feelings about the reporting process and conferences; indicated a sense of discomfort with reporting and conferencing activities; and expressed frustration concerning communication with parents after the conference. With respect to discomfort about reporting and conferences, students indicated that they: (a) worried about what grades and comments teachers would record on their report cards; (b) feared what teachers and parents would discuss about them when they were not present; and (c) were anxious about how their parents would respond toward them after the conference.

Student frustrations regarding talking with parents after the conference were apparent in comments about negative parent feedback and responses to parent questions about their performance. It is interesting to note that opinions expressed by these students closely resemble student opinions as reported by Richardson (1955) over 35 years ago.

Parent Survey

The Parent Survey was developed in a manner similar to that of the Student Survey. During the week of September 17, 1990 the researcher interviewed 25 parents at West Langley Elementary. Parents were informed of the researcher's intent to develop a survey and were requested to volunteer views of parent-teacher conferences. During the following week the writer delivered a talk on parent involvement in public schools to a group of parents (n=32) in Surrey, B.C. (a neighbouring municipality), and afterward requested input to the development of the survey.

Identified dislikes of parent-teacher conferences were: (a) discussions not detailed enough; (b) not enough focus on student strengths; (c) discomfort when talking with teachers; (d) lack of time; (e) ineffective communication; and (6) difficulty discussing specific matters pertaining to students. From these concerns a

pool of twenty items were developed and later piloted with parents at West Langley Elementary and at two local parent workshops in October 1990. Twelve items were selected and the same format preferred by students was decided upon. 107

Teacher Survey

During September and October of 1990 the writer addressed several teacher groups on the topic of classroom management and requested input to develop the Teacher Survey. With the exception of discomfort when talking with parents, the same issues presented by parents were identified by teachers. The writer decided to reword most of the items on the Parent Survey to address teachers. The Teacher Survey, consisting of ten items, was then piloted with teachers attending workshops presented by the researcher in November 1990.

Appendix B

Student Survey

STUDENT OPINIONS ABOUT PARENT-TEACHER CONFERENCES

- A. Date Today: ____ (year) ____ (month) ____ (day) B. Gender: boy girl
 C. School Name: _____ D. City _____
 E. I am in grade (circle one): 4 7 10
-

Circle one response which best tells your opinion.

1. I sometimes feel uncomfortable in talking to my parent/guardian about my report card.

Strongly Agree	Agree Somewhat	Neutral	Disagree Somewhat	Strongly Disagree
-------------------	-------------------	---------	----------------------	----------------------

2. I feel relaxed around report card time.

Strongly Agree	Agree Somewhat	Neutral	Disagree Somewhat	Strongly Disagree
-------------------	-------------------	---------	----------------------	----------------------

3. I could work harder in school.

Strongly Agree	Agree Somewhat	Neutral	Disagree Somewhat	Strongly Disagree
-------------------	-------------------	---------	----------------------	----------------------

4. I feel frustrated when I talk with my parent/guardian about my report card after the Parent-Teacher Conference.

Strongly Agree	Agree Somewhat	Neutral	Disagree Somewhat	Strongly Disagree
-------------------	-------------------	---------	----------------------	----------------------

5. I enjoy it when my parent/guardian talks to me about the conference.

Strongly Agree	Agree Somewhat	Neutral	Disagree Somewhat	Strongly Disagree
-------------------	-------------------	---------	----------------------	----------------------

6. I worry about what will be said about me at the Parent-Teacher Conference.

Strongly Agree	Agree Somewhat	Neutral	Disagree Somewhat	Strongly Disagree
-------------------	-------------------	---------	----------------------	----------------------

7. I work hard at school.

Strongly Agree	Agree Somewhat	Neutral	Disagree Somewhat	Strongly Disagree
-------------------	-------------------	---------	----------------------	----------------------

turn page over...

8. I am worried about what my teacher will write about me on my report card.

Strongly Agree	Agree Somewhat	Neutral	Disagree Somewhat	Strongly Disagree
-------------------	-------------------	---------	----------------------	----------------------

9. I like explaining my report card to my parent/guardian.

Strongly Agree	Agree Somewhat	Neutral	Disagree Somewhat	Strongly Disagree
-------------------	-------------------	---------	----------------------	----------------------

10. My parent/guardian knows how I work at school.

Strongly Agree	Agree Somewhat	Neutral	Disagree Somewhat	Strongly Disagree
-------------------	-------------------	---------	----------------------	----------------------

11. I look forward to my parent/guardian talking to my teacher about my report card.

Strongly Agree	Agree Somewhat	Neutral	Disagree Somewhat	Strongly Disagree
-------------------	-------------------	---------	----------------------	----------------------

12. After the Parent-Teacher Conference I worry about what I'll say to my parent/guardian.

Strongly Agree	Agree Somewhat	Neutral	Disagree Somewhat	Strongly Disagree
-------------------	-------------------	---------	----------------------	----------------------

13. Talking about the Parent-Teacher Conference with my parent/guardian is enjoyable.

Strongly Agree	Agree Somewhat	Neutral	Disagree Somewhat	Strongly Disagree
-------------------	-------------------	---------	----------------------	----------------------

14. My BEST SUBJECT is _____; and I usually get the following letter grade in it (circle the grade): D C B A.

15. My WORST SUBJECT is _____; and I usually get the following letter grade in it (circle the grade): D C B A.

Thank you for your opinions about these statements. Please feel comfortable to make any further comments about Parent-Teacher Conferences. _____

Appendix C

Parent Survey

PARENT/GUARDIAN OPINIONS ABOUT PARENT-TEACHER CONFERENCES

Junior secondary (8 - 10) ____, senior secondary (11 - 12) ____

- D. Total number of school-aged children in family
(Please circle number): 1, 2, 3, 4, 5 or more
-

Circle one response which best indicates your opinion:

1. I sometimes feel uncomfortable when discussing my child's report card at the Parent-Teacher Conferences.

Strongly Agree	Agree Somewhat	Neutral	Disagree Somewhat	Strongly Disagree
-------------------	-------------------	---------	----------------------	----------------------

2. A look at my child's school work during the conference helps me understand his/her progress.

Strongly Agree	Agree Somewhat	Neutral	Disagree Somewhat	Strongly Disagree
-------------------	-------------------	---------	----------------------	----------------------

3. Teachers can be too positive about my child's progress at school.

Strongly Agree	Agree Somewhat	Neutral	Disagree Somewhat	Strongly Disagree
-------------------	-------------------	---------	----------------------	----------------------

4. I would like to have more time for discussion during the conference.

Strongly Agree	Agree Somewhat	Neutral	Disagree Somewhat	Strongly Disagree
-------------------	-------------------	---------	----------------------	----------------------

5. Teachers can be overly critical when discussing my child's progress.

Strongly Agree	Agree Somewhat	Neutral	Disagree Somewhat	Strongly Disagree
-------------------	-------------------	---------	----------------------	----------------------

6. It is difficult to understand what the teacher is trying to say about my child's progress.

Strongly Agree	Agree Somewhat	Neutral	Disagree Somewhat	Strongly Disagree
-------------------	-------------------	---------	----------------------	----------------------

turn page over...

7. My child's behaviour at school can be difficult to discuss with teachers at the Parent-Teacher Conference.

Strongly Agree	Agree Somewhat	Neutral	Disagree Somewhat	Strongly Disagree
-------------------	-------------------	---------	----------------------	----------------------

8. The limitations of my child's abilities can be difficult to discuss with teachers at the Parent-Teacher Conference.

Strongly Agree	Agree Somewhat	Neutral	Disagree Somewhat	Strongly Disagree
-------------------	-------------------	---------	----------------------	----------------------

9. If my child falls short in his/her achievement I find it difficult to discuss at the conference.

Strongly Agree	Agree Somewhat	Neutral	Disagree Somewhat	Strongly Disagree
-------------------	-------------------	---------	----------------------	----------------------

10. Teachers really answer the questions I have about my child.

Strongly Agree	Agree Somewhat	Neutral	Disagree Somewhat	Strongly Disagree
-------------------	-------------------	---------	----------------------	----------------------

11. At Parent-Teacher Conferences I have noticed that teachers have difficulty discussing children who (check one or more):

have limited capabilities ____ achieve above average ____

misbehave ____ are average ____ achieve below average ____

12. Teachers really listen to what I have to say about my child.

Strongly Agree	Agree Somewhat	Neutral	Disagree Somewhat	Strongly Disagree
-------------------	-------------------	---------	----------------------	----------------------

Thank you for your opinions about these statements.

Please feel comfortable to make any further comments about Parent-Teacher Conferences.

Appendix D

Teacher Survey

D. Degree(s) held: 3 year certificate _____ B.Ed. _____
B.A. & certificate _____ Diploma in _____
M.Ed. in _____ M.A. in _____

1	2	3	4	5
Strongly Agree	Agree Somewhat	Neutral	Disagree Somewhat	Strongly Disagree

- have limited capabilities _____ are above average achievers _____
- misbehave _____ are average _____ are below average achievers _____

turn page over...

1	2	3	4	5
Strongly Agree	Agree Somewhat	Neutral	Disagree Somewhat	Strongly Disagree

5. There is enough time to discuss student progress during Parent-Teacher Conferences.

1 2 3 4 5

6. The limitations of a student's capability are difficult to discuss with parents during Parent-Teacher Conferences.

1 2 3 4 5

7. Parents can be overly critical of their child's progress.

1 2 3 4 5

I have noticed that this has (check one):

Increased ____ Remained the same ____ Decreased ____

8. I doubt whether parents really understand my comments about their child during these conferences.

1 2 3 4 5

9. Parents really listen to what I have to say about their child.

1 2 3 4 5

10. Parents really answer questions I have about their child.

1 2 3 4 5

Thank you for your opinions about these statements.

Please feel comfortable to make any further comments about Parent-Teacher Conferences.

Appendix E: Letter Granting District Permission

Appendix F: Letter of Introduction to Parents

Appendix G: Letter of Transmittal to Teachers

The University of British Columbia
Faculty of Education
Department of Counselling Psychology
5780 Toronto Road
Vancouver, B.C. V6T 1L2

Dear Colleague:

The attached survey form is designed to gain a better understanding of teacher opinions about parent-teacher conferences. Similar forms are being completed by students and parents.

I anticipate that the results from this study will help all parties improve communications between home and school; and help us to better understand our service to children and their parents.

I am particularly desirous of obtaining your responses to the teacher survey because your experience as a classroom teacher will contribute significantly toward solving some of the challenges we face in this important area of education.

The average time required for teachers trying out the survey instrument was 5 to 10 minutes.

It would be appreciated if you would complete the enclosed form prior to _____ and return it in the sealed envelope to the box marked "Conference Survey" in your staffroom. No name is required and your responses will be held in strictest confidence.

A summary of the survey results will be made available to you at your school in September 1991. Thank you for your cooperation.

Sincerely,

Barry MacDonald
District Elementary Counsellor

- enclosure

Appendix H: Instructions for Administering Student Survey

1. Distribute surveys. Make sure that everyone has a pen or pencil.
2. Instruct students to complete the student information section (items A through E).
3. Write the following information on the board:

Strongly	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly
Agree	Somewhat		Somewhat	Disagree

Say "Today you will be asked some questions about Parent-teacher Conferences. This is not a test. Your teacher and parents or guardian will not be reading your answers. I will be reading your answers and will write a report on opinions about Parent-teacher Conferences.

4. "These questions are different from most questions teachers ask. I am interested in what you think and feel about Parent-teacher Conferences. There are no right or wrong answers because everyone has different opinions."

5. Stand next to the blackboard and say:

(Grade 4 students) "I will read a statement like, 'I like hockey cards.' You will get a chance to answer whether or not this statement is true for you.

(Grades 7 and 10 students) "You will read a statement like, 'I like rock videos.' You will get a chance to answer whether or not this statement is true for you.

(All grades) "If you really like hockey cards/rock videos, you would circle the spot on your answer marked Strongly Agree. (Point to the spot on the blackboard.)

If you like hockey cards/rock videos pretty much, but you're not really wild about them, you would circle Agree Somewhat. (Point to the spot on the blackboard.)

If you are not sure about whether you do or don't, you would circle Neutral. (Point to the spot on the blackboard.)

If you disagree with the statement 'I like hockey cards/rock videos' you would circle Disagree Somewhat. (Point to the spot on the blackboard.)

If you strongly disagree with the statement you would circle Strongly Disagree. (Point to the spot on the blackboard.)

6. "Are there any questions?" (Answer student questions until everyone understands the directions.)

7. Before students begin the survey say "Do not write your name on this survey. Your teacher and parents will not be reading your answers. I am going to read your opinions and write a report on student opinions about Parent-teacher Conferences. I would appreciate reading about your personal opinions. Please sit quietly after you have completed all the questions. I will collect the papers after everyone is finished. Thank you."

8. Be prepared to answer further questions once students begin responding.

(Grade 4) Read each statement out loud and provide time for students to circle their opinion.

9. After collecting surveys thank the students for their participation and ask if they have any questions which they would like to discuss.