WHO CARES? WHO DOESN'T?
AN EXPLORATION OF PERCEPTIONS OF CARE BASED ON THE EXPERIENCES OF SECONDARY SCHOOL STUDENTS FROM DIFFERENT ECONOMIC GROUPS

by

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ABSTRACT

This qualitative study analyzes the perspectives of secondary students from different economic backgrounds and how they do or do not experience care in their schools. A secondary finding determines that the economic status of these same students is often a contributing factor to how they perceive care. The theoretical framework for this study is anchored in the work of Nel Noddings and others who have contributed to the ever-growing body of knowledge regarding ethics of care in an educational context. The main objective of this study was to better understand how students from different economic groups come to define and perceive care. A second theoretical framework is anchored in the works of Pierre Bourdieu for a comprehensive understanding of economic status, Bob Mullaly for oppression, bell hooks, Jonathan Kozol, and Ruby Payne for understanding poverty in an educational context, and Madeline Levine and Suniya Luthar for privilege and the culture of affluence respectively. The study used a grounded theory method and data collection included semi-structured interviews, document analysis, and field notes. The study found that economic status affects student perceptions of care. The research findings describe how students from different economic backgrounds define and perceive care. A discussion of the findings gives possible reasons why one group of students may perceive care differently from another. Since care is (or should be) a central part of education, this research has implications for educators and subsequently for teacher education programs and could enhance the school experiences of all youth regardless of their economic status.

Keywords: ethic of care, economic disadvantage, economic advantage, social field, habitus, otherness, belonging

The biggest disease today is not leprosy or tuberculosis, but rather the feeling of being unwanted, uncared for, and deserted by everybody.

Mother Theresa of Calcutta (in Muggeridge 1971)

DEDICATION

This thesis is about care.

I dedicate this work to the many educators, who through their efforts to care, meet the individual needs of the many students they encounter.

Working through the lens of an ethic of care, these educators contribute to making not only schools, but the world, a more caring place for all.

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CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

It is unlikely that anyone working in education would dispute that *care* is an important factor in how students feel about their teachers and the school. It is increasingly acknowledged that caring is a crucial element in programs and institutions that are successful at working with young people (Chaskin & Rauner, 1995). Furthermore, students tend to do better at school when they feel they belong to part of a caring community (Battistich, Solomon, Watson, & Schaps, 1997). Nel Noddings (1992, 2002) argued that caring for students is not only the most important job of teachers and schools but that caring should be at the centre of all educational efforts. School is a place where students from different backgrounds spend considerable amounts of time interacting with one another. Their relationships and experiences have a long-lasting effect on both their academic achievement and their emotional well-being (Bingham & Sidorkin, 2004, p. 5). Even if most educators agree with the claim that care is central to a successful educational program, care is still not fully understood in the context of education. First, it is difficult to find agreement on a definition of care. Second, most literature on education indicates that teachers should care but, until recently, little has been said about *why* they should or *how* they can develop caring relationships with students (Deiro, 2003). The dilemma for many educators, then, is recognizing the need for them to develop positive caring relationships with their students, but not knowing exactly what this means in educational practice (Bingham, 2001, 2004; Noddings, 1992).

My primary objective in this research study was to address this dilemma and to gain more insight into the role of care as it pertains to the education of students in secondary schools. Over the past decade, an increasing number of empirical studies have been completed on the role of care in educational settings

(these are discussed in Chapter 2); however, this research study differs from most of these studies. It is original in that it explores care from the perspective of secondary students from different economic groups. Like other studies pertaining to care, this one includes care as the central phenomenon. The primary objective is to explore this further, but a secondary objective is to look at care from an economic viewpoint. This study, therefore, examines how students from different economic groups perceive and experience care in secondary schools but, unlike most other studies about care, this study has woven together two distinct concepts: care and economic status.

PROFESSIONAL BACKGROUND AND INFLUENCE

Shortly after becoming a PhD student I attended an academic conference where the keynote speaker described how her personal background motivated her academic pursuits. She went on to say it is not coincidental that graduate students and those in academia research what they do and that our life experiences, both personal and professional, are often what influence our academic endeavours. I also recollect her saying something to the effect of: "We are our research." I realized then how much my professional background has been a major factor in deciding to pursue doctoral studies and in choosing this topic for my research.

For the past 18 years I have worked as a teacher, program director, and counsellor (in that order) at secondary schools in different regions of British Columbia. Most of my career has been at three schools and each of these has been very different from the other. The students at each school are from various backgrounds, including their economic status, and this contributed to a different experience at each place. This experience has been insightful and educational but has left me with a lot of unanswered questions, which prompted this study.

My first contract teaching job was in a city in Northern British Columbia at a secondary school located in what would be described as a fairly typical middle-class neighbourhood. At that time, the school was regarded as one of the best secondary schools in the city. It maintained a high academic standard, there were seemingly few student behaviour problems, and it was thought of by the locals (and other teachers in the city) to be a *good* school. As a new and inexperienced teacher, I also felt it was a *good* school. For the most part, I was

pleased with the academic efforts and achievement of my students. The school was referred to as the one that the well-off students attended and the students themselves were very clear about this reputation. Because I was a new teacher, they were eager to point out the many positive things about their school and they were equally eager to tell me which schools in the city were the ones where the "low class kids" or as they sometimes more crudely referred to them, "the skids," went to school.

I vividly remember teaching the infamous S. E. Hinton novel, *The Outsiders*, to a grade 8 English class where one of the students compared the middle-class Sociable kids in the novel to themselves and added that the Greasers would be the kids who attended an (un-named) inner-city school. Most of my students came from homes where the parents were professionals or business people and seemed to live in what appeared (at least to me) to be relatively stable conditions. Economic disparity was evident in this Northern British Columbia city but it did not seem as defined as it was in larger urban centres. It was surprising that these students were so acutely aware of their economic status compared to other areas of the city and how they so confidently regarded their school as the well-to-do one in the city. This being my first teaching experience, although relatively satisfying, it left me somewhat unprepared for my next position.

My next position was teaching (and eventually acting as director) in an alternate education program in a rural area approximately 1.5 hours outside of Vancouver. This alternate education program was different from many others in that it was situated within a regular secondary school (the only one in town), which, in effect, made the program a small school within a school. Although there were middle-class students and a select few wealthier ones at the school, as a new teacher, it seemed to me there was a disproportionate number of students whose families were either living on social assistance or had low income jobs. In the alternate education program I was assigned to, most of the students seemed even worse off than those in the rest of the school. Most were students that education researchers would label as *at-risk.* Most of the parents (many single parents) of these students were either unemployed and on social assistance or they were the working poor. In contrast to the students I had been teaching at the previous school, I perceived the students in both the regular and alternate programs at this school as comparatively poor.

During my time at this school, particularly when I became director of the alternate education program, I began to see a co-relationship between economic status and educational achievement and success. In short, it became increasingly evident that students at the low end of the economic spectrum were in a more precarious position than those above them. It was obvious that the few well-off students were receiving awards for academic excellence and scholarships, while those at the very low end were being placed in the alternate education program. It became clearer, at least in the case of this school, that economic status was closely related to how you might be treated and how you might succeed academically at school. If you were one of the few wealthy students, the school was a good place for you. If you were in the middle of the economic spectrum it could be satisfactory but if you were at the very low end, the likelihood was that you were either already in, or were destined to be placed in, the alternative program.

Despite being in a school (and town) where there were so many low-income students, those in the regular program and some of the alternate students themselves looked down on the alternate program. Numerous derogatory terms were used to describe it. Some of the more common names for the program were: The Welfare Program, The Feebs Class (short for feeble minded), or The Loser Program. Even some of the regular classroom teachers would jokingly use these cruel names when referring to the program. It was an uphill battle for me and other alternate program staff to counter these hurtful and classist remarks and it surely affected some of our students.

My present position is considerably different from those described above. I work as a school counsellor at a secondary school in a suburb of Vancouver that is one of the wealthiest areas in Canada. The school is regarded as a very good school where most of the students achieve high academic results; the majority continue to university. The school offers several Advanced Placement courses and an IB program for middle-year students. It has a thriving visual and performing arts program and many newly established sports academies. All but a handful of the students at this school come from wealthy backgrounds, unlike the previous school. The school is ranked as having the highest family income compared to all other public secondary schools in British Columbia (Fraser Institute, 2010). The students at the present school are considerably better off financially than those at the first school (Northern British Columbia), but what is

similar is that the students and their parents at this school are keenly aware of their economic status in relation to other schools in their area and beyond.

While working at these three very different schools, several incidents allowed me to see how economic status and educational success are closely related. With poor students, their need to secure basic essentials such as food and shelter was often a struggle and this created difficulty for them at school. Incidentally, this situation also created problems for me and the other staff members who sometimes tried desperately to teach students whose minds were far removed from academic tasks. Working with this group of students continually exposed me to the social problems and challenges that so many poor people face. Although I might have been distanced from these unfortunate circumstances in my personal life, my professional life certainly reminded me how the harsh reality of economic disadvantage equates to academic disadvantage for some students.

At the opposite end of the economic spectrum where I presently work, a parent of an extremely high achieving student misread a bill for fees owing to the school and wrote a cheque for $6000 instead of $600 and did not even notice or question it. When the parents were informed of their mistake they were agitated because they were "too busy" to deal with these sorts of issues and suggested that if the school wanted another cheque someone should contact their administrative assistant to sort it out. Issues such as this are perhaps even more distant to me in my personal life than those facing the poor but in my professional life I am aware of how economic advantage equates to educational advantage for many students.

Rationale for This Research Study

Several reasons indicate why a study such as this may be deemed necessary. I will examine three. First, it has long been acknowledged that students from economically disadvantaged backgrounds tend to do worse at school than their more advantaged peers (Kozol, 1991; Payne, 1996). A study such as this might advance another explanation as to why this is so. Second, statistics show a discrepancy between teacher and student perceptions of care in secondary schools in British Columbia (BC School Satisfaction Results and Trends, 2008-09). This discrepancy needs to be understood more thoroughly. Third, my

professional background (described above) has left me with many unanswered questions about the complex relationship between economic status and academic achievement. I question the possibility that the role of care might be an important factor in this situation. Each of these rationales is described below.

Economically disadvantaged students have historically been more at-risk than other groups of students; a large percentage of them do not even complete high school (Kozol, 1991; Payne, 1996). In contrast, students from middle-class and wealthy backgrounds tend to do better at school, with wealthy students doing the best (Levine, 2006; Luthar, 2003). Despite our recognition of these inequalities, little initiative has been taken to change the circumstances. Of course some would argue it is changing, based on the fact that the number of Canadian students completing secondary school has steadily increased over the past two decades (Vancouver Sun, November 10, 2010) but despite the increase, a larger number of these students is completing their education at alternative schools or programs. This in itself is not a problem but what is problematic is that the regular school system is simply not working for some students and they end up leaving to finish their education elsewhere. Perhaps some accept this situation and justify it by saying, "That's just the way it is" but I continue to question why.

Children living in poverty have twice the likelihood of poor academic attainment and of dropping out of high school than their middle-class peers (Mandell & Duffy, 2000, p. 188). Students who drop out of school often report they felt disconnected from teachers and the school environment (Fine, 1991). In fact, a study conducted by McWhirter et al. (1998) noted that of all the reasons cited by high school dropouts, a feeling of not belonging or disconnectedness was a common answer. Many high school dropouts in the same study indicated that nobody at school, particularly their teachers, really seemed to care or understand them. This perception is unfortunate, as teacher-student relationships are important in helping to create a sense of belonging and connection for students in school (Cassidy & Bates, 2005), and might well encourage more of them to stay in school.

A British Columbia College of Teachers publication stated, "Professional educators value and care for all children, acting at all times in the best interests of children" and "valuing and caring for all children is an essential prerequisite in the development of a professional educator" (2004, p. 1). Consistent with this

report, most teachers say that they care about their students. For example, in 2008-09, 96% of British Columbia teachers indicated they care about their students and claim they include and welcome all students into their classrooms (BC School Satisfaction Results and Trends, 2008-09).

It appears that teachers and students have very different ideas about care. This attitude is evident at all grade levels but more so at the secondary level. In the same 2008-09 survey only 52% of grade 10 and 56% of grade 12 students answered that they felt their teachers cared about them. Given the vast gap between teacher and student results, this is clearly a paradox. Even more disturbing is that student percentages differ in relation to the economic status of the area in which certain schools are located. For example, when the economic status of particular schools is compared to the survey results it shows that students in wealthier areas generally indicate they feel more cared for than those in lower socio-economic areas (BC School Satisfaction Results and Trends, 2008-09; Fraser Institute, 2010).

As teacher and director of an alternate program I began to question the complexity of the relationship between the concepts of care, economic status, and academic achievement. Shortly after beginning my position at the alternate program, I began to see a pattern when new students came into the program. First, most of them were referred because they had been unsuccessful, either academically and/or behaviourally, in regular school. Second, an extraordinary number of them seemed to be poor. Third, they made negative statements about care, or rather non-care. They often discussed teachers and their experiences at regular school and some of their more typical comments would include the term *care.* Some of these comments were: "I don't care about school," or "Teachers don't care," or "Teacher X doesn't care about me." Their phrases often included expletives that I have omitted. At times they would direct their comments to me or to other staff members and say, "Why do you care?" or "You don't care." Ironically, I eventually accepted the position as director of this program because I felt I did care. I cared enough to want to address issues such as economic disparity, which I saw as unfair in a broader sense but especially in the context of education. The phenomenon of care and its relation to economic status and academic achievement has been so puzzling that it motivated me to pursue further study.

All three rationales discussed above are what motivated me to undertake this study, but overall I am curious as to why so many students at the bottom

end of the economic spectrum experience school differently from those in other economic groups. I want to learn more about why so many of them do worse at school and what might be done differently to help this group become more successful at school and keep them from dropping out of school. I also want to understand why so many of them feel negatively toward school. In essence, I want to know if many economically disadvantaged students simply do not feel cared for and if this could explain why so many of them perform poorly at school compared to their middle-class or wealthy peers. Multiple explanations may be found but I have come to feel that the role of care is often minimized or even overlooked as a possible explanation for school success or a lack thereof. Therefore, the rationale and purpose of this research is to engage in an in-depth qualitative study with students from different economic groups to see whether or not care may be a factor in their education.

Framing the Research Problem and Question

Blaxter, Hughes, and Tight (2005) declared:

> You may have a strong instinctive feeling that a particular area or issue needs researching, or will raise interesting questions. This may be because of a critical incident you have experienced. Or it may be that something about it surprises or puzzles you, or just doesn't seem quite right. Don't be afraid to follow such hunches and see where they lead. (p. 33)

"It just doesn't seem quite right!" That is the sentiment I felt early in my career but it increased when I began noticing many academically capable but economically disadvantaged secondary students doing so badly at school. At the same time, many economically advantaged students (some academically able and some with learning challenges) were doing well at school. I asked myself: "How can student X seem so capable but be performing so poorly at school?" I am not naïve enough to think that no child will ever be left behind in education but it concerns me that economically disadvantaged students often have such radically lower academic results than their advantaged peers, despite many of them having the same cognitive ability.

Kozol (1991) described the problem, as follows:

> Gifted children are everywhere, but their gifts are lost to poverty and turmoil and the damage done by knowing they are written off by their

> society. Many of these children have no sense of something they belong to. They have no feeling of belonging to America. (p. 33)

Like Kozol, Goodenow (1993), McWhirter (1998), and Payne (1996) have also noted that many capable but economically disadvantaged students do poorly at school and that many of them experience school as a place where they do not belong. This too "just doesn't seem quite right!" I would agree that many economically disadvantaged students do not do well at school and feel they do not belong, but I would add that they might also feel less cared for than their economically advantaged peers. I would argue that care and academic success are closely related. Few researchers have studied this possibility, at least from the perspective of disadvantaged students. Wishing to make a contribution to this work, my central research questions are:

- How do students from different economic groups perceive and experience care or non-caring in secondary schools?
- If it is found that students from these economic groups perceive and experience care differently, what are the salient differences from one group to another?
- How might the role of caring in secondary schools be a factor in the academic success of secondary students from these different economic groups?
- If caring is thought to be a central factor in helping students be successful, what can teachers and schools do to ensure that students, particularly those who are economically disadvantaged, perceive their actions as caring?

As educational policy makers search for strategies to help a greater number of students complete high school, I suggest there is an even greater need for research on the role of care in schools. If teacher education programs would include information about the importance of care and how students perceive and experience it, perhaps this would help more students, particularly at-risk students, to be more successful. This research is timely as the global economy continues to worsen, leaving more families living with fewer financial resources and, consequently, more economically disadvantaged children attending our public schools.

ORDER OF PRESENTATION

Chapter 2 provides a review of the literature related to care, which is the central focus of this study. In this chapter I explore different interpretations of (a) what care is, (b) the ethics of care as moral philosophy, and (c) previous studies pertaining to care in an educational context. The latter part of the chapter includes a discussion of various theoretical frameworks for understanding economic status, which is a secondary focus of this study.

Chapter 3 explains the research method and design used for this study. I include a discussion of the qualitative research and grounded theory design including the methods of data collection. This chapter includes site and participant selection procedures, including barriers to the process. The placement of the participants into different economic groups is discussed. Ethical considerations and study limitations are described.

Chapter 4 includes site and participant profiles to allow the reader to understand the places and the people discussed in subsequent chapters.

Chapter 5 presents the findings from the data gathered from the semi-structured interviews with the participants described in the previous chapter. The major findings are discussed and put into broader themes. Student perceptions and experiences of care and non-care in secondary schools are discussed.

Chapter 6 provides a more detailed discussion of the findings presented in the previous chapter. These are discussed in the context of the relevant literature.

Chapter 7 concludes the paper and includes some comments, suggestions and recommendations regarding the role of care in education. Some unanswered questions and future research considerations are included in this chapter. The final section of this chapter reviews the important role of care in education.

The appendices include sample copies of parent and student consent forms used for this study. Also included are examples of the types of questions that were asked during the interviews with students.

CHAPTER 2
LITERATURE REVIEW

"Carrying out a research project in the social sciences will almost invariably involve the researcher in a significant amount of reading" (Blaxter, Hughes, & Tight, 2005, p. 97). Preparing for this research study required looking at two distinct bodies of literature: the concept of care and economic status. The literature on both topics was vast so the magnitude of the study was potentially overwhelming. Limiting both topics required looking at them more through an educational lens which helped make the task more manageable.

The study was conducted using grounded-theory methods: "Consistent with [this type of] qualitative inquiry, the literature plays a minor role and does not influence the questions being addressed by the researcher" (Cresswell, 2002, p. 460). Nevertheless, in order to understand care and economic status, it was necessary to familiarize myself with the theoretical and philosophical under-pinnings of these concepts. This chapter includes relevant literature including theoretical and philosophical considerations pertaining to both topics. It also includes research studies on care in the context of education. Since care is the central focus of this research study, it is presented first; economic status follows.

CARE THEORY: WHAT IS CARE?

"The desire to be cared for is almost certainly a universal human characteristic" (Noddings, 1992, p. 17). Care is a commonly used word in many domains of life but few stop to question what it means. Most people assume they know what it means and never take much time to philosophize over it for much time. We often hear about certain people being "caring" individuals but what that means seems to be taken for granted.

If and when we think about care we often describe it as particular actions and/or attributes. For example, in educational research studies, students often define care as certain actions and attributes they perceive as caring (Bosworth, 1995; Webb & Blond, 1995). We generally think of care as what people *do* for others. For instance if we *do* something for another person we might have done so because we care about them. We would then define our care by the specific behaviours or actions we displayed. I might send a box of chocolates to someone and claim to have done so because I care about them. My care for the other person was defined by what I *did*; I cared so I gave them chocolates. I would hope that the other person feels cared for because of what I did; yet the other person might interpret my actions differently. Perhaps the other person has previously told me they do not like chocolate and see my actions as insulting and uncaring. Care is not always perceived as such by those to whom the caring was directed (Noddings, 2002).

Care is complex and the more thought we give to it, the more complex it seems to become. So, what is care? How does one define it? Does it mean different things to different people? Of course it would be helpful if there were a universal definition of care but "there is not yet anything close to agreement among those writing on care on what exactly we should take the meaning of this term to be" (Held, 2006, p. 29).

One of the most extensive works on the phenomenon of care written in the last century is that of Milton Mayeroff (1971). He is one of many writers who began to explore a more universal definition of care to help others understand it. His theoretical work on care is general or non-contextualized because it was not intended to be read solely by those of any single discipline such as education. Nevertheless, his work provides a useful starting point for understanding care.

Mayeroff (1971) described care as a virtue and suggested that certain individuals have particular traits and attitudes that make them a caring person (Beck, 1992). To understand Mayeroff's definition one might reasonably ask, "What exactly are the traits and attitudes of a caring person?" Mayeroff did not explicitly state what these are yet, others who are familiar with his work would claim they include but, are not limited to, devotion, empathy, and trust (Beck, 1992; Hult, 1979). Cumulatively, these characteristics would be regarded as caring

and one would care for other people by showing these characteristics. This does not imply that a display of these traits would always be recognized as care.

Mayeroff's (1971) emphasis on defining care as a virtue is seen in some domains as being somewhat incomplete (Noddings, 1992, 2002). Critics such as Noddings would argue that showing devotion, empathy and trust to another person does not necessarily mean the other will see it as caring. In an educational context, for example, teachers may possess these characteristics but it does not mean their students feel they care about them. If a caregiver (teacher) claims they care but the one being cared for (student) does not perceive the actions as caring, does the care exist? To think of it in another way, if one person said, "I care," but the other said, "No you don't," who is correct? It would make sense to create an understanding of care that both parties agree to (Noddings, 1992, 2002). Care may well include certain actions and characteristics, such as those that Mayeroff suggested, but others emphasize that the interpersonal relationship between the caregiver and cared-for must be central to any definition of care (Noddings, 1984; Rogers 1961).

Psychologist Carl Rogers' (1961, 1980) theories are perhaps best known in the fields of psychotherapy and counselling psychology. His theory of person-centred therapy emphasizes the importance of relationships. He argued that if counselling or therapy is to be successful, a client needs to feel cared for. When this happens they will experience positive change and self-actualization; a caring relationship is essential to this process (Rogers, 1961). Rogers emphasized genuineness, empathy, and unconditional positive regard as integral characteristics of such a relationship. Rogers' theory relies less on the specific actions of those in caring roles and more on the relation of both parties. His emphasis on the relational aspect of caring was apparent when he wrote:

> When I truly hear a person and the meanings that are important to him at that moment, hearing not simply his words, but him, and when I let him know that I have heard his own private personal meaning, many things happen. He wants to tell me more about his world. He surges forth in a new sense of freedom. He becomes open to the process of change .... On the basis of my experience I have found that if I can help bring about a [relationship] marked by genuineness, caring and understanding, then exciting things happen. Persons and groups in such a climate move away from rigidity and toward flexibility, away from static living toward process living, away from dependence toward autonomy, away from defensiveness toward self-acceptance, away from being predictable

> toward an unpredictable creativity. They exhibit living proof of an actualizing tendency. (Rogers, 1961)

Rogers' theory emphasizes care as being relational. His ideas have been applied in different contexts including education. Beck and Cassidy (2009) discussed how one teacher in an alternative education program introduced some of Rogers' ideas into his classroom as a way of trying to help a group of marginalized students feel more cared for.

Philosopher Martin Buber (1878-1965) stressed the importance of inter-personal relationships amongst human beings. Buber did not talk specifically about care but rather emphasized how genuine and authentic dialogue strengthens relationships between individuals (Kaufmann, 1970; Noddings, 1992). He reinforced the notion that positive relationships strengthen the possibility of self-growth and actualization. According to Buber, human beings enter into one of two types of relationships. He referred to the first as an I–Thou relationship wherein two parties regard each other as humans. The second was an I–Her/I–Him or an I–It relationship wherein people see each other less as humans and more as inanimate objects. The first type of relationship is based on interpersonal dialogue between two people that includes mutuality and reciprocity. Kaufmann (1970) noted, "One should not try to dilute the meaning of the relation: relation is reciprocity" (p. 58). A relationship characterized by reciprocity would generally be considered a caring relationship where the cared-for may emerge as a different person or one he may have been striving to be (Noddings, 1992; Rogers, 1961, 1980). Buber's second type of relationship is less authentic and less caring so, rather than bringing people together, it is more likely to create a divide between them (Kaufmann, 1970).

Nel Noddings (1984, 1992, 1995, 2002, 2005) and Carol Gilligan (1982) are two of the most prolific writers on care. Noddings approached care from a philosophical view whilst Gilligan used a psychological approach. Both have had such a resounding impact on the phenomenon of care that they are discussed separately in upcoming sections of this chapter. Noddings is described first and Gilligan is described in a later section pertaining to moral philosophy. Both writers presented a different and (in my view) more complete definition of care than other care theorists. What sets their work apart from other theorists is that they emphasize the role of relationships in defining care. Noddings defined care

as "a way of being in relation, not a set of specific behaviours" (1992, p. 17). This view reflects other current writers on care in an educational context (Cassidy & Beck, 2009; Noblit, 1993, 1995; Rauner, 2000; Vogt, 2002). Noddings did not altogether dismiss care as being virtuous: "I do not reject entirely the notion of caring as virtue" (2002, p. 12) but she and Gilligan can be given credit for emphasizing the view that care is primarily relational rather than virtuous. Perhaps more than any other care theorist, Noddings has extended her theory of care beyond the private sphere and into the more public sphere of education (Bates, 2005; Beck & Cassidy, 2009; Cassidy & Bates, 2005; Waterhouse, 2007). She discussed how caring for others can become "ethical caring" or caring that occurs when we are summoned to care but may not feel inclined to naturally care for the cared-for. It is the type of care that is practised in public domains such as education (Beck & Cassidy, 2009) as opposed to the type of caring that might occur more naturally at home between a parent and child. Ethical caring and Noddings influence in the realm of education has been immense and, as such, it is discussed more fully below.

NEL NODDINGS:
ETHICAL CARING IN AN EDUCATIONAL CONTEXT

Noddings (1995, 2002) differentiated between what she calls natural caring and ethical caring. Natural caring is more common in a family situation where a parent may care for a child or where the desire to care for another person "arises on its own" (p. 187). Natural caring would be more typical of that which is (hopefully) practised in a private domain such as one's home environment. Ethical caring occurs when a caregiver extends his or her caring to other domains which are more public, such as education (Beck & Cassidy, 2009, p. 57). When caring is extended into an educational domain, some theorists such as Noddings claimed, it is not only ethical caring but a type of moral education. She defined ethical caring as "not only a form of education that concentrates on producing moral people but also an education that is moral in purpose, policy, and methods" (1992, p. xiii). She stated:

> If this is true—if, that is, our sense of caring and being cared for starts at home—then it is reasonable to examine this beginning seriously, to study

> it philosophically. We can then ask about the social policy implications of care theory and the development of care in individual lives. I believe that school as well as home should be central in any adequate discussion of moral life and social policy. Starting at home does not suggest that we must remain there. Theories, like children, can grow up and move into the public world. (Noddings, 2002, pp. 1-2)

Noddings (1984, 1992, 2002, 2005) emphasized the role of relationships or rather *being in relation* as an integral aspect of care. "A caring relation is, in its most basic form, a connection or encounter between two human beings—a carer and a recipient of care, or cared-for" (Noddings, 1992, p. 15). In an educational context, an example of a *caring relation* would be the relationship between a teacher and student, wherein the teacher would presumably be the caregiver and the student the cared-for. The imposed relationship between these two parties still does not explain how it might become a caring relationship.

We can assume that most teachers would say they care about their students (Rooney, 2003) but it is less certain that most students would say their teachers care about them (Noddings, 1992). In fact, in a U.S. survey (1989) of Girl Scouts, only one-third of the students indicated their teachers actually cared about them (Noddings, 1992, p. 1). Similar findings were reported in a British Columbia survey of teachers and students where the percentage of teachers who indicated they cared about their students greatly outweighed that of students who indicated they felt their teachers cared about them (BC School Satisfaction Surveys, 2009). This might be upsetting for most teachers but it begs the question, "How does such dissonance occur?" This might convince us that care is not just *what* we do, or what we *think* we do, but it is also *how* we go about doing it. A teacher is not necessarily perceived as caring just because of what she or he does for students. "Caring with respect to teachers and students is usually defined as a reciprocal relationship" (Noblit, 1993, p. 23).

Noddings (1992) argued there is no recipe for building a caring relationship but rather, there are certain factors that come into play that enhance the possibility of building one (p. 19). The key to her concept of a caring relationship is reciprocity; there should be a reciprocal relationship between the teacher as the *one caring* and the student as the one who is *cared for* (Bates, 2005; Waterhouse, 2007). A relationship characterized by reciprocity includes recognition, reception, and response on the part of the one being cared-for

(Noddings 1992). Reciprocity begins with the "recognition or realization of care" by the cared-for person (p. 18). In other words, students must recognize care in whichever form or action it is given .They must receive and accept it as care, and respond by showing they accept it. Noddings (1992, 2002) not only insisted that a caring relationship must be characterized by reciprocity but if care is not recognized as such by the person being cared for, it is not care and should not be described as such (Noddings, 1992, 2002).

Noddings' (1984) theory of care purported that in order for a caring relationship (one that is characterized by reciprocity) to emerge, it demands three tasks of the caregiver: engrossment, commitment and motivational displacement. To put this into an educational context, these three tasks would be placed upon teachers. Engrossment would entail the teacher to try to understand the lived experience of their students or to become engrossed in them: "an open, non-selective receptivity to the [student]" (Noddings, 1992, p. 15). Commitment on the part of caring teachers is when they "believe that nothing takes precedence over their responsibility to care for the student. [It] requires inclusion of all students and understanding and acceptance of the student's feelings" (Waterhouse, 2007, p. 34). Motivational displacement can be described as a shifting of motivation or action on the part of the teacher; he or she moves from a sense of *self*-motivation or from doing what s/he *wants* to do or feels would be best for the student, to *other*-motivation which entails being motivated to do what the student *needs* (Noddings, 1984).

Care must take into account the needs of others and in the case of education this would be addressing the needs of students (Noddings, 2005). Battistich et al. (1997) conceded that a caring school community is one in which students feel that their needs are being fulfilled, so it would make sense that students would describe a caring teacher as one who fulfils their needs. Noddings (2005) differentiated between two types of needs, inferred and expressed. "Most of the needs identified by educators for learners may be classified as inferred needs; that is, although they are said to be the needs of the learners, they are not needs that have been expressed by the learners themselves" (p. 149). Inferred needs are those that we assume other people need and it may be the reason why so many self-proclaimed caring teachers are not perceived that way by their students. If the inferred needs of the teacher are imposed and

they are in direct conflict with the expressed needs of the students, the relationship is very likely going to be perceived by the latter as non-caring. The difficulty is that in some (if not many) cases, the expressed needs of the student cannot always easily be accommodated. How do caring teachers manage to balance and negotiate the expressed needs of their students while trying to ensure their own needs and those imposed on them by institutions and systems are also fulfilled? Noddings' response to that question was: "In all cases . . . I try to respond in a way that will maintain the caring relation" (2005, p. 147).

Noddings does not underestimate how demanding it is for teachers to implement ethical caring in their classroom. Her book, *The Challenge to Care in Schools* (1992), described ethical caring and offered practical solutions for teachers. She talked about four components of classroom practice that help foster care in schools: modelling, dialogue, practice and confirmation. Educators who have implemented an ethic of care into their classrooms and schools strive to include each of these in their curricular programs (Beck & Cassidy, 2009). All four components contribute to a learning environment congruent with one guided by an ethic of care.

Modelling is how teachers *show* care to their students; they model it. One goal of ethical caring is to help students learn how to care so it would follow that to do this we must also be prepared to show them what it looks like (Noddings, 1992). "We do not tell our students to care; we show them how to care by creating caring relations with them" (p. 22).

Dialogue in its most simple form is a conversation between different parties or an exchange of ideas on an issue (Random House Dictionary, 1980), but dialogue in regard to ethical caring goes further than being just words (Beck & Cassidy, 2009; Noddings, 1992). Dialogue can be experienced in different ways such as through touch, smiles, affectionate sound, silence or glances, "a feeling with, and attending to" (Green,1991, as cited in Beck & Cassidy, 2009). Noddings used the term *dialogue* as Paulo Freire (1970) did in that it is open-ended. In the case of education, a teacher would acknowledge the needs of his or her student through dialogue (Noddings, 1992, p. 22). For dialogue to be perceived as caring it should always be done in a non-coercive manner and students should feel as though they are willing participants in the relationship (Noddings, 1992, p. 23). Noddings explained:

> Dialogue is a common search for understanding, empathy, or appreciation. It can be playful or serious, logical or imaginative, goal or process oriented, but it is always a genuine quest for something undetermined at the beginning. . . . We respond most effectively as carers when we understand what the other needs and the history of this need. Dialogue is implied in the criterion of engrossment. To receive the other is to attend fully and openly. Continuing dialogue builds up a substantial knowledge of one another that serves to guide our responses. (p. 23)

True dialogue in education is thought by some to be quite rare; some voices are less persuasive than others and student voices are often unheard in education (Kozol, 1991). "Our social and political culture predetermines certain voices and articulations as unrecognizable, illegitimate, and unspeakable" (Boler, 2004, p. 3). The voices (or needs) of students are not often heard and the students feel uncared for. A caring relationship requires an open-ended dialogue between teacher and student so that it will allow the caregiver to acknowledge the needs of the cared-for and respond accordingly.

The third component of ethical caring discussed by Noddings is practice. She referred to practice as providing opportunities for students that "not only teach [them] specific skills but also to 'shape minds,' that is, to induce certain attitudes and ways of looking at the world" (Noddings, 1992, p. 23). Teachers are expected to create an environment where the objectives of learning provide opportunities for the students to practise what they are learning. "We should want both boys and girls to have experience in caring. It does not just happen; we have to plan for it" (p. 24).

Confirmation is the fourth component of a caring relationship between teachers and students. Noddings' idea of confirmation is not unlike that of Buber (1965) and Rogers (1961). Buber described confirmation as affirming and encouraging the best in others or seeing another person as one who has potential to be "a better self" (Noddings, 1992, p. 25). Rogers (1961) did not use the word confirmation but he used a similar term, which he called unconditional positive regard. Unconditional positive regard in its most basic definition means to place oneself in another's position and view the world from his or her perspective or as some would say, put oneself in another person's shoes. Noddings argued that caring requires us to "see a self that is better than this act" (1992, p. 25). Confirmation is not to be confused with condoning someone's behaviour but

rather, it is trying to understand what might have motivated such behaviour in the first place (Noddings, 1992).

Noddings' conceptualization of caring and particularly ethical caring, which is what she purports should occur between teachers and students, is primarily seen as relational. Caring relationships of this type take into account reciprocity, which requires engrossment, commitment and motivational displacement on the part of the caregiver and recognition, reception, and response on the part of the cared-for. Reciprocity is more likely to occur when teachers strive to meet the needs of their students. When care is demonstrated in schools and classrooms and exercised in this fashion, it is congruent with what Noddings referred to as an ethic of care (1992, 2002). Educating in this manner is a moral exercise (Noddings, 1992, p. xiii).

MORAL PHILOSOPHY AND ETHICS OF CARE

> Moral philosophy is a philosophical inquiry about norms or values, about ideas of right and wrong, good and bad, what should and what should not be done. . . . Some people use the term moral philosophy as synonymous with ethics, the philosophical discussion of assumptions about right and wrong, good and bad, considered as general ideas and as applied in the private life of individuals. (Raphael, 1981, pp. 8-9)

In her book, *Philosophy of Education,* Nel Noddings (1995) suggested that since all teaching should first and foremost be a moral practice, no real discussion about education should occur without first having a basic understanding of moral philosophy and moral education. She added that nowadays it is rare, if not completely impossible, to have any real discussions about morality or the inclusion of it in educational programs. Educational leaders are sceptical about the inclusion of morality in public education and "teachers are often unwilling to even talk with their students about moral matters" (Noddings, 1992, p. 39). If we embrace what Noddings (and others) espouse and strive for schooling where "caring is the very bedrock of all successful education" (Noddings, 1992, p. 27), an understanding of moral philosophy is necessary.

Like most philosophies, moral philosophy is difficult to define although the opening citation (above) is as good as any at providing a general sense of

what it is. Different philosophers have particular explanations and theories about what it means to be moral and how humans become moral beings. Quite simply, there is no particular recipe or blueprint for moral development.

Moral philosophy includes numerous theories of how people become moral beings (Frost, 1989; Noddings, 1995; Raphael, 1981). Aristotle, for example, spoke of virtues and a good character as being the basis of moral reasoning (Frost, 1989). Utilitarianism is a different moral theory that refers to the amount of happiness as the basic factor in deciding what is moral and what is not (Raphael, 1981). Relativists claim that there is not, and cannot be, a universal understanding or definition that can be applied to everyone; morality is relative (Raphael, 1981). The philosophy of Immanuel Kant, or Kantian ethics, claims that morality is based upon cognitive factors such as reasoning and rationality (Raphael, 1981). Kantian ethics proposes that morality is congruent with higher level thinking skills, which in most cases are developed through education (Frost, 1959; Noddings, 1995; Raphael, 1981). Numerous different theories of moral development exist but the latter (Kantian ethics) has dominated moral philosophy in the past century and until recently has almost solely been a major influence in moral education (Noddings, 1995).

One prominent moral education theorist, Lawrence Kohlberg, was influenced by Kantian philosophy. Based on empirical research of what he called moral judgment or decision making, Kohlberg's theory emphasized cognitive factors such as reasoning as the key factor in moral development (Noddings, 1995). His theory was strongly influenced by Piaget and the concept of developmental stages. Hence, Kohlberg's theory identifies three levels of moral development each consisting of two stages. Stages of moral development, according to Kohlberg, are "hierarchical integrations," wherein people at the high end of the hierarchy "are most able to handle moral complexity in a stable and consistent way" (Hersh, 1980, p. 123). In other words, those who are more adept at reasoning, rationalizing, and coming to logical conclusions will also be more capable of applying the same skills to moral dilemmas. Kohlberg's concept of stages may at one time have been novel but his belief that cognitive factors precede moral decision-making is not unlike several other theories of moral development. Hersh noted:

> For Kohlberg [and others], morality is more powerfully explained in terms of the logical processes through which one conceives and resolves moral conflicts. Although we refer to Kohlberg's theory as a theory of moral development, more precisely it is a theory of the development of moral judgment. . . . Morality hinges on the form in which moral choices are justified. (p. 22)

Kohlberg's theory is similar to what is often referred to as an ethic of justice in that moral decisions are focused on the individual rights of one party or another; the end goal is justice to the individual parties (Held, 2006, p. 62). This differs from more recent feminist theories of moral development such as the ethic of care, in which affective (as well as cognitive) factors are thought to be a key factor in moral decision making, and relationships rather than individual rights are the primary concern or outcome (Held, 2006).

Theories such as Kohlberg's gained strong support throughout the past century as accurate and adequate explanations of moral development and decision-making and until recently they dominated both moral philosophy and moral education (Hersh, 1980). In 1982, however, Carol Gilligan challenged such explanations of moral development in a ground-breaking book titled, *In a Different Voice.* Gilligan's work is widely recognized in the realm of care theory and is cited as often as others such as Noddings, although within a different paradigm: psychology versus philosophy. Through her empirical research, Gilligan came to recognize that not all people approached moral issues and/or topics in the same manner and pointed out that, as a result, some moral judgments or decision-making patterns were often dismissed or seen as inferior to other approaches (Bates, 2005, p. 10). "Gilligan described a morality based on the recognition of needs, relation, and response" (Noddings, 1992, p. 21). Along with other feminist writers including Annette Baier (1995), Gilligan was among the first to argue that accurate moral decisions could be made that were not decided solely on the basis of cognitive or rational factors. This does not imply that feminist philosophy disregards cognition in moral development. "One cannot dismiss thinking and reasoning [altogether] from ethical conduct" (Noddings, 1984, p. 171). It simply implies that there are other explanations for moral development and decision-making than espoused by those such as Kohlberg. For the past two decades, the experiences of women have come to be included under the umbrella of moral philosophy and factors other than just cognitive ones have been considered (Noddings, 1995; Sommers & Sommers, 1997).

The ethics of care is just one example of how moral philosophy has come to be influenced by a feminist perspective wherein affective factors rather than just cognitive ones are considered in the making of moral decisions.

> An ethic of care focuses on attentiveness, trust, responsiveness to need, narrative nuance, and cultivating caring relations. Whereas an ethic of justice seeks a fair solution between competing individual interests and rights, an ethic of care sees the interest of [care-givers] and cared-for as importantly intertwined rather than as simply competing. . . . Care fosters social bonds and cooperation. (Held, 2006, p. 15)

An ethic of care means that moral decisions are made on the basis of sustaining caring relationships between individuals. We do what we feel is morally right based on our desire to sustain a positive relationship with others. Hence, it could be said that an ethic of care is synonymous with an ethic of relation rather than an ethic of justice (Noddings, 1995). An ethic of care is sometimes wrongly defined as an ethic of virtue; however, the two should not be confused, as they are not synonymous. The ethic of care is more relational than virtuous (Noddings, 1992).

Feminist perspectives of moral development and the role of care have been challenged by critics who claim that focusing on care simply reinforces negative stereotypes of females being in subservient social roles such as caregiver. Traditional feminism has attempted to attain equality of the sexes by drawing attention to similarities between males and females (Acker, 1995). Supporters of the ethics of care have now moved away from a belief in a total similarity between the sexes and acknowledge that certain traits such as caring may well be associated with women rather than men. They would add, "It would be remarkable if thousands of years of very different experience did not produce some enduring differences between males and females. But [that is] not to say that one set of traits is superior to the other" (Noddings, 1995, p. 181). In other words, what if caring is perceived as a woman's aptitude? It is a noble quality and one that women should be proud of (Acker, 1995). Other writers such as Jane Roland Martin (1985) would agree that not only should the caring traits of women be recognized as important and noble, but that both boys and girls should be educated and socialized in such a way that both sexes learn not only about care but also to care (Noddings, 1995, p.181). Furthermore, a feminist approach to moral decision-making is not to be

seen as exclusively female, nor does it mean that all women come to moral decisions in the same way (Gilligan, 1982).

In the past decade, the ethic of care has extended beyond the realm of moral philosophy and has come to be recognized as a significant influence in education. Nel Noddings (1984, 1992, 1995, 2002, 2005) proclaimed the primary objective of education is a moral one and that care should be central.

> But if the school has one main goal, a goal that guides the establishment and priority of all others, it should be to promote the growth of students as healthy, competent, moral people. This is a huge task to which all others are properly subordinated. . . . My position is not anti-intellectual. It is a matter of setting priorities. Intellectual development is important, but it cannot be the first priority of schools. (Noddings, 1992, p. 10)

Noddings has been one of the most prominent writers responsible for bridging the gap between moral philosophy and educational practice. She has almost single-handedly taken the ethics of care from the realm of philosophy and translated it into an educational model. Noddings emphasized that the foundation of all education is a moral enterprise and one that is achievable by implementing an educational theory guided by an ethic of care (Noddings, 1992, 1995). If such a theory were to be properly implemented in educational practice, all aspects of the curriculum would centre on caring, and the basis of such caring would be relational (Noddings, 1992, 1995). As noted earlier, care is difficult to define, let alone to try and implement as the driving force of an educational theory. The next section of this chapter will discuss literature and studies pertaining solely to care in the context of education.

Care in Educational Practice

It is important for teachers to develop positive caring relationships with their students (Bingham, 2001, 2004; hooks, 2000, 2003, 2009, 2010; Lipsitz, 1995; Noddings, 1992). Even if most educators were to agree with these claims, the concept of care is not fully understood in the context of educational practice. Until the last decade, the literature on education has rarely discussed what care is or why teachers should develop caring relationships with students and how they might do this (Deiro, 2003). Caring relationships may be seen as important

to some in education, yet relationships have not been a priority in the hierarchy of curricular and policy concerns (Noblit, 1995; Noddings, 2002; Rooney, 2003).

The importance of care in education has begun to be discussed more frequently in academic circles. Noddings' work (1992) may be regarded as being pivotal in this but others have taken her theoretical considerations and situated them in educational practice. Lipsitz (1995) wrote about the importance of care and why we should strive to achieve it as an educational goal. She described the need for schools to re-examine their objectives and to consider the benefits of a culture of caring in schools. She stated, "[Care] can make schools places where people not only learn, but also construct moral lives" (Lipsitz, 1995 p. 665). Rooney (2003) echoed the same sentiment. Her work emphasized the need for school principals to establish caring schools. She noted how authentic leadership is necessary if we want students to perceive schools as caring places. Epstein (1995) emphasized the need for schools to work with families and communities to help care for children and she provided a list of ways of achieving this. These writers share Noddings's desire for schools to practise ethical caring and emphasize certain actions and behaviours as ways of achieving this. Many of these actions and behaviours could be regarded as caring by some students, but without managing the relational and reciprocity aspects of care, they alone may not constitute a caring school or classroom (Noddings, 1992).

Until recently, the literature has included fewer empirical and more non-empirical studies on care in an educational context; what did exist was more often about younger students in elementary schools than adolescents in secondary schools (Rauner, 2000, p. 11). Much of the earlier discussion about care in education tended to be dominated by a canonical belief that care is a virtue; it is something that good teachers supposedly possess and model to their students (Gregory, 2000, p. 445). In the past decade, an increasing number of empirical studies have been completed pertaining to the care of older students. Many of these have considered care as being relational rather than being virtuous (Bates, 2005; Beck & Cassidy, 2009; Cassidy & Bates, 2005; Waterhouse, 2007).

Bosworth (1995) undertook one of the earlier empirical studies of care in an educational context and one of the first to include students beyond elementary level. She directed a study team that explored adolescent perceptions of care in American middle schools. The study focused primarily on how

students define care. The findings were presented mostly by the particular things that teachers did to and/or for their students. This study helps us in our understanding of what particular behaviours *some* students perceive as caring, but again it does not delve into how these actions create caring relationships or that *all* students would see all of these behaviours as caring.

In a Canadian study, Webb and Blond (1995) studied a small sample of teachers to see what actual knowledge they had about the role of care in teacher/student relationships. They found that many take for granted they know what care is and feel they enact it in their classes but this is usually based on their personal experience of care (instances when they have felt cared for) and their ideas are not congruent with the way some of their students would describe care.

Noblit (1995) and a team of researchers conducted a small-scale study of two elementary teachers. The study suggested that schools need to re-structure and to implement care in the school curriculum. Noblit noted:

> Morally and culturally, caring is a belief about how we should view and interact with others. In this way, caring is essential to education and may guide the ways we instruct and discipline students, set policy, and organize the school day. (p. 680)

Vogt (2002) completed a study about teachers and issues of care in two European primary schools and although insightful about what might constitute a caring teacher, the study was primarily designed to explore gender differences to see if male and female teachers perceived caring differently.

Some of the earlier empirical research studies (Bosworth, 1995; Webb & Blond, 1995; Vogt, 2002) discuss care from the perspective of certain actions and behaviours. This could lead to the assumption that care is universal, that it can be practised in the same way with all students, and that all students would perceive certain actions and behaviours as caring. Studies such as these give us a good starting point in understanding care in an educational context. They also remind us about the complexity of the phenomenon of care.

Chaskin and Rauner (1995, 2000) have written extensively on care in both an educational context and other public domains. They believe in the importance of caring and discuss how it can be addressed in schools. Rauner (2000) challenged educators to commit themselves to making schools into institutions where relationships and social connections are emphasized and built on an ethic

of care. She insisted this is all possible but not without systemic challenges and barriers (p. 2). In *They Still Pick Me Up When I Fall,* Rauner (2000) expressed her hope for an ethic of care to be enacted in all schools and institutions, or rather, in all of public life. She claimed that while parts of her vision have fallen into place in some schools and institutions, she wishes for a broader societal commitment.

Even less empirical work has been undertaken on specific student populations and care. Eaker-Rich et al. (1996) explored an ethic of care from the perspective of various marginalized populations and found that, compared to others, these students are more likely to experience school as unwelcome and uncaring. Studies completed by Cassidy and Bates (2005) and Bates (2005) support the suggestion that marginalized students may have different perceptions of care from other students. Their studies of at-risk youth in alternate education programs found that while attending regular secondary schools many of them felt alienated from their schools and teachers. They didn't feel cared for. In a secondary analysis of the data from the first study, Bates (2005) found that many of them indicated that when they were placed into an alternate school facility, the school and teachers' flexibility in meeting their individual needs led to many beneficial changes for them both in and out of school. These studies move away from a virtue ethics approach and examine the types of relationship that students have with their teachers; in this case, relationships in alternate school versus regular school. These studies are useful in understanding how (a) a perceived lack of care may adversely affect the educational success of some students in regular school, and (b) how in this case it was solved when the same students attended an alternative school that operated from a common vision of care.

Waterhouse (2007) examined student perceptions of care in an alternate education centre and found that many previously unsuccessful students in regular school were successful in an alternative school. He also found that positive relationships with teachers was a key difference in their success at alternative school and that the students felt more cared for there than at regular school. Studies such as these are helpful because they describe the importance of care in educational success, something that appears to be happening in some alternative schools if not at regular schools. This finding does not imply that all alternative schools enact an ethic of care as the driving force of their educational curriculum; nor does it imply there are not regular schools that enact an ethic of

care. The ethic of care was a significant part of Waterhouse's study and he described it this way:

> Operating from an ethic of care is an active process, not just an idea or theory; it requires much of the teacher. Key to [this] concept is the commitment by teachers to reciprocity; in other words to creating a reciprocal relationship between the teacher as the *one-caring* and the student as the one who is *cared for.* As Noddings (1992) explains, teachers who work from an ethic of care see it as their responsibility to empower their students. Such a commitment often requires the teacher to buck a system which encourages an instrumental approach which sees teaching the lesson as the teacher's responsibility, while leaving caring for the student up to others. (Waterhouse, 2007, p. 34)

Beck and Cassidy (2009) undertook a four-year study with teachers, counsellors and administrators from a variety of educational settings who all shared a vision of enacting an ethic of care in their respective educational environments. Noddings (1992) postulated that the current structures of education often work in opposition to enacting an ethic of care, yet this study found that educators who strive to do so can find inventive ways, both large and small scale, to do so. The educators in this study, for the most part, felt that purposefully enacting care in their classrooms and working on their relationships with students led to greater success and positive growth for their students. The findings support claims that care indeed helps "build an inclusive environment where all students can succeed and grow" (Beck & Cassidy, 2010, p. 55).

SUMMARY OF CARE LITERATURE

Beck (1992) claimed, "Although few educators are against it and most believe that they practice it, caring as it relates to schooling remains an elusive concept" (p. 455). A review of the literature on care reveals that many deem it an important and necessary factor in education yet it is not easily defined or understood. If educators come to adopt the idea that care is a crucial component of education programs, they will need to have a thorough understanding of care and what it means in their classrooms (Noblit, 1995). The philosophical and educational theories of writers such as Noddings (1984, 1992, 2002, 2005) and Gilligan (1982) have much to offer in furthering our understanding of such a complex phenomenon as care.

Noddings (1992, 1995,2002, 2005) presented a theory of care that emphasizes care as relational; she described care as an ethic of relation rather than a virtue. Ethics in its most simplistic form means "doing the right thing." Noddings suggested that an ethic of care should be a central focus in educational curriculum. Ethical caring in schools is an extension of natural caring wherein caregivers look after the needs of others, which is something Noddings believes exists in many homes. Other writers have begun to approach the topic of care in a similar fashion. In my opinion, this will assist us in understanding and implementing the complex phenomenon of caring in educational practice.

ECONOMIC STATUS AS OTHERNESS IN EDUCATION

Canada is a diverse country where teachers have come to expect students from different backgrounds in their classrooms. Students of a different race, culture, ethnicity, religion, language, sex, gender and sexual orientation, physical and mental abilities, family composition, and economic status, or any combination of these, might all be sharing the same classroom. Many of these differences, or otherness, can be quite unfamiliar to the teacher and sometimes to other students. Kumashiro (2000) claimed, "Educators have come a long way in detailing approaches that address different forms and different aspects of otherness" (p. 25). This may be true in some instances where the differences are more visible or obvious, but differences such as economic status are less visible and often go unrecognized and/or unnoticed altogether (hooks, 2000, 2003; Kozol, 1991, 2005; Payne, 1996).

Economic status in the context of education, particularly academic achievement has long been discussed in academic circles. More often the literature has considered students from economically disadvantaged backgrounds (Levine, 2006; Luthar, 2003). It is widely acknowledged that these students often do worse than their more privileged peers (Kozol, 1991; McWhirter, 1998; Payne, 1996). Given that economic status is such a significant factor in educational achievement, it is surprising that teacher education programs provide little guidance on effective interventions that could address this issue (Payne, 1996). In some cases, teachers may be unaware of the economic status of particular students and therefore simply do not think of it as a factor in their achievement. Others may hold biased or

preconceived notions of students based on their economic status and associate their academic achievement or its lack to their status (hooks 2000, 2003; Kozol, 1991, 2005; Levine, 2006; Luthar, 2003).

Few empirical studies examine students from different economic groups and the way institutional factors and policies might affect their academic achievement (Kozol, 1991, 2005; Payne, 1996). Studies pertaining to at-risk youth, including those who are economically disadvantaged, often focus on personal deficits to explain why many of the students do not perform well academically (Cassidy & Bates, 2005, p. 69). Fewer studies on economic status and education have focused on systemic or institutional problems such as curricular design and how this affects academic achievement (Payne, 1996). Even fewer empirical studies exist on the lived experiences of students from different economic groups and their relationships with teachers and others in their schools (Kozol, 2005).

Economic status is a form of otherness that is rarely addressed in schools (hooks, 2003; Kozol 2005; Payne, 1996). Some teachers acknowledge that school classrooms have students who are poor, wealthy and those in between but others may be oblivious to economic differences. If, as Kumashiro (2000) claimed, we have come a long way (which is questionable) in acknowledging diversity in classrooms, we still have a long way to go in addressing them, particularly in regard to economic status (hooks, 2000, 2003; Kozol, 1991, 2005; Meier & Wood, 2004; Payne, 1996). This form of difference or otherness will hopefully come to be discussed more often in the future, allowing teachers to find solutions to the problems of economic inequality (Howe, 2010).

The theoretical framework for understanding economic status as it pertains to this study has been drawn from a diverse body of literature including multiculturalism, feminism, Marxism, post-modernism, and critical social theory. Some of the more prominent writers whose theories and ideas have contributed to this section of the literature review include: Hegel in Houlgate (1998), Buber in Kaufmann (1970), Taylor (1991, 1994), and Foucault in Rabinow (1994); for philosophy, Bourdieu (1977), Anyon (2005), Shipler (2004), and Mullaly (2002); for sociology and social work, Levine (2006) and Luthar (2003) for psychology, and for education, Bingham (2001, 2004), hooks (2000, 2003), Illich (1970), Freire (1970, 1992), Kohn (1999), Noddings (1992), Payne (1996), and Kozol (1991, 1995, 2005). Although the sections below discuss poverty and affluence in relation to

education, it should be noted that not *all* children who are economically disadvantaged or advantaged experience things in the same way. The lived experience of both rich and poor students is more complex than this.

POVERTY AND EDUCATION

Many developed countries in the western world like to think they are democratic and classless societies but, despite their denial, the economic disparity between the rich and the poor in these countries continues to widen, and the number of people living in poverty continues to rise (Mullaly, 2002; Shipler, 2004). It is increasingly difficult to ignore the inequities between different economic groups (Lott, 2001, 2002; Lott & Bullock, 2001; hooks, 2003; Shipler, 2004). Poverty is a complex phenomenon and not easily defined but, in the most basic sense, it is "the extent to which an individual does without [financial] resources" (Payne, 1996, p. 16).

Government and other institutions use an income base to determine what is called a low-income cut-off or the poverty line; those whose income falls below this line are considered poor (Statistics Canada, 2003). In some cases, the poor are unemployed and might receive some form of financial and social assistance from government. In Canada and the United States, an increasingly large number poor people do work but their wages and associated benefits still leave them economically disadvantaged. They join the ranks of what have come to be referred to as the "working poor" (Shipler, 2004). Regardless of whether someone is working or not, in the capitalist system economic disadvantage is a struggle and children are often the innocent victims of poverty (Kozol, 1991, 2005). It is estimated that one in five children in Canada under the age of 16 live below the poverty line (Statistics Canada, 2003). This statistic is not unlike other developed countries such as the United States where it is estimated that approximately 17% of children under 16 live in poverty (Lott, 2001; Payne, 1996; U.S. Bureau of Census, 2009). Economic inequality gradually manifests as social inequality and for children, the consequences of poverty can be devastating. The education system is just one example wherein poverty can have devastating effects on a child (Mandell & Duffy, 2000, p. 188).

Many would claim that education has been saturated with studies about poor students. In fact, from the 1950s onward, research on poor students and how

they fare in education has been one of the most common themes of all studies in the social sciences (Luthar, 2003). This may be true but many of these studies examine poor achievement, test scores and the dropout rates of economically disadvantaged children (Kohn, 2000; Meier & Wood, 2004). Empirical research studies on interpersonal or relational difficulties of poor students with teachers and/or schools, or those that examine oppression or classism in education are relatively sparse (Lott & Muluso, 1995; Mullaly, 2002). In other words, numerous studies show that poor students fare worse than those from other economic groups, but there are few findings to explain why this might be so.

Critical social theorists such as Peter McClaren (1989, 2007) and Michael Apple (2006) have written extensively on how capitalism creates economic disparity and how in education this affects those who find themselves at the low end of the economic spectrum. Despite the amount of research that has been done on low economic status and education, few findings improve the achievement of poor students (Kozol, 1991, 2005; Meier & Wood, 2004). For many economically disadvantaged students, schools are a place where they feel they do not belong; they simply do not feel welcome and are sometimes even ostracized by those who work there, including their teachers (Barrett, 2005; hooks, 2003; Kozol 1991, 2005). Students who experience the daily reality of poverty are twice as likely to achieve more poorly than their middle-class peers (Kozol, 1991; Mandell & Duffy, 2000; McWhirter et al., 1998). They are also more likely to drop out or be expelled (Cassidy & Bates, 2005).

Unlike other forms of discrimination in schools such as racism or sexism that are frequently studied, classism tends to be ignored. Regarding poverty and education, it could be said that "the voices of children, frankly, [have] been missing from the whole discussion" (Kozol, 1991, p. 5). Like racism, sexism, or other forms of prejudice, classism does exist in education and, unfortunately, teachers may be the perpetrators. In many cases teachers would be astonished to think this, as often their maltreatment of students is not even questioned as being discriminatory or classist (Kozol, 1991). Cozzarelli et al. (2001) conducted a large-scale study on attitudes and perceptions toward the poor and found that, although many are not vocal and open about their feelings, many middle-class and affluent people have negative attitudes toward the poor and blame them for their poverty.

Many if not most teachers either come from middle-class backgrounds or have gained this status through upward economic and social mobility (Kozol, 1991, 2005). Teachers, administrators, and other education professionals, particularly in urban public schools do not usually live in the same area or neighbourhoods as the students they work with (Anyon, 2005; Kozol, 1991, 2005). McLoyd (1998) found that "teachers who grew up in middle-class homes, rather than in lower-class homes, are more given to social class biases, and especially racial biases, in their achievement expectancies and perceptions of their students" (p. 194). Consequently, teachers can be guilty of having the same class biases toward the poor as many other middle-class (and upper-class) people do. How they act upon these biases and how it is perceived by their students could have a direct effect on relationships they experience at school (Payne, 1996). In some cases teachers' actions and behaviours cause a divide between themselves and students who experience poverty (Payne, 1996).

It is important that teachers understand diversity issues such as poverty so that they do not cause social or emotional harm to their students and jeopardize their chance of obtaining an education. Kozol (1991) found that even in the worst of physical conditions in some inner city schools and despite immense social and economic barriers, when teachers strove to understand poverty and maintain a positive relationship with their students they were better at helping their students succeed academically. These same teachers worked hard at not letting poverty interfere in their relationship with students (Kozol, 1991).

It is questionable whether all children who experience poverty would actually identify themselves as poor. Do they know they are poor? Taylor (1994) pointed out that many people have no idea who they really are until it is pointed out to them when they enter the public sphere such as school and/or other public institutions. In many cases, the identities that are assigned to them are based on existing discourses and may have little to do with how people see themselves and their life. In this regard, the way that people are perceived is often based on false stereotypes (Bingham, 2001). A child who has grown up in poverty may have only experienced this life at home in the private sphere. This is likely the only life he knows and he has not necessarily had it pointed out to him that he is any different from other people or that he is poor; he may not even identify himself as poor prior to being at school. It is not until he goes to school

that he sees that his life is different from others or in a worst case scenario an uncaring teacher may point it out to him. Bingham (2001) noted how others can misconstrue differences or otherness, which he refers to as misrecognition, and how this can lead to ill-treatment of a child. This treatment may have a lasting psychological impact on a child or lead to what Taylor (1994) referred to as: "One simply does not *feel there* in a certain public space" (in Bingham, 2001, p. 48). If a student does not "*feel there*" or believes that she does not belong in such a space, it is likely that some will find it difficult to thrive (or even survive) at school (Battistich et al., 1997; Osterman, 2000).

A lack of good relationships or *not feeling there* might explain why many students who are poor might feel uncomfortable at school (Battistich et al., 1997; Kozol, 1991) but it does not explain how they start feeling different in the first place. What are the salient differences between children from poverty and other children. Why would the differences be construed as negative? What defines poor children as "other?" Unlike visible minorities, poverty is a type of otherness that is not always as recognizable. Even in a worst-case scenario, if a teacher was prejudiced against poor people, he might not realize that someone was poor just by looking at him. Students are treated negatively by others not because they are poor, but rather because they exhibit certain behaviours or characteristics that are different and others might not like or accept this (Mullaly, 2002; Payne, 1996). If poor students are perceived to be different and are treated in a discriminatory way, what explanations could be given for this?

Culture of Poverty Theory

Sociologists sometimes describe the habits and behaviours of poor people as a "culture of poverty" (Mandell & Duffy, 2000, p. 198). A culture of poverty suggests that a lack of resources leaves people with a different worldview and experience than those with access to resources. Therefore, poor people develop a culture or a set of beliefs that is distinct from the middle and wealthy classes. In other words, it is believed that people who experience poverty come to share common traits such as feelings of inferiority, apathy, dependence, fatalism, little sense of deferred gratification (Mullaly, 2002). These traits often conflict with those of the middle class; hence, they look down on poor people.

> These traits are said to be passed on to subsequent generations through the process of socialization so that by the time poor children are of school age they have internalized the basic traits of poverty and are not psychologically prepared to take advantage of the opportunities available to them. Little, if any, thought is given in this theory to the possibility that many of these so-called traits of poor people are actually adaptations and adjustments on the part of the poor to cope with poverty. (Mullaly, 2002, p. 11)

Regardless of whether or not the traits of poor people are adaptations to being economically deprived, their behaviours and actions sometimes conflict with those of middle-class people, which might cause relational problems between the groups.

In a study completed by Lott (2001) on middle-class responses to poor people, she found that middle-class children as young as five believe that poor people are that way because they are lazy and do not work hard enough. Bullock (1995) found that middle-class descriptions of poor people and their attributions of poverty become more negative with age. For example, descriptions involving lack of effort, lack of ability, and other negative personality traits, as well as describing the poor in terms of observable physical characteristics such as messy hair and clothing, and personal characteristics such a laziness, were all reported by middle-class children under 18 (Bullock, 1995). Interestingly, when poor children were asked if there were noticeable differences between them and more affluent people, the most common response was that poor people worried more than rich people. Studies such as this suggest that poor and middle-class people may recognize they are different from one another, but it is more often the poor that are thought of negatively by the wealthier than the other way around. Middle-class people think of the poor as having a particular (but inferior) culture of poverty; they think of them as being different and hence perceive them as *the other* (Bullock, 1995). Most poor people do not think of those who are better off in the same negative manner.

> Students think of themselves according to different social categories. . . . Students also have ideas about how people in these groups behave. We call these notions prescriptions, and the prescriptions give the ideal or stereotypical physical attributes and behaviour of people in each category. Students then gain or lose utility insofar as they belong to social categories with high or low social status and their attributes and behaviour match the ideal of their category. (Akerlof & Kranton, 2000, as cited in Barrett, 2005, pp. 188-9)

RUBY PAYNE (1996)—HIDDEN RULES THEORY

Another theoretical framework that has been postulated on the culture of poverty and the observable differences between the poor and middle and upper class people is that of Ruby Payne (1996). Payne described how there are "hidden rules" among classes and how the rules are learned and different for each class. In the case of poverty, the rules are substantially different from those of the middle class and more often than not an unawareness of this is what causes misunderstanding between the classes. This situation contributes to problems for poor people.

Payne (1996) drew particular attention to the hidden rules of language use. Drawing upon the work of Joos (1967), she claimed that all languages have different registers or levels of language ranging from informal or casual to formal. She referred to five levels of language: intimate, casual, consultative, formal and frozen. The higher the level, the more sophisticated it supposedly is. Different levels are seen as more appropriate in different settings and because middle-class people tend to be more mobile and navigate more freely between private and public spheres, they learn how to determine which level of language is appropriate in different settings. Poor people, on the other hand, often remain at the casual stage, which is more characteristic of people who because of a lack of resources and social mobility mostly remain in the private spheres of life (home and community) where casual language is "more the norm." "Middle-class people tend to see the world in terms of a bigger picture, while those from poverty see the world in its immediate locale" (Payne, 1996, p. 60). Middle-class people may misinterpret the language of poor people. In the public realm of school, poor students could be at a disadvantage as they may not know what the rules are, including the rules of language, and more likely to be misunderstood and regarded as inferior. Their seemingly improper language may cause them to be looked down upon. The use of casual language, which may be the only language they know, could be seen as vulgar and unsophisticated and be interpreted by teachers or others as being rude or disrespectful. This same behaviour, or in this case use of language, is not viewed as negative in the private spheres of home and family. Students who are poor, therefore, have rarely had an opportunity to rethink its use or to learn the hidden rules of language in different settings. Language is just one example that Payne uses to describe some of the differences between socio-economic classes.

Payne's work has recently been subjected to a fair amount of criticism. Critics argue that it examines poverty from a deficit model, claiming that it simply reinforces negative stereotypes of an already marginalized group (Bomer, Dworin, May, & Semingson, 2008). These authors argue that Payne's attempts at helping teachers understand and deal with poverty in classrooms actually does more harm than good, as her deficit model likely leaves teachers with low expectations of poor students. As a consequence, poor students are placed in less rigorous academic programs and are not prepared to pursue further education, which simply confirms economic inequality. Payne makes generalizations that would imply all poor people act and behave in the same way (a deficient way). In response to her critics, Payne has counter-argued that any such negative attributes of poor people are not meant to imply that poor people are innately inferior to people of other economic groups but rather, poverty causes negatively perceived actions that are merely coping mechanisms (Payne, 2009). She counter-argues that criticism of her work is further evidence that middle class and wealthy people (such as her critics) are naïve about the realities of living in poverty since they are studying it from afar whereas she has studied it by direct observation.

Another aspect of Payne's work that has recently come under attack is her description of American society as having three distinct social classes, a poor, middle and wealthy class (Bomer et al., 2008). Sociologists and others have argued for decades that economic stratification is much more complicated. "Contrary to Payne's neat division, many scholars who have done work on social class have discussed multiple classes and substrata within those as comprising the class structure in the US" (Bomer et al., 2008). Others such as Lott et al. (2001, 2002) supported Payne's belief that there are three class levels based on income levels. They suggested that to compensate for the large gaps between the income levels of each class that each one be further subdivided into two sub-categories. The labels assigned to these categories are less significant than the income levels of each. Lott and Bullock (2001) suggested that the lower class could be sub-divided into poor and working class (or working poor), the middle class could comprise a lower and upper middle class, and the upper class would be divided into upper class and affluent (or wealthy).

PIERRE BOURDIEU—SOCIAL FIELD, CAPITAL AND HABITUS

A third theory that outlines some of the differences between people from various economic groups is Pierre Bourdieu's concepts of social field, capital, and habitus. Bourdieu's theories have been given various names but the two most prominent ones used to describe his ideas are, *the sociology of culture* and *theory of practise.* Bourdieu (1977) argued that the ways of being and how people relate to the world are not only based upon which social class they belong to or by their economic capital or lack thereof. He argued that much of how we view the world is based on the various social fields we find ourselves and where we are positioned in each of these. Grenfell (2008) summarized Bourdieu's idea of how people view the world as follows:

> Everything we know about the world is both established and developed as a consequence of individual acts of perception. However, these structures have defining principles which are both pre-constructed and evolving according to the logic of differentiation found within the social universe. (p. 45)

Bourdieu (1977) did not deny that society is comprised of a class structure but he argued that economic capital alone does not define one's social status. Indeed, economic capital can affect which social fields one may enter, but this alone does not determine one's social status. He argued that there was an "interdependent and co-constructed trio, field, capital, and habitus – with none of them primary, dominant or causal" that contributed to how one navigated the social landscape of modern societies (Grenfell, p. 69). Each of his key concepts is described below.

Social field is essentially what Bourdieu referred to as a social space in which interactions with other people take place. A social field is similar to a playing field in that, "according to Bourdieu, the game that occurs in a social space or field is competitive, with various social agents using various strategies to maintain or improve their position" (Grenfell, p. 69). He also noted that some of the players in a given social field begin the game with particular forms of capital which give them certain advantages over the other players. Hence they are more likely to control the game and sustain positions of power. A social field can be defined as any number of places including schools or other institutions or it can even be events such as social engagements.

Bourdieu (1977) agreed that economic power influences what people can and cannot do, but how one manoeuvres within a given social field is also determined by other forms of capital. He referred to three forms of *capital* that people strive to acquire which can help (or hinder) their social status in a given social field. Economic capital is usually found in the form of monetary or other possessions – the accumulation of wealth. Cultural capital is "like the status or socialization" of individuals and the types of things they do (Grenfell, 2008, p. 102). For example, in one social field people may be more inclined to partake in a different set of activities than those whom are in a different field. For example, he spoke of how upper-class French society or those with greater forms of economic and cultural capital attended opera and dined at different restaurants than those with less capital. Social capital is a form of symbolic social status. For example some positions are held in higher regard than others. Bourdieu argued that all three forms of capital are interwoven and form the habitus of a particular social field. Hence, some adapt to certain social fields more easily than others.

Habitus is that which is "structured by conditions of existence and generates practices, beliefs, perceptions, feelings and so forth in accordance with its own structure" (Grenfell, 2008, p. 51). Put simply, habitus is how people of a similar group view the world and their surroundings and how they adapt and react to it. Bourdieu studied particular social positions in fields such as education. He found similarities in the ways that people in a certain field enacted their social role and found they were different from the roles of other social fields. Bourdieu determined that social roles were determined by power structures in certain fields rather than by economics, but that economics often determined which social field one belonged to. People manoeuvre and struggle in pursuit of desirable resources.

It is difficult to discuss Bourdieu's conceptualizations of the different forms of capital and habitus without some discussion of *symbolic violence.* The most simplistic definition of symbolic violence is when something (or someone) is highly valued or held in greater esteem than other things (or people) and when it is reinforced to others that they or the things they value are of less value. He defined symbolic violence as something that occurs in a wide range of settings from public consumerism to institutional domains such as schools. The violence associated with it is shown by degrading and sometimes humiliating things or

people who do not quite measure up or attain the social status attached to the symbol (thing or person). Grenfell (2008) pointed out that symbolic violence manifests itself in different situations. He used the example of a working-class diner in an expensive restaurant where he finds himself in the uncomfortable position of not knowing which fork to use. The patron in such instances can be immediately reminded of his social status or position in such a situation. He went on to say:

> There is, of course, nothing inherently superior in the use of one fork or spoon or another. There is only a social superiority because of the relative class position of various culinary practices. … The violence is symbolic, but the suffering and the reproduction of class hierarchies that result are very real. (p. 199)

Another important aspect of Bourdieu's theory is *doxa.* "Doxa are the fundamental, deep-founded, unthought beliefs, taken as self-evident universals that inform an agent's actions and thoughts within a particular field" (Bourdieu, 1977, p. 10). Doxa could be considered synonymous with hegemony. Like hegemony, doxa maintains the social order and works to the advantage of the dominant members of society. This is not unlike Michel Foucault's post-modern critique of discourse. He argues that a dominant discourse is often thought to reflect knowledge, reality or truth, but it creates and maintains a dominant status quo (Mullaly, 2002, p. 22).

To place Bourdieu's theories and concepts in the context of education, students who experience similar economic status probably share similar social fields. The habitus or beliefs and/or habits of the group are similar based not only on their economic capital but also on their social and cultural capital. Hence, some students who are poor may carry out their social role based on the habitus they are accustomed to, but upon entering a different social field such as school, their habitus may be in direct conflict with that of other students and their teachers. The teacher's own belief system will determine whether or not she or he will allow a relationship to occur between two parties and within which parameters. In other words, certain students, depending upon which social fields they are most accustomed to, could have difficulty navigating the social field of education.

Another aspect of Bourdieu's theory might show why so many poor students feel that they do not belong at school or why they have negative feelings about being there. He called this state *hysteresis.* Hysteresis is what a

person may experience when he is placed into an environment (social field) that feels foreign to him or when people feel *like a fish out of water* (Grenfell, 2008, p. 132). Some poor students may feel that they do not belong at school simply because their world outside of school (their habitus) is at odds with the environment and those with whom they come in contact at school. Hysterisis may create "a painful struggle to maintain a desirable place in the [new] field," causing a conflict that makes many poor students simply give up and retreat to the familiarity of their own comfort zone or social field. Some poor students may choose to quit school altogether rather than face the daily hysteresis of attending. Others may have to stay as they are too young to drop out. In these cases it is hoped that some of these students will encounter teachers who help make them feel safe and secure in unfamiliar surroundings. In other instances, it is likely that some will endure a painful struggle of being in a place where they feel they do not belong and/or where no one cares about them. This situation causes great emotional turmoil (Grenfell, 2008, p. 143).

Affluence and Education

Much less has been written about affluent children than other economic groups and even less has been written about them in the context of education. The reason is probably because many people assume that children from an affluent background do better at school than those in other groups (Levine, 2006). They are not usually considered to be at-risk of dropping out of school and some researchers likely feel that "the lives of [affluent] youth must be utterly benign and ostensibly not worthy of scarce research resources" (Luthar, 2003, p. 1581). Although it may be true (at least academically) that many affluent youth do better at school than their less privileged peers, it is less certain their lives are benign and not worth researching (Levine, 2006).

Many writers have traditionally had little sympathy for wealthy people. In fact they are often thought to be the ones who dominate and control the economy and are often blamed for the circumstances and problems of those with fewer financial resources (Apple, 2006; Freire, 1970; hooks, 2003; Kozol, 1991; McClaren, 1989, 2007). It is perhaps understandable why some might feel this way, as Kozol (1991, 2005) pointed out that many children he has researched in

inner city schools frequently ask him why their schools are so run-down and under-funded compared to those in more affluent areas. The only answer he can provide is that those who have the power to change it do not or will not.

> Undemocratic practices like these, no matter how strategically compelling they may seem, have introduced a radical distorting prism to an old, if seldom honoured, national ideal of universal public education that affords all children equal opportunity within the borders of a democratic entity. Blurring the line between democracy and marketplace, the private subsidy of public schools in privileged communities denounces an ideal of simple justice that is often treated nowadays as an annoying residue of tiresome egalitarian ideas, and ethical detritus that sophisticated parents are encouraged to shut out of mind as they adapt themselves to a new order of Darwinian entitlements. (Kozol, 2005, p. 55)

It is not that many educators and others do not want to address issues of economic inequality in education (Kozol, 2005) it is that they often feel unable to do much about it. Educators have often been encouraged to strive for a more democratic educational system that includes less privileged children (hooks, 2003). "Certainly as democratic educators we have to work to find ways to teach and share knowledge in a manner that does not reinforce existing structures of domination" (hooks, 2003, p. 131). Democratic educators such as Freire (1970) claim that to attain educational democracy it is necessary to work directly with poor people and to teach them about their economic situation.

Although some of the wealthy may take solace in their privileged position and feel it is their earned right (and that of their children) to take advantage of opportunities, including educational ones, it is unfair to direct our blame toward children of the wealthy as though they somehow contribute to the problem of economic inequality (Levine, 2006). Children of the wealthy, like children of the poor, develop a culture that is based on family economic status and they rarely question why they might have what other children do not. This situation does not imply that children from an affluent background do not have problems of their own. "On the contrary, affluent children are at risk of having their problems glossed over or trivialized, increasing the likelihood that when their problems are finally acknowledged, they will be more severe and more difficult to resolve" (Levine, 2006, p. 25).

Levine (2006) and Luthar (2003) have written extensively on affluent children in America. Both would agree that many affluent children do well in the

realm of education but that many of them do not fare as well in other aspects of life. They would argue that a disproportionate number of affluent children have adjustment problems such as substance use, anxiety, and depression (Luthar, 2003). These problems have previously been associated with poor children rather than the affluent. Levine (2006) claimed:

> There is a vast body of literature documenting the fact that poverty imposes such severe financial, emotional, and social challenges that parenting skills are often compromised and as a result children in poverty have high levels of emotional and behavioural problems. . . . [But] America's newly identified at-risk group is preteens and teens from affluent, well-educated families. In spite of their economic and social advantages, they experience among the highest rates of depression, substance abuse, anxiety disorders, somatic complaints, and unhappiness of any group of children in this country. (p. 17)

In regards to education many affluent students feel pressured to succeed and achieve high grades, as this will get them into top-rated universities, something their parents expect of them. The pressure to achieve this, however, may well have a negative effect on their social and emotional lives. Levine cited many examples of students who describe the immense pressure that parents and others put on them to do well. "Of all the things [affluent] parents are likely to be anxious about, academic performance is invariably near the top of the list" (Levine, 2006, p. 29). Parental demands and expectations for academic results manifest into what Levine described as "maladaptive perfectionism" of their children (p. 29).

Like poverty, affluence is a form of otherness that many teachers may not recognize or understand how it might affect certain students in their classrooms. As described above, problem behaviours exist among many affluent youth just as they do among those at the other end of the spectrum. Teachers might be less sympathetic to these children because they may have preconceived notions of what it is like to be wealthy and feel that children with wealthy parents should not have the same problems as poor children. On the other hand, teachers may appear to be non-caring toward affluent children simply because they may be doing well academically so the teachers assume they are doing well in other realms of their life. Nevertheless, problems exist with both poor and affluent groups of students although the causes may be different. It is imperative that teachers strive to understand affluence as a form of otherness so that they can

care for such students in their classrooms. "As we are increasingly able to identify these factors, we can also identify the personal, parenting, and social solutions that hold the key to helping our kids get back on a track that leads to an emotionally healthy adulthood" (Levine, 2006, p. 24).

SUMMARY OF ECONOMIC STATUS AND EDUCATION

Although some children are educated in a non-traditional manner, most young people still attend schools where they have to interact with their peers, teachers and other staff. School is a meeting place, a public space (versus a private one) where many diverse individuals and groups come together and spend a considerable amount of time interacting with each other (Bingham & Sidorkin, 2004, p. 5). The types of relationship that students experience while at school, particularly the ones that they have with their teachers, may have a long-lasting effect on their academic achievement and their emotional well-being. Students need to feel that they belong to part of a caring community (Battistich et al., 1997). Teachers who share a moral responsibility and support notions of social justice sense that there is a need to try and understand economic differences and how this may affect particular children in their classrooms (Mullaly, 2002; Noddings, 1992). Teachers who claim to be advocates of social justice should try to identify the needs of all children in their classes including those from different economic groups. All students, rich, poor, and in between, should be granted the right to feel physically and emotionally safe amongst others, including their teachers, whilst they are at school.

CHAPTER 3
METHOD

This chapter includes a description of the research design and an overview of how the study was conducted. The first two sections of the chapter discuss the method and design and rationalize why these were appropriate for the type of study I was undertaking. Ethics, limitations, and site and participant selection are also discussed. The latter section pertains to data collection and analysis.

QUALITATIVE RESEARCH

> The word *qualitative* implies an emphasis on processes and meanings that are not rigorously examined or measured (if measured at all), in terms of quantity, amount, intensity, or frequency. Qualitative researchers stress the socially constructed nature of reality, the intimate relationship between the researcher and what is studied, and the situational constraints that shape inquiry. Such researchers emphasize the value-laden nature of inquiry. They seek answers to questions that stress how social experience is created and given meaning. In contrast, quantitative studies emphasize the measurement and analysis of causal relationships between variables, not processes. Inquiry is purported to be within a value-free framework. (Denzin & Lincoln, 1998, p. 8)

There may be many reasons why individual researchers decide to employ the methods they do, as both qualitative and quantitative approaches have their place in educational research. Qualitative research methods were used for this study because they are congruent with the social constructivist paradigm I espouse and also because these methods seemed more useful. In regards to the topic of care, I was not as interested in gaining quantitative knowledge (such as how many students feel cared for or not cared for) but rather I wanted to examine how students perceive and describe their experiences of care or non-caring.

Similarly with regard to economic status, I was interested in how students from different economic groups might describe their experiences of care or non-caring. Regardless of the topic, there is a need for both qualitative and quantitative types of information. In the case of this study, however, significant quantitative data already exists, particularly student surveys, to show whether students in public schools feel cared for or not. There is perhaps even a saturation of quantitative data to show that students from less advantaged economic groups fare worse in education than others (Luthar, 2003). Qualitative research leans more toward understanding the world from the perspectives of those who are living and experiencing it. What I wanted to gain from this study was to learn (a) what students from different economic groups had to say about care in their secondary schools, (b) how they perceive and experience care, and (c) why this may be. To meet these objectives, qualitative methods seemed the most appropriate to use.

Qualitative research normally begins with the researcher positioning him- or herself within a particular research paradigm. The categories most commonly used to define these paradigms are: positivism, post-positivism, constructivism, critical/feminist, and post-structuralism/post-modernism (Hatch, 2002). The researcher most often chooses a paradigm that is congruent with his particular views or ideas about ontology, epistemology, methodology, and what will come out of the research, or the product. Qualitative research is not as systematic or prescriptive as quantitative research, so views about ontology, epistemology and methodology do not have to fit neatly into one research paradigm or another; a researcher's view of these perspectives is not always restricted to using a particular research approach.

This study was undertaken primarily through a constructivist lens, so it differs from other paradigms both ontologically and epistemologically. In regard to ontology, constructivists assume that absolutism is not possible; there is no such thing as absolute reality. Constructivists argue that individuals view and experience the world from their own vantage point and construct their own reality that may or may not be shared by others (Hatch, 2002). Since constructivism focuses on individual socially constructed realities this, in turn, influences how a researcher would think about epistemology.

In the constructivist paradigm, truth or knowledge is believed to be based on how it is symbolically constructed (it is not objective) so therefore, knowledge

that is created or formed out of a particular study is merely that which has been co-constructed by the researcher and the participants. Interpretive principles are often used to guide the formation of these co-constructions but other methods may also be compatible with a constructivist paradigm. The end product of a constructivist study can vary but is often presented as a case study or narrative describing the interpretations that have been constructed. For this study, interpretations have been presented by co-constructing the perceptions and experiences of the participants with how I, as the primary investigator, have understood or communicated what they have said. Not only have co-constructed meanings been presented about the participant's perceptions and experiences but, explanations for how and why certain events occur within their social world have been suggested. This would indicate that grounded theory design or methodology has been used in this particular qualitative study.

GROUNDED THEORY

> A grounded theory design is a systematic, qualitative procedure used to generate a theory that explains at a broad conceptual level, a process, an action, or interaction about a substantive topic. A central element of this definition is the generation of a theory. (Creswell, 2002, p. 439)

Grounded theory was developed in the late 1960s by two sociologists, Barney Glaser and Anselm Strauss (Creswell, 2002). Their pioneer study using this design was conducted on terminally ill patients. The study prompted so much interest from others wanting to learn more about their research design that it led them to write a book that described grounded theory procedures. As successful as their work on grounded theory was, Glaser and Strauss came from different research backgrounds, quantitative and qualitative respectively, at a time when animosity existed between the two types of research. As a result, their relationship could be described as unusual and innovative. Following their joint project with terminally ill patients, Glaser and Strauss engaged in further research using grounded theory design. Their seemingly unlikely relationship eventually ended in disagreement about the path the grounded theory design was taking (Charmaz, 2000).

Ironically, it was Glaser (the former quantitative researcher) who first began to suggest that the research design being used by his colleague was too rigid and systematic. Strauss felt grounded theory design was (and should be) systematic and rigidly structured so that it would be deemed credible. Glaser agreed that grounded theory design needed to be systematic and credible but he did not feel that it had to be as rigid or procedural as Strauss suggested. In 1992, Glaser openly criticized the ideas of his former colleague and the two parted ways (Cresswell, 2002, p. 440). Subsequently, the introduction of new and different types of grounded theory designs occurred.

Since the Glaser and Strauss era, what evolved are three dominant (but different) types of grounded theory design: systematic, emerging, and constructivist (Creswell, 2002). The designs are different from one another in how they are used, but the common feature is their emphasis on the development of theory. The systematic and emerging designs are quite rigid, particularly in regard to how the coding of the data is carried out. In contrast, the constructivist design espoused by some research theorists such as Kathy Charmaz (1990, 2000) is thought to be less rigid and more procedurally flexible. A constructivist grounded theory design was used primarily because it was more congruent with understanding the experiences of the participants than what either a systemic or emerging design might have been.

Grounded theory using a constructivist design is different from the other two (systematic and emerging). In regard to educational research a constructivist paradigm would be conducted with less formality or structure than what a more positivist paradigm might be. On a continuum of research paradigms, one would find constructivism somewhere between a highly structured absolute positivist approach to a flexible and loosely structured one.

Using a constructivist design is appealing to qualitative researchers who are less concerned with systematic procedures but still want to develop plausible explanations and theorize about a particular phenomenon or process with a particular group of participants. This in no way implies that such researchers using a constructivist design simply don't want to be bothered with a more structured design. This study was carried out with rigor but it is not as systematic and procedural as some other designs. A constructivist approach was used as it is more congruent with understanding human perception and experiences.

Charmaz (2000) has been influential in describing why a researcher may choose to use a constructivist grounded theory design as opposed to another.

> In applying this approach, a grounded theorist explains the feeling of individuals as they experience a phenomenon or process. The constructivist study mentions the beliefs and values of the researcher and eschews pre-determined categories, such as found in axial coding. The narrative is written to be more explanatory, more discursive, and more probing of the assumptions and meanings for individuals in the study. (Cresswell, 2002, p. 446)

A key factor in any grounded theory design is some form of explanation to describe a particular phenomenon or process. The difference between a constructivist design versus a systematic or emerging one is that conclusions are merely suggestive, they are incomplete and inconclusive, and are not meant to be a scientific hypothesis that is to be proven (Cresswell, 2002).

A constructivist grounded theory design was deemed appropriate for this study for several reasons. First, there was foreshadowing of a problem that economic status could be a factor in how secondary students perceive and experience care. As the principal researcher for the study, I had ample reason from professional experience to believe that there was a co-relation between the two concepts. In other words, it was plausible that students from different economic groups might perceive and experience care differently in secondary schools. If this were the case, the second purpose of the study was to unravel this process and to provide some form of an explanation or theory for why this might occur. A key aspect of grounded theory research is that there is no pre-conceived hypothesis about why certain things occur. In the case of this study, I chose not to use a deductive approach but rather an inductive one, which would provide more than one explanation, none of which were assumed prior to the study.

Other approaches could have been considered before pursuing this research. Indeed, depending upon the paradigm one chooses, there are endless possibilities. I feel that a constructivist grounded theory design was most suitable for the purposes of this particular study. Rather than spending valuable time justifying a particular method or design, a better question might be: "Will this research help us see something about the human condition, and how might it contribute to that end?" The data collected for this study was analyzed using a coding system that is congruent with grounded theory methods. This is discussed further in a subsequent section of this chapter.

SITE SELECTION PROCESS

The sites used for this study included three public secondary schools in two British Columbia school districts. All three schools were familiar to me because I previously worked in one of the school districts where two of the schools are located and I presently work in the other. The districts are considerably different from one another, as are each of the three schools. To ensure confidentiality and maintain the anonymity of the two districts and the three schools (and the participants) I have used pseudo-names for them. The districts are referred to as School District A and School District B. Mountainview Secondary is located in School District A, which is a wealthy suburb of Greater Vancouver. All but a few of the students at Mountainview come from wealthy to affluent backgrounds. The other two schools, Oceanview Secondary, and Hilltop Secondary, are situated in School District B, a rural coastal area. The latter two schools are in the same school district but in different small towns approximately one hour and two hours outside of Vancouver respectively. Oceanview and Hilltop are significantly less affluent than Mountainview Secondary with a considerable number of students who are economically disadvantaged. Because they are the only secondary schools in their respective towns, they also contain some students who come from relatively high economic status. It is fair to say, however, that fewer of the high economic status category students attend, compared with the low category. Nevertheless, unlike many urban schools where the economic status of students may be quite similar, Oceanview and Hilltop have a spectrum of students from different economic groups, which makes the populations at these two schools more economically diverse than some schools, including Mountainview Secondary.

Qualitative researchers often choose sites for their research using what is called "purposeful sampling" which means finding a site where the central phenomenon they are trying to explore might be best represented (Cresswell, 2002, p. 193). In regard to finding potential sites to collect data for this research I was faced with two immediate considerations. First, because the study was about care I was concerned that some educators might feel I could be evaluating them or judging their practice. Second, I was concerned that some school officials might perceive that talking about the economic status of students would be insensitive or intrusive, not to mention a confidential matter. (Incidentally, both

concerns proved to be warranted as the study progressed). Therefore, I felt it was of utmost importance that I consider sites where I had already established solid working relationships and could be trusted by those who would grant me access to their schools for data collection. More importantly, because economic status was to be a major factor in the study, it was necessary to find sites where the participants would be from different economic groups. I felt I already had strong working relationships with both school districts and because of my familiarity with each school I was quite certain I could find students from different economic groups to participate in the study. I was confident these schools would fit the criteria I was seeking. Consequently, all three schools became the sites for the study. The schools were intentionally chosen as sites because I felt they could provide the type of participants I was seeking. Each school is described in more detail in Chapter 4 where a profile of each one is given.

Gaining permission to use the secondary schools as sites for my research involved a series of meetings with different levels of officials in both school districts. The first meetings were held at the school district level and included only district officials. The second-level meetings were held at each of the three schools where I met with school officials. At each meeting I presented my research proposal and responded to any questions and concerns that arose. I kept detailed field notes of what transpired at each of these meetings.

The first meeting was held in School District B (where Oceanview and Hilltop are located), which included meeting with the superintendent, assistant superintendent and two district principals. Those in attendance were very supportive and at the end of the meeting I was given permission from the superintendent to use both Oceanview and Hilltop Secondary schools as sites for the study. Their enthusiasm and support for the study was granted because they felt there was a strong need for this research in their district given the large number of economically disadvantaged students.

School District A (where Mountainview is located) did not require me to meet with them but requested that I forward a copy of the proposal so it could be reviewed by the assistant superintendent. Shortly thereafter I received word they fully supported it and I was granted permission to proceed with data collection at any school in their district that I felt would be useful to the study. They requested that I avoid interviewing any student in the district that I may have

had a close relationship with; this is not something I would have disagreed with anyhow.

Both districts provided letters of permission to use their schools as sites to collect data and these letters were then submitted with an application to the University Research Ethics Board (REB). The site selection was finalized when the REB gave approval to proceed with the data collection phase of the research study.

After receiving ethics approval for the study, a second set of meetings was held at each of the three schools where the data was to be collected. I presented the research proposal to those in attendance, which this time included the principals, vice principals, and counsellors from each school. The primary purpose of these meetings was to build relationships with staff in each school by describing my intentions and reassuring them the study was practical and useful to the field of education. I felt people in their position might be aware of particular students who would be appropriate participants for the study and perhaps they would refer students to me or just let students be aware of the study.

The first of these meetings was held at Mountainview Secondary. The staff members there were particularly supportive and receptive to the ideas I presented and indicated they would do whatever they could to help find suitable participants for the study. One of the counsellors offered to place posters around the school to try and garner student interest in the study, something that proved to be an extremely useful strategy. The administrators, counsellors, and the school youth worker were helpful in providing names of students they felt would be suitable participants for the study.

The reaction I received at Oceanview and Hilltop in School District B was quite different. It is difficult to describe the tone at those meetings because each of the attendees responded quite differently. Some were modestly polite and some were reserved or mildly supportive, whilst others I perceived to be somewhere between patronizing and sarcastic. At the first meeting, one attendee interrupted me at one point to have me clarify if indeed the study was a doctoral study and then in a rather mocking tone asked why someone would even want to complete a PhD when there was no pay increase or other incentive for doing so. He was not the only one who displayed a sense of dismay at my doing this research. At both school meetings in District B there were those who displayed animosity toward the proposal and in one case there was outright negativity

toward it (described below). The tone at these two schools was much less friendly than what I experienced at the first meeting with their superintendent and district staff. Needless to say, my objectives for meeting with staff at the school level did not prove to be particularly fruitful and indeed I was beginning to notice some unexpected barriers being put up.

Upon completion of the two school-level meetings the principals at both schools in District B agreed to let me use their schools as sites for the study but neither gave any clear indication they were interested in the study, nor did they offer any personal support for the project. Of the staff who attended the meetings at Oceanview and Hilltop, the counsellors were the most responsive group, but even some of them seemed ambivalent about the study; none seemed to be overly enthusiastic about it. One counsellor openly admitted that she would not refer any students to me. She added that she would not discourage any student who wanted to participate in the study but it was not something she would promote. When prompted to explain, she indicated that she felt the study was invasive and that identifying students as economically disadvantaged could make them feel further marginalized by participating in it. At the other school, prior to the start of the meeting, a staff member (who did not realize I was in the room at the time) was previewing a hand-out of the proposal that included the words *Who Cares* in the title. She read the words, *Who Cares,* aloud and then laughingly reported to the others that it was a very good question, because she certainly did not care and added something to the effect of *who would care* about yet another useless educational study. When the meeting started, she realized who I was and that I had been in the room whilst she was mocking the proposal. For the duration of the meeting she sat with her elbows and head resting on the table and did not participate in the discussion. Clearly, she did not care or at least that was my perception. Despite all levels of permission being granted for me to begin collecting data, I recognized that I probably would not be able to count on much support from the staff at either Oceanview or Hilltop School. Finding participants would likely be left to my own initiative. My feelings proved to be correct and there were indeed challenges in finding participants at these two schools.

PARTICIPANT SELECTION PROCESS

Purposeful selection was used to find participants. It was necessary that I find students from different economic groups so not only did I purposefully have to find sites where such students could be found, but I also had to choose certain participants. From the beginning I realized that finding participants might not be a straightforward or easy task. I was not concerned about finding students who would discuss the topic of care with me but I was unsure about securing those who would identify their economic status and then openly discuss it with me in an interview. My strategy was to present the focus of the study to any potential participants as being primarily about care (which it is) and then if they were interested I would explain how the role of economic status factored into it and why I would need to have some discussion with them about this. My intention was to have potential students indicate from their perspective which economic group they felt they belonged to (upper, middle, or lower class) and if they were interviewed I would ask more specific questions about their family's economic status. Aside from their economic differences I consciously decided to try and find students who were similar in other respects. If I found there were differences in how the participants perceived and experienced care, I wanted to be reasonably certain that it was economic status and no other factors that might be responsible for this. Hence, I tried as much as possible to eliminate participation from groups such as international students, racial, ethnic, or religious differences, learning or physical disabilities, and other factors that might explain different perceptions or experiences of care.

In order to attract potential participants I created posters and placed them in each of the schools. I also gave the same posters to the counsellors and vice principals to post in their offices. My contact information was included and I asked for interested participants to contact me. In addition to this, at the school meetings I suggested some possible ways that the counsellors and vice principals could sensitively mention the study to any students they saw as potential participants. Finding participants was an interesting experience and like other parts of the process, it proved to be quite different in each of the two school districts.

In regard to Mountainview Secondary in District A, between the staff who made recommendations and the many students who saw the posters, I had more students contact me than I could have used in the study. I presently work at this

school so I wanted to make sure that any students who volunteered to participate were ones that I did not know or did not know very well. I wanted to keep my professional role separate from my academic one and I was conscious that some students might want to participate simply because they knew me. I had to explain to some students why it would not be appropriate for me to interview them. As elated as I was to find so much interest in the study, it was disappointing to have to tell some students that I could not use them or that I already had enough participants. I responded to each student who contacted me and explained in full what the study was about and that I required participants from different economic groups. In order to participate they would need to identify the economic group that they felt best described their family and explained there were other criteria that I was looking for. I had originally chosen this school because I suspected it would be the most likely of the three to get students from wealthy families to participate, which was the case. In fact, almost every student at Mountainview who responded to my request identified themselves as wealthy. In the end, seven of the 12 total participants were from Mountainview Secondary and of these, four identified themselves as wealthy, two as in-between, and one as poor. The latter contacted me after hearing about the study from his counsellor whom he talked with about feeling out of place at Mountainview.

Finding participants at Oceanview and Hilltop Secondary was not as easy as at Mountainview. In fact there were times at which I began to consider abandoning my attempts altogether and searching for different schools to find participants. I had chosen these two schools because I knew they contained students from low socio-economic status but I did not know how difficult it would be to get any of them to participate in the study. No students from either school responded to the posters so I requested to meet with the counsellors again hoping that they might have some referrals and/or suggestions. My request to meet with them, which would have been a third time of meeting with people in District B, was politely refused and most of them simply responded that no one was interested. Looking back, I am not sure if they meant it was the students who were not interested or themselves, or both. One staff member suggested I might want to visit the school and sit in the foyer to see if any students were interested and she offered to set up a table for me to do this. It became increasingly obvious that to find participants at either of these schools, a new strategy was needed.

The new strategy was fairly simple. I circumvented those whom I had originally felt could assist me and opted to contact teachers at both of the schools. I contacted a couple of teachers I knew from having previously worked in the school district. None of them were aware of the study but agreed to allow me to come into their classes and present the study to their students. In a relatively short time I found five students (some right after I spoke to the classes) who were willing to participate in the study. Of these, three identified themselves as poor whilst the other two identified themselves as being in the middle.

Despite some unexpected barriers that caused difficulty in finding participants in School District B, the study ended up including 12 students. Seven of these were from Mountainview in District A and the remaining five were from District B. I managed to have four students from each of the three economic groups I required for data collection although one of these was perhaps more suited to a different group (how the students were placed into economic groups is discussed in complete detail in Chapter 4). There was an even split in regards to gender with six girls and six boys participating. The composition of the students was two grade 8s, two grade 9s, two grade 10s, three grade 11s, and three grade 12s. All but one of the participants was Caucasian but otherwise there were very few other noticeable differences between the participants other than their economic status. Before the data collection, each participant as well as at least one of their parents was required to sign a consent form.

ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Any study that involves human subjects needs to comply with ethical procedures. This study met the required ethical expectations of Simon Fraser University but in addition, care was taken to ensure that no emotional harm would occur to the student participants.

> Qualitative researchers doing research in education contexts have special ethical responsibilities when the participants in their studies are students and teachers. Students are especially vulnerable to exploitation because of their youth and their positioning as a kind of captive audience in the school. While informed consent procedures will require parents to agree to their children's participation, it is often questionable if children, especially young children understand what is going on or agree to participate themselves. . . . The fact that they are children should make us

> more, not less, sensitive to ethical concerns. A genuine effort should be made to help children comprehend exactly what their participation will mean and a thoughtful attempt to assess their degree of agreement should be a part of research design. (Hatch, 2002, pp. 66-7)

The purpose of this study was explained to each of the young participants; there were to be no surprises. Furthermore, although not required, I had each student sign a consent form similar to that of their parents when they felt they understood both the intent of the study and their participation in it.

Ethical research should provide confidentiality for the participants as well as any institutions that are part of the study. This research project was considered minimal risk in that there was slight chance that any harm might come to the participants, but due to the sensitive nature of the topic (care and economic status) the possibility of emotional harm did exist. Participants were assured of full confidentiality and participant anonymity. They are not identified by their real name on any written transcripts or in this paper. For further protective measures, the real names of their schools and school districts were not included in the written transcript.

One particular concern was that some students might become emotional about discussing personal matters such as how they were treated at school or their family's economic status. The participants and their parents were all aware that school and other counselling supports were available to them if necessary. My final contact with each participant included asking if they felt all right about having participated in the study. It was a general way of asking if it had caused them any emotional harm. Fortunately, none of them indicated it had caused them any emotional difficulty and most were actually very thankful for having had the opportunity to participate. In one case a student reported that the interview itself had been therapeutic and he actually felt empowered by having participated in the study.

Sample documents and forms relating to the ethical conduct of this study have been included in the appendices of this paper, albeit without names of the participants, their schools, or school districts. Confirmation of approval from the SFU Research Ethics Board is also included. Researchers must ensure that participants, or their parents or guardians, have agreed to their participation by signing a consent form. Sample consent forms are included.

DATA COLLECTION METHODS

Data collection for this study included three methods. The primary source of data came from semi-structured interviews with the 12 student participants and most of the research findings are based on this data. Aside from the interviews, however, to ensure triangulation (described below) for the study, other data were collected from other sources to help strengthen and/or support information collected from the interviews. A substantial amount of data was collected in the form of field notes recorded during visits to the three sites as well as during the interviews. These notes were multi-dimensional and included any subtle or obvious nuances that occurred or were witnessed while visiting the three different schools. A cumulative reflective journal of personal observations recorded over the duration of my doctoral studies (approximately seven years) while working in both school districts also provided useful information. Other data came from document analysis including student files, school satisfaction surveys, post-secondary entrance statistics, and socio-economic demographic statistics from government and private sources. Each of the data collection methods is described in more detail below.

The use of different data collection methods was to ensure triangulation. "Triangulation is qualitative cross-validation" (Wiersma, 2000, p. 252). It is when a researcher compares the information gathered from multiple data-collection procedures to determine whether or not there is corroboration (Wiersma, 2000, p. 251). The information gathered in the interviews was compared to the various documents including student files as well as to direct observations recorded in field notes and a journal. The data were consistent, which suggests that the data-collection methods I used were sufficient for the type of information I was trying to attain. "If the data [had been] inconsistent or [did] not converge . . . the researcher is then faced with a dilemma regarding what to believe" (Wiersma, 2000, p. 251).

INTERVIEWS

Interviewing has come to be one of the most commonly used data collection methods in qualitative research and is particularly common in education research. The interview method involves questioning people or discussing issues and is a useful technique for collecting data that would probably not be

accessible using techniques such as observation or questionnaires (Blaxter et al., 2005). Interviews are intended for when we want to know something important about society or social life. When this happens we ask those who are *in the know*. It is a good way for us to understand individual perceptions or phenomena that are unclear to us (Holstein & Gubrium, 2003). The purpose of interviewing is not just to get answers to questions but also to understand the experience of other people and the meaning they make of their experience (Seidman, 2006). It is not a straightforward method of simply talking to people or asking questions. Like all methodology, there is an art to learning how to interview wisely and effectively. The success of using interviews as a data collection method will depend largely on how the questions are formulated for the interview. Proper thought has to be given to the types of questions asked in the interview. There is no perfect recipe for formulating questions but there are some pertinent aspects to keep in mind when interviewing. Useful information for the structuring of effective interview questions can be found in Holstein and Gubrium (2003):

> The full range of individual knowledge is potentially accessible—the interview is a virtual window on experience, a kind of universal panopticon. Interviewing gives access to the observations of others. Through interviewing we can learn about places we have not been and could not go and about settings in which we have not lived. . . . Interviewing may be defined simply as a conversation with a purpose. Specifically, the purpose is to gather information. (p. 10)

Even an experienced qualitative researcher may encounter problems when using interviewing as a data collection method. Recognizing these problems is the first step in reducing the chances that they will affect one's research. Seidman (2006) cautioned all researchers to be aware of differences including class hierarchies and status. "A lack of consciousness about class issues can be injurious to both the participant and the interviewer" (p. 79). Although many researchers think they are open-minded, in reality many are unprepared for meeting certain types of people or understanding their worldview; these may well clash. The language, jargon or cultural attributes of a particular group of people may not be understood by the interviewer or vice versa. An additional problem may be differences of power between the two parties in an interview. Interviewers and participants are never equal. We strive to reduce hierarchical arrangements, but the participant and the interviewer want and get different things out of an interview" (Briggs, 1986, 2003). Furthermore, a dominant

discourse always hangs over any qualitative research and often affects the analyzing of interviews. In other words, sometimes we find what we were looking for too easily. Other problems include more obvious barriers that can generally be traced back to either the un/suitability of interviewer or structural aspects of the interview.

In the case of this study, I took into consideration all of the above information and carefully put together an interview script that I hoped would prompt rich discussion and dialogue and encourage open-ended answers to each question I was asking. Before using the interview script I had each of my thesis committee members review it and suggest recommendations, which were then incorporated. I also did two trial runs using the prepared script. The first was with a colleague and the second was with a first-year university student who was familiar with the research topic. By the time I did the first interview I felt confident that the script was well done and perhaps more importantly I felt comfortable using it. A sample of the interview script is presented in the appendices section of this document but the interviews with students were semi-structured so the number of questions and how they were asked were at times different than how they are presented. I often made decisions to alter the script to allow the participants to have more autonomy and control over what they wanted to say.

After spending considerable time understanding the procedures for conducting interviews properly and feeling confident that I had formulated an effective interview script, I met with each participant to begin this part of the data-collection process. Semi-structured interviews were held with each of the 12 student participants. My procedure for conducting the interviews followed a three-phase model similar to that of Seidman (2006). This method uses a semi-structured interview script with mostly open-ended questions. It is designed to be done in three stages so the participants have enough time to provide as much information as possible and for them to have time to reflect upon and revise any parts they may want to.

After receiving the signed consent forms, the first stage of the interview process began with me having a short (approximately 20 minutes) informal interview meeting with each of the students. The main objective of these preliminary meetings was to (a) build a rapport with each participant, (b) ensure that they understood what the study was about, and (c) collect some basic

demographic information in order to put together a personal profile of each one (these are presented in Chapter 4). These first interviews were held in private offices or rooms at the schools where the students attend classes.

At the end of the first meeting with the students, the second interviews were scheduled and participants were asked to be prepared to stay for one and a half to two hours. I anticipated the interviews could take a considerable amount of time. I also asked each student where he or she would like the interviews to take place and all seemed open to whatever space was available to us. They were mostly held in the same spaces as the first interview. The shortest interview lasted approximately 45 minutes and the longest was nearly two hours. After the interviews were transcribed, I contacted each student to see if they wanted to verify that what they had said during the interviews had been recorded accurately. Only three of the participants opted to do this and none of them requested that anything be changed. The final contact with the participants included asking how they felt about participating in the study and thanking them.

To summarize, interviewing, like other research methods, needs to be practised with care. Given the type of study this was designed to be, I feel that using interviews was indeed a useful and appropriate data collection method. It is questionable whether student perceptions and experiences of care could have been collected as accurately using a different method. Perhaps more importantly, I think this method is less formal than some others and if used properly it can create an authentic and comfortable relationship between two parties, which is congruent with my personality and style when working with others.

DOCUMENT ANALYSIS

A number of documents were analyzed for this study although some were used more extensively than others and were more useful than others. The primary reason for analysis of documents is that they help the researcher to understand the central phenomenon. For this study, they were mostly used to ensure that the information about the sites was correct. They were also used to validate some of the information that was presented in the interviews. In other instances, newspaper articles substantiated other claims described in the findings of this research. All the documents used for this study were public documents. Given

that the central phenomena were care and economic status, documents pertaining to these concepts were primarily the ones used. Some documents were reviewed prior to the interviews and others afterward. Some of what was taken from the documents is discussed in the research findings chapter of this paper, but the following provides a brief overview of why I used particular documents.

Since a major criterion for this study was to interview participants from different economic groups, it was pertinent that I found appropriate sites. My familiarity and knowledge of both districts was helpful in this but it was important to have something other than my own opinions about the socio-economic status of each school. No statistics describe the economic status of those attending particular schools so I had to rely on sources that gave the economic status of regions and communities. Even then, such information is limited.

Statistics Canada was my starting point and was useful in that it gave an overview of the economic situation and provided a general understanding of family incomes across Canada. According to Statistics Canada (2007 census), the average family income in British Columbia was $81,200 based on a typical two-earner family. The average family income for a single female earner, however, drops to $30,900. These figures were then compared to regional figures of the districts I was studying.

The Fraser Institute provides family income statistics based on regions of British Columbia. Their statistics were actually more useful to me than those from Statistics Canada because they report incomes in particular areas of British Columbia and they also indicate which secondary school is located in each area. Therefore, I could get a general idea of the average income of families within a certain school area. Unfortunately these statistics are not completely accurate as there is no way to determine that everyone living within the proximity of these schools has children attending them. Nevertheless, I was able to determine that the economic status of each of my three sites was quite different. The income base for each school was reported as follows: Mountainview Secondary—$200,200, Oceanview Secondary—$85,000, and Hilltop Secondary—$73,900. These statistics helped confirm that the economic status of each site was significantly different, particularly between Mountainview and the other two, meaning that I would likely find a broad range of students from low to high economic status in these schools. I also had to recognize that these figures were

based on families with dual incomes and assume that a single-parent family might have a considerably lower income than indicated in these figures (Statistics Canada, 2007).

The only documents I found that pertained to care were school satisfaction surveys available from the British Columbia Ministry of Education. One of the questions asked in these surveys is if students feel that their teachers care about them. I was interested in the student responses to this question, both province-wide and at each site. I found it astonishing that in the 2009/10 survey only 52% of grade 10 students and 56% of grade 12s felt that their teachers cared about them (Fraser Institute—Report Card on Secondary Schools in British Columbia and Yukon, 2009). Such low figures provided even more motivation to explore the phenomenon of care more thoroughly. Percentages for each of the three school sites are included in the school profiles in Chapter 4. It is worth mentioning that the wording for the question about care in the 2010 survey has been changed because some school districts do not like to ask students to answer it the way it is presently worded.

The remaining documents used as data were intended to give further information about the students and the schools they attended. Individual student files were used at different times during the study and for different reasons. The first time I looked at them was after the participant selection was completed. I wanted to see if any of the students had completed any psycho-educational assessments, as I preferred not to have students with learning disabilities in the study. Previous studies have shown that many of these students often have negative feelings toward school and teachers (Wong, 1996) and because this study pertained to whether their economic status was a factor or not I wanted to eliminate other obvious explanations. When the interviews were completed, I looked at the student files again to see if the school reports were consistent with what the students had to say about things such as their academic performance, attendance, and behaviour.

Other documents used for this study included post-secondary entrance statistics and newspaper articles. Post-secondary entrance is often associated with higher socio-economic status so I felt that looking at these statistics at each site would provide more information about the individual schools (Kozol, 2005; Levine, 2006; Luthar, 2003).

PERSONAL OBSERVATIONS—FIELD NOTES

Personal observation and field notes were kept all through the study. From my initial entry in a doctoral program I began recording my thoughts in a reflective journal. I kept note particularly of times when students included the word *care* in statements and would comment on details and events that they were describing. Once the formal data collection for this study began, I focused less on journal writing and more on field notes. These notes were recorded each time I visited one of the sites. My field note entries are varied. Sometimes I recorded first-hand either what I saw or what I might have thought about something or someone at one of the sites; at other times I would record what people said to me. Of course, the only things included in my field notes were what I felt pertained or related to the study.

> Observation is the process of gathering first-hand information by observing people and places at a research site . . . qualitative inquirers do not use instruments developed by other researchers; rather, they design their own data-gathering observational forms. These forms are "unstructured" in that they do not rely on predetermined questions or scales, as do forms used in quantitative research. Using these unstructured forms, researchers record data such as the behaviours of individuals, chronological lists of the sequence of events, physical diagrams depicting the setting, and specific quotes of individuals. (Cresswell, 2002, p. 199)

Researchers carry out many types of qualitative data collection in a casual and informal manner. I used this method quite informally yet a lot of valuable data was collected. More importantly, I feel I carried out my observations in a professional and ethical manner; at no time did I feel anyone was suspicious of my motives and nor did they need to be. Although I did not use a particular observation instrument I did try to record both descriptive and reflective notes. The interviews with students were audio-recorded but I also took handwritten notes during the session. The notes included remarks about the participants and sites that can only be captured in the written word; you had to be there to understand it. The notes add a flavour or richness to the findings, as they describe characteristics of the participants and sites that would not be as evident from the interviews alone.

DATA ANALYSIS

> Data analysis is a systematic search for meaning. It is a way to process qualitative data so that what has been learned can be communicated to others. Analysis means organizing and interrogating data in ways that allow researchers to see patterns, identify themes, discover relationships, develop explanations, make interpretations, mount critiques, or generate theories. (Hatch, 2002, p. 148)

A study using a grounded theory design, particularly a constructivist one, is not necessarily systematic and rigid in its application. All types of qualitative research, however, contain a process in which the data is analyzed. The primary source of data for this study was the stories and insights that came from the interviews; therefore, this data required the greatest amount of analysis. Other data corroborated that which was analyzed from the interviews. It was secondary data, used to support the information taken from the interviews.

It is typical in most qualitative research to use an inductive approach for processing the information collected as data. In the case of this study, it began with a central phenomenon, care, and then through careful analysis of the data some general explanations evolved about the topic. A coding system was used but it was not as formal or systematic in its approach as in some research studies.

The data analysis of the interviews began with a preliminary exploratory analysis. At this stage of the process, I read the transcript and asked myself some probing questions about it. As I read through it I asked, "What is really going on here?" After this part of the analysis, the transcripts were read again and particular words or phrases that related to the phenomenon of care were noted. At this stage, points were noted as pertaining to caring or non-caring; this would be considered the initial coding of the data. This approach is similar to that of Miles and Huberman's (1994) "backward and forward" system of reading the data, re-reading it, and continuing in this manner until themes began to emerge and make sense to the researcher.

After the initial coding, the words or phrases were put into generic categories. Although some researchers who use a grounded theory design use what are called "in vivo codes" (Cresswell, 2002), I did not use these. I chose instead to create my own labels for particular information I was finding in the transcripts. These labels included categories of caring or non-caring, but more specifically they were domains such as actions, attributes, or related information

to these two concepts that were put into non-specified categories. The categories were then analyzed further by looking to see if there were multiple perspectives, meaning that more than one of the participants had included it in their discussion on care. The more often participants discussed or alluded to certain categories or the more that categories appeared to connect or interrelate to one another, they were placed into themes. The number of themes was, of course, considerably less than the original codes assigned to such things. In the case of this study my analysis found six identifiable themes that were related to student perceptions or experiences of caring or non-caring.

As themes of caring or non-caring were established they were considered as findings. Each of these is discussed in detail in Chapter 5. Because this study was designed using a grounded theory approach, some of the discussion on the central phenomenon should include explanations or a process outlining how and why things occur. It is the responsibility of the researcher to address the original research question and provide some possible explanation. In this study, possible explanations for why students from different economic groups perceive and experience care differently are discussed in a separate chapter (Chapter 6).

LIMITATIONS

The primary goal of this study was to understand the perceptions and experiences of care, based on information gathered from a small sample of students from different economic groups. It is important to note that the sample size, while appropriate for this study, will not support generalization to larger populations of secondary students. The study was not intended to make grandiose conclusions or assumptions about how all students from any particular economic group perceive care, but rather it will retell the stories of some students from each of these groups. It will shed some insight into how economic status may be a factor and how care and economic status are related.

A second limitation of this study was in regard to the participant selection. Aside from economic status, I was trying to get students from as homogeneous a background as possible. Students might be similar in terms of characteristics such as race, ethnicity or religion but this does not mean their backgrounds are similar enough to perceive care in the same way. Culture is

more elusive than this. Despite my effort to find participants that differed in regard to their economic status but were similar in other ways, this is clearly a limitation as there are likely to be more differences than similarities in any group of people.

A third limitation of this study and perhaps the most challenging was deciding which economic group each participant belonged to. Economic status was a secondary phenomenon being studied so it was necessary that I had a general understanding of socio-economic status but putting the students into economic groups presented a major challenge. First, I did not have the exact family incomes of the participants (nor would I have asked for it) so I had to rely on the students' self-perceptions of how they felt about their family's economic status. I formed the groups by comparing the students' perceptions to other data. I believe they are an accurate representation of the students in regard to economic status but there is really no way of knowing if they are grouped correctly. A thorough description of how I faced this limitation is described in Chapter 4.

A major concern and possible limitation to some readers is that this research was conducted in sites that were familiar to me and that my professional background and knowledge of the topic could have influenced potential findings for the study. I will not dispute that these factors had the potential to infiltrate greater bias into this study. Usher (1996) stated that the topic one chooses to study is often likely to derive from personal concerns and he went on to say, "Nowadays, there is a general scepticism about the very possibility of value-neutrality [in educational research]." (p. 36) This does not in any way however permit researchers to go about conducting a study with no limits or parameters around their conduct. In the case of this study the utmost of care and attention was given to ensuring that my professional background and any pre-conceived notions I may have held about the topic did not interfere at any stage of the research process. This included the particular questions that were asked of the participants and the interpretation of the data. Particular attention was given to the language used in the interviewing process to ensure that it would not sway or influence participants to state what I may have thought they would. In cases where participant voices might have been surprising to me (and there were instances when this occurred) I took particular care to ensure

that authenticity was presented in the findings. As stated above, forms of bias may perhaps be evident in all education research. In this study, extra care was taken to minimize such potential. From the onset of this study, the potential for bias was explored and a continuous critical examination of my practice while doing this research was undertaken and reviewed accordingly.

CHAPTER 4
RESEARCH SITES AND PARTICIPANT PROFILES

The purpose of this chapter is to provide readers with a greater familiarity of the school sites and the student participants interviewed for this study. The previous chapter included a discussion of why these sites were chosen and how the participants were selected. This chapter is intended to give more specific information about the sites and participants. I begin the chapter with an overview of the three school sites, starting with Mountainview Secondary in School District A, followed by the two schools in School District B, Oceanview Secondary and Hilltop Secondary. Following a description of the school sites, the 12 student participants are introduced. Included in this chapter is a discussion of how the economic status of the participants was defined and why they were placed into a particular economic group. The chapter ends with a summary of some smaller themes that arose during the interviews that were significant, but not so much as to include them as major findings.

SITE PROFILES

Descriptions of the three schools come from my observations recorded in field notes while attending meetings and interviewing students at the schools. Comments from staff members while at meetings in the individual schools as well as school and public documents were used to construct a profile of each site.

Obtaining statistics for economic status and student perceptions of care is difficult, which is precisely why I undertook this research study. One of my primary objectives in interviewing students was to obtain this information but I

felt it was important to have a starting point or a general understanding of these two phenomena (economic status and student perceptions of care) at least for the schools where I would be collecting my data. To achieve this I used the limited resources available to me. For student perceptions of care I used the British Columbia Ministry of Education School Satisfaction Surveys (2009). It is limited and problematic in that only one question in the survey relates to care, and there is no definition or indication as to what this means. The question simply asks students: "Do you feel your teachers care about you?" The Fraser Institute School Report Card (2010) and Statistics Canada (2007) were used to determine the economic status of the school sites. These reports were also limited because the statistics are based on income tax returns for the whole area or region and are not specific to the families who have children attending any of the schools. Although both sets of statistics are limited in the type of information they give, they did provide a context from which to begin my own data collection.

SCHOOL DISTRICT A—MOUNTAINVIEW SECONDARY SCHOOL

Mountainview Secondary is located in a wealthy suburb of Greater Vancouver. The community in which the school is situated is affluent. It is regarded as the second wealthiest neighbourhood in British Columbia and one of the top 10 in Canada (Statistics Canada, 2007). In many ways this makes the school very different from other BC public schools.

As soon as one enters the driveway of the school it is apparent from both the look of the grounds and the building that it is new and well maintained. Upon entering the school, one cannot help noticing how immaculately clean and well-kept the foyer and hallways are and almost every area of the school is flooded with natural light from the many windows. Plenty of student work hangs on the walls and numerous displays showcase awards the students have won for music, sports, and other disciplines. The school exudes a feeling of affluence and this does not go unnoticed by the students. When asked to describe their school, the participants from Mountainview spoke at length about the school being a wealthy school and how this was reflected in the appearance of the school and grounds. One participant (Robert) said, "this is [city], it's probably the richest area in Canada so of course our school is going to be beautiful." Another of the

participants (Alex) from this school said, "Of course this is a wealthy school, you just have to look at the place to know that, I mean look at the architecture here."

The 2010-11 population of Mountainview Secondary is approximately 850 students. The majority of students are Caucasian (approximately 80%); others are international students who typically spend one to three years learning English. The latter are primarily, but not exclusively, from Asian countries and pay substantial amounts of money to study in British Columbia. Anyone familiar with the school would note how obvious it is that the international students are not well integrated into the regular student body. It seems there are two distinct student bodies, the international students and the regular students, which is exactly how one student (Richard) from this school described it in his interview.

The participants from this school considered it as highly academic. It offers a large variety of courses including a large number of Advanced Placement courses for a secondary school of its size. For example, the present graduation class consists of approximately165 students, yet the school manages to offer three full classes of AP calculus. In contrast to this, the other two sites have relatively the same number of students but offer no Advanced Placement classes in any discipline. Statistics kept at the school show that a particularly large number of students who graduate from Mountainview go on to attend university (approximately 85% in June 2010) within the first year of completing their diploma. Although difficult to track, the career centre at the school reports that if the second year after graduation were included in these statistics, the number would likely be higher. This proportion is much higher than the British Columbia provincial average of 52%, which includes all students that enter any type of post-secondary institution, not limited to universities (British Columbia Ministry of Education Post Secondary Report, 2009). Even more unusual is the fact that of the Mountainview graduates who go to university, 62% leave the province or the country to study. This number is much higher than in other public secondary schools where the percentage of students who leave BC to attend university is only 6% (2009).

A primary objective of this study was to determine whether secondary students from different economic groups feel cared for. As mentioned above, I wanted to get a preliminary understanding of the situation at each school so I used the British Columbia Ministry of Education School Satisfaction Surveys

(2009). According to these statistics, the students at Mountainview tend to feel more cared for than their peers at most other BC secondary schools. Sixty-five percent of grade 10s and 70% of grade 12s indicated they felt their teachers cared about them compared to the provincial averages of 52% and 56% respectively (BC School Satisfaction Survey; 2009).

SCHOOL DISTRICT B—OCEANVIEW SECONDARY SCHOOL

Oceanview Secondary is located in a small town approximately one hour outside the greater Vancouver area. According to my field notes, a staff member with whom I spoke at an introductory meeting indicated the town relies heavily on industry-based resources such as forestry and fishing so many of the students come from working class families. Resource-based industries in British Columbia have experienced tumultuous times over the past decade making the local economy rather volatile. Some families have left the area to seek employment elsewhere but many families who remain are living in poverty or are on social assistance. Because it is the only school in town there are also a few students whose families come from professional backgrounds and are more economically advantaged, so the school is not entirely made up of economically disadvantaged students. At a meeting with the school counsellors, one of them was surprised at the income level of the school as reported by the Fraser Institute ($85,000). In my field notes I recorded her saying, "There would be few students at Oceanview that I can think of whose parents make that much money." She added that a lot of students in the area are in single-parent homes making finances more difficult. A different counsellor noted that the given figure could probably be attributed to a number of senior urbanites (some of whom are quite wealthy) who move to the area to retire. The local economy benefits but it has no effect on the demographics of the local secondary school population. In fact, School District B continues to experience declining student enrolment.

Oceanview is located close to the centre of the town on a busy highway and is surrounded by numerous businesses. On entering the driveway of the school it is apparent from both the grounds and the building that it is old and in need of repair. The school is clean and well-kept but there is a pervasive odour of mildew, which adds to the feeling of age. The foyer is pleasant and, like other

schools, visitors see a showcase of trophies inside the front doors. The hallways feel dark and show signs of aging. The school is an older building and it shows its age accordingly. On one of my visits to the school, a curious student asked if I was including their school because it was "a welfare school."

The 2010-11 population of the school is approximately 650 students with most of the students being Caucasian. According to figures from the Fraser Institute Report Card (2010), the graduation class of June of 2009 was expected to be 135 students. The school does not keep statistics of how many students go on to university or to post-secondary training but one of the school counsellors indicated that only a small number, perhaps 15-20 of their graduates, would have done so. For some of those it would not have been to university but to a college for a one to two year certificate or diploma course.

Before doing my own research to determine whether students feel cared for, I once again wanted to use the BC School Satisfaction Survey results to get a preliminary glimpse of how the students at Oceanview feel about care in their school. I was unable to acquire the relevant statistics from the school. The first time I was told that they were not available for the year I was requesting and the second time I was abruptly told to ask the assistant superintendent and get them from him. Incidentally, all schools are supposed to have copies of the results for their respective schools. The information is not accessible to the public through the Ministry of Education website so researchers can only acquire the results from the school itself or from the school district office. I opted not to pursue getting them but did find it quite interesting that there was resistance on the part of this school to my obtaining this information. From the outset, this school seemed to be resistant and suspicious of my motives. Few if any of the staff were helpful and these unexpected barriers made it difficult to get participants from the school, so not surprisingly, only one student from Oceanview was interviewed. In retrospect, not getting the information I requested was actually indicative of my entire experience with this school.

SCHOOL DISTRICT B—HILLTOP SECONDARY SCHOOL

Hilltop Secondary is located in a small town approximately 1.5 hours outside of Vancouver. This town relies heavily on industry-based resources although it is a

much larger town than that where Oceanview is located so there are generally more employment opportunities. It is the only secondary school in the town, so there are students from different economic groups. According to my field notes, with few exceptions, the staff members I met with felt that the largest groups would be families regarded as working but poor or those living on social assistance. One staff member I spoke with at Hilltop was quite surprised at the income level of the school as reported by the Fraser Institute ($73,900), feeling that the figure seemed inflated compared to what she would have thought based on the students she sees in her classes. On the other hand, another member of the staff described the school as middle class and felt the income level reported by the Fraser Institute was much too low. Depending on whom I spoke to, there seemed to be different views on the economic status at the school, but using statistics from the Fraser Institute, Hilltop has the lowest economic status of the three schools in this study.

Hilltop Secondary School is located in a secluded part of the town atop a hill rising above the downtown business area with a view of the ocean. The vice principal met me when I first arrived at the school and told me that Hilltop had underwent a massive renovation project a few years ago so, unsurprisingly, the school has a relatively new feel to it. The inside of the school is well kept. The foyer is open with lots of natural light and visitors can see displays of student work and a large trophy case. During my visits to the school, I sensed a very relaxed atmosphere. There were few students hanging around the hallways or running about because most were either in classes or sitting at tables in the foyer doing schoolwork. The exterior grounds of the school are not nearly as pleasant as the interior. Aside from a majestic view beyond, the immediate grounds are basically just a large parking lot. Adjacent to the school is the site of a new housing development so there are virtually no green areas but lots of pavement. The other side of the school has a concrete skateboard park covered in graffiti. The exterior grounds of the school are in stark contrast to the pleasant interior.

The 2010-11 population of the school is approximately 600 students most of whom are Caucasian but a significant proportion, approximately 15%, is First Nations. According to figures from the Fraser Institute Report Card (2010), the graduation class of June 2009 was expected to be 133 students. The school does not keep statistics of how many students proceed onto university or to post-

secondary, but one of the counsellors indicated he thought about 20 of their graduates would have done so.

As with the other two schools, I relied on School Satisfaction Survey (2009) results to get an approximation of how the students at Hilltop feel about care. According to these statistics, the students at Hilltop have mixed feelings as to whether their teachers care for them or not. Only 42% of grade 10s indicated they felt their teachers cared about them compared to the provincial average of 52%. On the other hand, 61% of the grade 12 students felt their teachers cared about them compared to the provincial average of 56% (BC School Satisfaction Survey; 2009). As I was unable to obtain statistics from Oceanview, there are no figures to compare to how Hilltop students feel (although they are in the same school district), but both grades 10 and 12 students at Hilltop feel less cared for than those at Mountainview Secondary.

SUMMARY OF SCHOOL SITES

Based on the few resources available, the statistics below were used only to help me get a preliminary perspective of each of the schools where I would be interviewing students.

TABLE 1. SCHOOL COMPARISON SUMMARY: INCOME LEVELS AND CARE

	Mountainview Secondary	**Oceanview Secondary**	**Hilltop Secondary**
Average Family Income (Fraser Institute 2010)	$200,200	$85,000	$73,900
Average Single Parent Income (Stats Canada, 2006)	$43,421	$38,213	$38,863
% of Grade 10 students who feel teachers care (BC Ministry of Education - Student Satisfaction Survey; 2009)	65%	Not Available	42%
% of Grade 12 students who feel teachers care (BC Ministry of Education - Student Satisfaction Survey; 2009)	70%	Not Available	61%

STUDENT PROFILES

The participants in this study were selected from the school sites discussed above, but rather than introduce them based on where they go to school I have opted instead to introduce them according to which economic group they were placed into for this study. I have done this because the study examines economic status as a factor in determining how students perceive and experience care. Care is being examined based on the economic status of the students rather than where they attend school. Hence, I have introduced each of them in one of three different economic groups.

Deciding on the criteria for the three economic groups was not easy. Economists, sociologists, and other social scientists grapple with how to define economic status (Lott & Bullock, 2001), so it is not surprising that I experienced the same dilemma when trying to decide which criteria I would use to establish different groups for this study. Prior to finding students for the study I prepared some guidelines to help me with my own understanding of what the different economic groups might be. I was prepared to share these with any participants who might be unsure which group they felt they might belong to. In other words, it was necessary to have a general understanding of economic stratification and a baseline of income levels that would correspond to the economic groups I would eventually form and use for this study. To do this, I used the methods of various levels of government and some private agencies to measure both individual and family economic status.

The Government of Canada (and each province and territory) uses guidelines to define economic groups and these in turn are used to determine the level of income taxes individuals or families will pay. At the lowest end of the economic spectrum they use what is called a low-income cut-off (LICO) to determine whether an individual or family is living at or below the poverty line (Statistics Canada, 2006). For example, in British Columbia, a family of four living in a community with a population under 100,000 people would be living below the poverty line if their family income was less than $33,046. If they were living in a larger community the LICO would be $38,610 (Statistics Canada, 2006). At the opposite end of the economic spectrum, according to a Gallup Management Journal (2005), a family living with an income of $120,000 to $160,000 is considered to be affluent (Levine, 2006, p. 13). Those above the

poverty line but below the affluent line would be referred to as the middle class (Mullaly, 2002) but this is problematic, given the wide span of income levels between the two lines. Clearly, there is a wide gap between $33,046 and $120,000, which would affect the lifestyle one may have. Therefore, economists often subdivide the middle class into two categories of lower and upper middle class. Advertising and marketing agencies often target these levels differently when they promote goods and services (Levine, 2006). For example, families with incomes above $75,000 are regarded as a select category of consumers known as "mass affluence" based on the particular goods and services they are more likely to buy than income groups below them (Arora & Saad, 2005). On the other hand, a different set of goods and services would be advertised and promoted in communities where the income level is lower than this but still above the LICO.

Based on the criteria described above, I wanted to find participants who fitted into each of these three groups: those below the poverty line (disadvantaged), those in the middle (middle class), and those above the affluent line (advantaged). The process of how participants were found and selected for the study was discussed in the previous chapter so I will not repeat it here. In short, finding the participants, although there were challenges, was fairly straight forward compared to determining which economic group to fit them into.

First, I had already selected schools where the chance of getting students in the range of these three economic groups was most probable. Second, knowing it would be difficult if not impossible to ascertain the economic status of the student participants, or rather their family income, I needed to consider how the students would self-identify their family's economic status. Since this study is about perceptions I felt it was appropriate to do this as a basis for helping to establish the groups. In this sense, the way in which children might perceive and construct their world makes it their reality. After selecting the participants I asked each of them particular questions about their family's economic status. They were first asked if they felt most of the kids at their school were wealthy, middle class, or poor. They were then asked if they felt their own family was, wealthy, middle class, or poor. If they identified themselves as in the middle, I tried to clarify whether they felt they were closer to being poor or closer to being wealthy. I also used information in the students' files (if related to their economic situation) and included any information that was shared with me by

staff I spoke with at the schools. In short, I compared the students' self-reported economic identity to any other information I had available that would support their claims. I then placed them into one group or another. In the final interview I informed some of the students about which economic group I felt they belonged to and asked them if they felt I had placed them correctly. Only one student (Julia) felt she had been incorrectly placed and after discussing it with her, I moved her to the group she felt she most belonged (the upper middle class). In the end, the 12 participants were placed into three economic groups including economically advantaged students, middle-class students, and economically disadvantaged students. The middle-class students were subdivided into upper middle and lower middle, as the income levels of the four students in this group were considerably different and it was not suitable to claim them all as being in the same economic group.

The profiles (below) of each student are intended to be introductions, so they do not include a full account of what each participant had to say in the interviews; much of that is included in the research findings in Chapter 5. To introduce each participant I have included: basic demographic information, how they came to be included in the study, some of their general perceptions of care, thoughts on economic status in regards to their school and themselves, self-descriptions of themselves as a student, and their feelings toward school. In some cases I have included additional comments about the participants based on my personal observations recorded in field notes. It should be noted that although I have tried to use as many direct quotations as possible, in some instances I have changed some of the wording for the sake of coherence and clarity but careful to not in any way change the meaning of what the participants said.

GROUP 1 STUDENTS—ECONOMICALLY ADVANTAGED STUDENTS

Participant 1: Richard

At the time of the interview, Richard was 15 years old and a grade 10 student at Mountainview Secondary. He is the oldest of three children in his family and lives with his mother and father. While describing his family he included their three cats as part of the family and added, "Having animals in a family makes a big difference in the home." Richard has lived his whole life in their present

residence although they spend a considerable amount of time at a ranch they own in the interior of British Columbia, a place that he would like to spend more time as "[they] have 12 horses which are a big part of my life."

Richard noticed an advertisement for the study in the counselling department at the school and asked about it. When I spoke with him and explained my intentions, he was very eager to participate. When it was explained to him that the interview would include discussing issues such as educational care and economic status he was even more eager to participate because he felt he had a lot to say about both. In the interview with Richard I found him to be very articulate and well spoken. In fact it was the longest interview of all 12 students, taking almost two hours, and the transcription record shows he spoke considerably more than I did.

In regard to the phenomenon of care, Richard indicated he felt cared for both at home and school. He feels his mom is the most caring person in his life, and at school he generally feels cared for, adding, "Yeah, I'd have to say there are one or two teachers that definitely do seem to care about me." He felt the ones who cared most about him were teachers who were most like him: "I think it's easier to have a relationship with someone if you feel more on the same level." When prompted to explain this further, he indicated that teachers have high academic expectations so they are "bound to have a better relationship with a student who's excelling in their class and getting 95%." For the most part, Richard described a caring relationship between teacher and student as one that was formed because of an academic bond; he spoke little about other reasons why it might develop. When asked whether teachers seem to care more or less for students based on differences such as their economic status, his reply was:

> Nah, I wouldn't say I've ever really seen any difference in a teacher liking a student over their economic status because really in a classroom you're not going to see, you can't really tell if this person is super rich or really poor, you may be able to get some idea . . . and not only that, I think most teachers don't really care. I don't think they care about another person's economic status and how much they're going to like them and I can't think of an example in a classroom when I've seen a student be preferred because of that.

In regard to our discussion on economic status, Richard had some interesting insights. He described Mountainview as a "very well off school" with

mostly well-to-do students of which he felt he was one of them: "This is a wealthy school and my family is pretty much equal with the others here so I suppose that would mean I'm a rich kid." He explained, however, that despite the school being wealthy, there were different levels of wealth. He described Mountainview as having "two student bodies," the regular students and the international students. The latter (or others) he felt were the "wealthy wealthy ones" and the rest, including him were the "poor wealthy." As interesting as I found this, he was quite adamant in his belief that the regular students were poor in comparison to the international students. He said:

> A lot of the kids here that are the most well off are a lot of the Asian students that come over. They phone home for whatever amount of money they need. My dad, he has sold hundred thousand dollar cars to 19-year-olds that come over here with their parents' money and I'd say there's lots of that at this school for sure. There are a lot of those kids here that have a lot of family money here.

Aside from his belief that there were two distinct economic levels, he had this to say about the regular "poor wealthy" ones at the school like him: "If we went to another school we'd be the super-rich kids, whereas here we're kind of the poor kids." Compared to the other participants, Richard had more to say than any of the others about the economic status of the students at his school.

In response to interview questions about school, Richard described himself as a very good student; in fact he gave himself a 10 on a scale of 1-10 with 10 being the best. He indicated that he felt at ease while at school and never felt out of place or different from other students. Despite his success as a student, he felt that a lot of stuff that students are taught at school is irrelevant: "I feel lots of it is useless." When asked if he thought economic status had any sort of impact on how students perform academically at school, he replied, "For sure, the poor students do better." When prompted to explain this, he referred again to the two distinct student bodies and in his opinion the "poor wealthy" students do better than the "wealthy wealthy" international students, mostly because the latter "just don't care and they don't know how to work hard because they've never had to and don't need to because they're parents have so much money."

Upon reviewing Richard's student file it was clear that he is indeed a very good student. His marks were consistently high and the teacher comments were all positive. There were no incidents of poor behaviour or any incidents of

misconduct or otherwise. His student file reflected what he described about himself—a good student who is liked by his teachers.

Participant 2: Brad

At the time of the interview, Brad had just turned 14 ("nine days ago") and was a grade 9 student at Mountainview Secondary. He is the oldest child in his family and lives with his younger sister and both parents. His family has lived in their present residence all his life. He completed all of his elementary education at the same school and predicts he will graduate from his present high school. He described himself as a well-rounded person who was very active: "I don't like just sitting around at home." He plays lots of sports including hockey, wrestling, and running, and plays in two band classes.

Brad had made a visit to the counselling department about a personal matter and was later asked if he might be interested in taking part in the study. He seemed mature and articulate and a student that could positively contribute to the study. He was open to participating and said he would check with his parents to see if it was all right. When it was explained to him that the interview would include discussing what could be perceived as sensitive issues such as educational care and economic status, he seemed unaffected. The interview with Brad went very well and I found him to be well spoken, and for someone of his age I was surprised at how articulate and detailed his comments were.

In regard to the phenomenon of care, Brad indicated he felt cared for both at home and school. He feels his mom is the most caring person in his life and at school he indicated that all of his teachers seem to care about him. He added, "Some teacher-student relationships are stronger than others. . . . So I guess you can base who cares for you more on the quality of the relationship you have with them." Brad felt the ones who cared the most and those he had the strongest relationships with were those he is more engaged with such as his running coach and music teacher. "They do things outside of the regular school day with me and act friendly to me and kind and caring . . . it goes beyond a regular teacher–student relationship; it's unlike the relationships I have with the other teachers." For Brad, a caring relationship between teacher and student is when they care for you as a student but also "when they care about you as a person." In regard to care and the rest of the students at his school, Brad felt that if asked, most of

them, "a solid 80%," would probably say their teachers care about them. He did feel that there were some students that were cared for more than others because some sports groups and other activities they belonged to were respected more. He also felt some teachers care more for certain students because they like "good students. I'm a good student and there isn't much reason for people to not care for me." He added that those who participate more in class are probably cared for more than others. He made no mention that students might be cared for more or less based on differences such as their economic status.

In regard to our discussion of economic status Brad was pretty clear that his school was a wealthy school. He felt that everyone at the school was probably pretty equal in terms of their economic status: "Generally, we're all wealthy." He felt his family was the same as the others at the school. Brad did not elaborate on the topic of economic status and from my perspective he simply accepted he was at a wealthy school and did not really have much to say because he did not have much to compare his experience with.

In response to interview questions about school, Brad indicated that he liked school a lot and described himself as a very good student. He said he and his parents were always happy about his marks. He generally felt at ease while at school, but "the only time I feel uncomfortable is when I don't get something or I don't understand something and that's rare, it happens but it's rare." Brad had some pretty strong opinions about which subjects were more worthwhile than others. He had this to say:

> Math and English are important for life, and you need PE to stay healthy. Music is fun and something I'll probably continue with after I finish school, but I think there's some stuff that's a total waste of time, like social studies, like you really don't need to know what happened a hundred years ago.

When asked if he thought economic status had any sort of impact on how students perform academically at school he replied, "The richer students do somewhat better." When prompted to explain why this might be, he said, "It shouldn't really matter and money shouldn't be a huge factor in it but money helps because you can use it to pay for tutors and other ways to get extra help.

Upon reviewing Brad's student file it was clear that he is indeed a very good student. His marks were consistently high and the teacher comments were all positive. There were a couple of minor comments about his being upset in

class on occasion but none of these were reported as very serious. His student file reflected what he described about himself—a good student who is liked by his teachers.

Participant 3: Colleen

At the time of the interview, Colleen was 17 years old and in grade 12 at Mountainview Secondary. She is the youngest of three children and lives with her mother and father. Her older brother and sister live away from home to attend university. Colleen has always lived at the same residence and has attended the same high school since grade 8. Colleen is a very involved student as a member of numerous school clubs and plays sports. She is a national-level athlete in two sports.

Colleen was referred to me by the school youth worker who felt she would be the type of student that would have honest and interesting insights about the topics of care and economic status. When I spoke with her and explained my intentions, she was keen to participate and seemed genuinely interested in what I was doing. When I explained that the interview would include a discussion of potentially sensitive issues such as educational care and economic status, she replied by saying, "I can handle it." Perhaps because she was the first grade 12 I interviewed I found Colleen to be very mature and insightful. I felt she was speaking from the heart and not holding back when telling me how she saw things. Her interview lasted a long time, well over an hour, and when it was over she asked if I would keep in contact with her when the rest of the interviews were completed, as she was interested in what other students had to say.

In regard to the phenomenon of care, Colleen indicated she definitely felt cared for at home and her mom is the most caring person in her life. In regard to feeling cared for at Mountainview, her response was mixed: "Personally I would say yes but there have been a lot of moments, not for me specifically but for other people where it could have been felt that this was a really uncaring school." When asked if she could elaborate on that, she indicated that the school was "very cliquey" and not always welcoming to students who moved from other schools or those who were different from the other students. Despite feeling cared for by most of her teachers, she said, "There are specific staff that I think are more caring

than others, but now that I'm in grade 12 I don't really care if certain ones like me or not." She added that teachers "have to care about all of their students, but realistically that's not possible." Colleen described a caring relationship between teacher and student as one that was formed by common bonds such as interests. The teachers she felt she had the best relationships with were ones who spoke to her about things such as her outside of school activities, in other words, the ones who took an interest in her life outside of school. When asked if teachers care more or less for students based on their economic status, her reply was: "If anything teachers probably care for the richest kids the least. I've been in classes where teachers have joked about kids who have the most money."

Regarding our discussion on economic status Colleen described Mountainview as a wealthy school and indicated her family was wealthy but added, "There are certainly kids here with more money than my family." She told me she could think of many examples of students who were "super wealthy." She spoke of one student whose "parents own I don't know how many houses and stuff," and she was surprised that the student had continued going to Mountainview through to grade 12 because he could have gone to any private school he wanted to.

In response to interview questions about school, Colleen described herself as a very good student, giving herself a 9 on a scale of 1-10. She generally felt she did better than most students although in some classes she did worse, but added, "I'm never at the bottom of the pack." She indicated that she always felt at ease and socially comfortable at school and never felt out of place or different from the other students. In terms of what is taught at school she felt Mountainview offered students a sufficient choice of programs and although she enjoyed some classes more than others she felt good about what was being taught at school. "I definitely wouldn't be the person that I am if I didn't go to high school or if I dropped out . . . when you get out of it you're going to remember it and use it later. . . . Academically, I have learned a lot." At the end of the interview she stated how much she was looking forward to leaving home and going off to a highly respected university in Eastern Canada.

Upon reviewing Colleen's student file it was clear that she is indeed a very good student. Her marks were consistently high and the teacher comments were all positive. There were no incidents listed for attendance problems or

behaviour incidents. Her student file reflected what Colleen described about herself—a good student who is liked by her teachers.

Participant 4: Taylor

At the time of the interview, Taylor was 16 years old and a grade 11 student attending Mountainview Secondary. She is the youngest of three children and has two older brothers, one who is away at university and the other who lives at home. Taylor has lived in the same home since birth and lives with her mother and father. She explained that her mother was a stay-at-home caregiver and her dad owned a large private airline company in Europe, which required him to be away a lot. The family's three-legged dog was included on the list of family members and it was explained to me how the dog's unfortunate accident happened. Taylor spoke very fondly of her family and considerably more than other participants in this part of the interview.

Taylor noticed an advertisement for the study and because she has always aspired to be either a social worker or a counsellor she was interested in the study because it had to do with care. Furthermore, she liked the catch phrase, "Let's talk," on the poster and wanted to know more about the study. When I first met her she described herself as a very caring person who has always looked after her friends and others who need her support. When I spoke to her about my intentions and explained that the interview would include discussing issues such as educational care and economic status, she seemed even more intrigued by the study. In the second interview with Taylor, however, I found her to be less articulate than she was at our original meeting. I found her enthusiastic throughout the interview but as the topic got deeper and more involved I found myself having to repeat questions or prompt her for more information. Nevertheless, she was a pleasure to interview and had many comments to share with me in the interview.

In regard to the phenomenon of care, Taylor indicated she felt very cared for at home and described her mom as the most caring person in her life with plenty of examples of what her mother does that shows she cares. At school Taylor feels that most of the people care about her and could not think of any person who did not care. She spoke fondly of one of the teacher assistants at the school who she felt particularly cared for her and said she was a person she

would often talk to about school and other stuff. "So we have a relationship, but not really beyond school. I mean we don't hang out or anything like that, but I talk to her like about like stuff." When asked if teachers care more about certain students than others her reply was: "Yeah, for sure!" When I asked if she meant that teachers had favourites her reply was:

> Yeah, I think so. I think so for sure. Sometimes students bring it on themselves. Like some students can be bratty or rude and then the teachers don't favour or care about them, but like I think sometimes there are, say, students who have the same grade-point average or a similar essay they hand in and they get totally different marks. So they like some students more than others.

She went on to say that there were teachers at Mountainview who care more about the guys than the girls, and for guys, "if you don't play [sport] you'll get a worse mark." She added, "I even know a guy who got an extremely worse mark when they dropped out of [sport]." Taylor felt that aside from these examples, teachers at her school did not favour students because of aspects such as race or other differences but some teachers like you better just "because you can relate so you feel like you know each other." When asked if teachers care more or less for students based on their economic status, her reply was:

> Oh yeah. Well my friend who goes to a private school and her parents bought a huge amount of books for the library there. I mean a huge amount, and my friend was getting a low B in a class and so her mom went in, I totally disagree with this, but they got her mark bumped up to an A. You can do that at a private school. I know so many people who have done that.

Regarding our discussion on the economic status of her family and the other students, Taylor described Mountainview as a "very well-off school" with "a lot of rich kids." She added that the students are wealthy and better off than most students at schools in BC. She thought of her own family as wealthy but acknowledged that there were families at her school that were better off than hers. In general she felt her family was either about the same as the others in the school or perhaps a bit better off.

In response to interview questions about school, Taylor described herself as a student who does not do too well: "I don't do very well. . . . Last year I was okay but it's getting progressively worse." She indicated that she normally did worse than most of the students in her classes. She mentioned she had a tutor to

help her with math. Generally speaking, Taylor had mostly negative things to say about curriculum choices for students and the content they learn at school.

> I think it favours the more studious type of kids I guess you could say. Like everyone can be studious but it might be in a different thing. Say you really like art and all you want to do is draw. Why should you have to take a science class when all you want to do is draw? I guess it's meant to prepare us just in case you change your decision but some people know 100% they hate it, they think it's a waste of time. Why should they waste their time with that when they could be busy improving other parts of their life that could help them be more successful? Most of what we learn here is just useless.

When asked if she thought economic status had any sort of impact on how students perform academically at school, she replied that it did not make any difference. She felt that if anyone wanted to do well at school they could and their economic status would not matter. "Poor kids can do really well in school and sometimes wealthy kids just think they'll just live off their parent's money and they don't do well."

Upon reviewing Taylor's student file it did not seem she was doing as poorly as she felt she was. Her marks were not in the highest percentage category but she was not failing in any areas. Math was a weak area for her and she stated that without a tutor she would probably fail that course. The teacher comments on her report cards often mentioned she needed to put more effort into her schoolwork and there were some poor attendance reports and a few minor incidents listed for poor behaviour in class, mostly socializing too much, but nothing overly serious. Her student file actually reflected a much more positive and better image of her than she described herself.

GROUP 2-A STUDENTS—UPPER-MIDDLE-CLASS STUDENTS

Participant 5: Julia

Julia was the only student in the study whom I felt I had placed in the wrong economic group. Her reasons are discussed later in this section. After a discussion with her I decided to place her in the middle-class group but it was also because of her that I opted to create two levels of middle-class students.

At the time of the interview, Julia was 16 years old and a grade 11 student at Mountainview Secondary School. She is the youngest of three children in her family and lives with her mother and father. Her older sister has finished university and lives part-time in New York and London. Her brother is attending university in Toronto. Julia has lived in many cities, mostly in Asia, but she was excited about telling me how London is her favourite city and that her family would be all getting together there soon for a holiday. She also spoke at length about living in Singapore and Taipei and how not being Asian had added a certain flare to those experiences. While living in Asia she became fluent in Chinese and is now fully bilingual. Her family has moved a lot but her parents have always wanted to live in this part of Canada and they have done so for two years now. Julia indicated she has liked living here and she enjoys Mountainview Secondary.

Julia's school counsellor referred her to me thinking that her experience in so many different schools in various parts of the world would be an interesting addition to the study. When I spoke with her about the study, she was very eager to participate. Talking about issues such as educational care and economic status did not deter her from wanting to participate in the study although she recognized that some people could be uncomfortable discussing these topics. In the interview I found her to be mature beyond her years, articulate and well spoken. She has already lived a very eventful life and described her life as full of adventures and she felt she was a very fortunate young person. Her interview was lengthy, well over an hour, and the transcription record shows that she spoke as much if not more than I did as interviewer.

In regard to the phenomenon of care, Julia indicated she feels very cared for at home and somewhat at school. She feels her mom is the most caring person in her life, and at school she generally feels cared for by her friends more than others: "I think of my friends mostly when I think of care." When asked if any particular teachers or other staff stood out as caring to her she listed a couple but interestingly none of them were teachers. One was the school youth worker and the other was the principal. Julia did not express a completely negative opinion of teachers, but she did not feel she had a particularly strong relationship with any of them and nor did she feel that any of them cared about her. She said her relationships with teachers were probably about a 6 out of a possible 10.

I guess I feel that teachers say they care, but that's mostly because they want you to feel okay about coming and asking questions and stuff, but I'm sure that if they had to voluntarily come to school without getting paid for a few weeks, I don't think a lot would show. . . . the ones who would are the ones who really care. I just don't know about some teachers because I've had experiences, like two weeks ago with a teacher and that's not the first time here. . . . That's not care, but like uncaring.

She felt teachers had favourites and that they cared about some students more than others. According to her, those who are most cared for at her school are the smart kids, the [sport] boys, and the least cared for are the international students who she feels most teachers "don't even know their names." When asked if teachers care more or less for students based on their economic status, her reply was: "No, not really, they just differentiate on things like sports."

In regard to our discussion of economic status Julia took little time to think about her answers. When asked to describe Mountainview, she quickly responded, "Oh that's easy to do, it's a very wealthy school." She felt she was of the same economic status as the other students at her school so when I asked why she had identified herself as coming from a middle-class economic status she replied that she had gone to schools where kids were much wealthier than her and the other Mountainview kids. From her perspective she was perhaps wealthy at this school but she would not be in some other places so therefore felt she was from a middle-class economic status. She felt many of the students at Mountainview had "over-inflated egos" about their economic status and if they had lived in some of the places she had, they would also see themselves as middle class. Julia self-identifies herself as a middle-class student so I respected her opinion and placed her in this group—albeit as the first one in the group. Indeed Julia's worldliness seems to have given her an interesting perspective on economic status.

In response to interview questions about school, Julia described herself as just an average student. She indicated that some subjects just were not "her thing" such as math, but in some other classes she did as well as most of the other students. She indicated that she always feels at ease while at school and never feels out of place or different from other students. She has mixed opinions about the value or relevancy of the school curriculum.

> Umm, I'd like to think that most of it's useful, but sometimes I don't know. Like my mom went to university and when I ask her things, most of what she learned she has forgotten. She doesn't remember anything in science. I guess I really don't know just how important most of it is. Maybe we'll use it later.

When asked if she thought economic status had any sort of impact on how students perform academically at school, she replied, "I don't think wealth has anything to do with brains. It's not linked. It's really just how hard you work at it, I guess."

Upon reviewing Julia's student file, for the two years she had been at Mountainview it was clear that she is a good student. Her marks were mostly high and the teacher comments were all positive. There were no incidents listed for poor behaviour or incidents of attendance problems or other misconduct. In many ways, not excluding the description she gives herself as a student, I found Julia to be very modest and that she is likely a much better student than she credits herself with being. Furthermore, I think her life in other parts of the world has been somewhat humbling in how she sees herself compared to her present classmates

Participant 6: Robert

At the time of the interview, Robert was 16 years old and a grade 11 student at Mountainview Secondary School. He is the younger of two brothers and lives with his mother and father. While describing his family, he mentioned that his parents do not have a great relationship and his brother has gotten into a lot of trouble with drugs and has been kicked out of school. The family moved to their present residence when Robert was three years old. Robert described his dad as a "rags to riches sort of guy" who in his younger years lived a tough life but has done well for himself and was able to move to where they presently live. Robert felt placing him in the middle-class group of students was justified.

In regard to our discussion on economic status Robert was very clear about his school and family situation. He described the school as "wealthy and better-off than any other school. It's Mountainview; it's one of the richest places in Canada." In regard to his family, "I'm below most of them here. I'm definitely not as wealthy as a lot of the kids here." I asked him if his school would be a hard place for a child to go to school if they were poor and he answered, "It

would be very tough, you'd be surrounded by all these people here and you wouldn't really have anyone you could relate to on the same basis." Nevertheless, Robert indicated he always felt very comfortable at school and never felt out of place or different from the other students.

A teacher who knew about this study mentioned it to Robert because he thought he would be a good person to interview and had Robert contact me for information. When he learned what it was about, he replied, "That's cool, that would definitely be a cool interview. It's interesting to think about [care] cuz I've never really thought about that before." Like the others, it was explained to him that the interview would include discussing issues such as educational care and economic status but also like the rest this did not deter him. In the interview I found Robert to be articulate and well spoken. It was a very long interview, going past 90 minutes and even then we had to rush the end part so he could leave for an appointment. The transcription record shows that he spoke considerably more than I did as interviewer.

In regard to the phenomenon of care, Robert indicated he felt cared for at home but mostly by his father. He did not say anything about his mother, which made him the only student in the study who did not name his mother as the most caring person in his life. I sensed that he has a strong relationship with his dad. He feels his girlfriend is the most caring person in his life and gave several examples of why she is such a caring person. At school, he feels people care, although when I asked him to elaborate on that, he spoke how his friends care about him, but nothing about staff members. When I asked if he thought the staff of his school were caring he answered with just one word, "Yeah." When prompted, he spoke of one teacher whom he particularly feels cares about him, and he feels this is probably "because I do well in his class or maybe he just knows that I care about math." I asked if that same teacher would care for the students in class who were not good at math and he responded that those students would "still say that he's a nice guy." Much of what he described about this teacher was how he would help the students with their math and how he would answer questions and that he always cared about the student's marks. For the most part, Robert described a caring relationship between teacher and student as one that was formed because of an academic bond and spoke little about other reasons why it might develop. When asked if teachers care more or

less for students based on their economic status, his reply was: "No, there's nothing like that, or nothing racist, but maybe the occasional sexist thing like guys answering all the questions."

In response to interview questions about school Robert described himself as a very good student, giving himself a 9 on a scale where 10 would be the best. Despite achieving success at school, Robert had this to say about what kids learn at high school:

> Well obviously I've learned a lot in school, but a lot of the stuff is just really to exercise your mind, like brain exercises. You're really not going to use a lot of this stuff you're learning. You're not going to use the math stuff you're learning, and you're not going to use some of the science stuff. It's just really to get your memory working and exercise your brain. So I guess it's useful for that maybe.

When asked if he thought economic status had any sort of impact on how students perform academically at school he replied, "I don't really think there's a direct correlation between the two." He explained that some rich kids do not do so well and there are "probably some less wealthy, maybe poorer kids that have that drive to make more money, be better and have a better off life when they're the age their parents are." Robert felt he was a good student but it had nothing to do with his economic status.

Upon reviewing Robert's student file, it was clear that he is indeed a very good student. His marks were consistently high and the teacher comments were all positive. There were no incidents listed for poor behaviour or any incidents of misconduct or otherwise. His student file reflected pretty much what he described about himself—a good student who was liked by his teachers.

GROUP 2-B STUDENTS—LOWER-MIDDLE-CLASS STUDENTS

Participant 7: Emma

At the time of the interview, Emma was 13 years old and in grade 8 at Hilltop Secondary School. She lives with her mother and father and two baby twin sisters who would be turning two years old in just a few months. She included her two dogs as part of the family. Emma has lived at their present residence for four years. Prior to moving here she lived in three other areas and attended three different

elementary schools. She hopes to stay at this high school for the duration but that will depend on whether her dad can secure steady and stable employment.

Emma was part of a social studies class that I spoke to about this study. She was one of a few students who stayed behind and asked questions about participating. I received permission from her parents and interviewed her two days later. When I spoke with her about why she was interested in participating in the study, she indicated her social studies teacher had told her ahead of time that I would be coming to speak to the class and the teacher thought she would be a good participant. Emma indicated she "really liked" the teacher and because of this she felt she would like to participate. I explained the purpose of the interview to her including the fact that sensitive issues such as educational care and economic status would be discussed and she replied that those topics would not bother her and she would not be nervous talking about them. The interview with Emma seemed considerably shorter than many of the ones I had already done. I am not sure if was her age and only being in grade 8 that contributed to this or if she was just not a particularly verbal person. I found her to be very quiet and needed a lot of prompting to understand and answer the questions. In short, the discussion often felt one-sided with me speaking more than she did. The open-ended interview questions were difficult for her and she was more comfortable answering the closed questions.

In regard to the phenomenon of care, Emma indicated she felt cared for at home and feels her mom is the most caring person in her life. She feels that care is basically helping people and that is why she feels her mother cares about her the most. "Care is like you help people, you'd care for them by helping them if they were hurt, or say at school you'd help them with homework or answer questions and stuff like that." When asked if she feels cared for at school she said yes, but when asked if she could think of anyone in particular that cared for her she could not. She added, "Probably not, I think they're all kind of equal." When I asked her what she meant by equal she said they all cared for her about the same and none of them cared for her more than another. When asked if she felt any of the teachers at her school cared for some students more than others she indicated, "No, I don't think so," but then added, "Teachers like the people who actually listen to them, be on time, and have all their stuff with them." For the most part Emma thinks teachers care for all their students equally, but what I

understood her to say was that they care equally for the students who actually care about school. She vividly described three girls in her grade that the teachers did not care about because none of those girls cared about school. It was interesting how Emma could speak (without thinking about it) of certain students at her school as not really being worthy of care because they were not good students: "They're the kind of people who don't like school and don't pay attention and get in trouble." The idea that teachers might not care for those students as much as others seemed justified to Emma, at least by the way she spoke in the interview.

In regard to our discussion on economic status Emma described Hilltop as a school that is "not rich but it's not poor . . . there's not really any rich or poor kids here." She thought her school would be "pretty much like every other school in British Columbia" and she felt her family was of a similar economic status as the rest of the other students at the school: "We would probably be the same." It was clear in the interview (perhaps due to age) that Emma had little insight into the economic reality of her school. The teacher who referred her to me was aware that I was looking for students who were economically disadvantaged, which is why she had encouraged me to come to the particular class that Emma was in and that she would fit the criteria of a disadvantaged student. Emma felt that she was in the middle range of students at her school and that it was appropriate for me to place her in the middle-class group. After the interview with Julia (which was some time before Emma) I had decided to establish two groups of middle-class students but if I had not, I would have moved Emma into the economically disadvantaged group.

In response to interview questions about school Emma indicated that doing well at school was something that was very important to her parents as neither of them had done well at school. She was unsure if either of them had finished high school but knew that neither had gone to college or university. She described herself as a good student and as someone who enjoys going to school. She indicated that she "got all straight A's," on her last report card. She indicated that she felt at ease while at school and never felt out of place or different from other students. When asked if she thought school was useful and if what students learned was valuable, she had this to say:

> Yes, it's all good stuff to learn; it's probably all useful in some way. If students only did electives all day, you're not going to learn anything and you're not going to get far in life, like you won't be doing much. You probably won't be able to get into a college or a university, that's for sure.

When asked if she thought economic status had any sort of impact on how students perform academically at school, she replied that she did not really know: "There's not really any rich or poor kids here to compare to each other". When prompted to guess whether rich or poor kids usually do better at school, her answer was:

> I think a rich person would probably just get someone to do it for them so they wouldn't really understand, whereas a poor person would have to do it by themselves. I don't know who would get the better grade but poor kids probably learn more. The rich kids have tutors and stuff like that.

Upon reviewing Emma's student file it was evident that she is a good student. Her marks were consistently high, like the straight A's that she reported, and the teacher comments were all positive. There were no incidents listed for poor behaviour or any incidents of misconduct or otherwise. Her student file reflected what she described about herself—a good student who was liked by her teachers.

Participant 8: Tira

Tira was a student in the same social studies class as Emma and the same teacher had suggested to Tira that she speak to me about participating in the study. I received permission from her mother and interviewed her two days later. When I spoke with her about why she was interested in participating in the study she indicated that one of her friends (Emma) was thinking about participating in it and they wanted to do it together because they are "so much like each other." When I explained the purpose of the interview, indicating that sensitive issues such as educational care and economic status would be discussed, she replied that she would be fine talking with me because "my family is really caring and they kind of brought me up to try different things and meet new people so I don't put down what I haven't tried." I did not quite get the connection between my comments about the study and her response but nevertheless, the interview with Tira included many other comments that were helpful data. The interview was similar to the other grade 8 student (Emma) in that the session was

considerably shorter than most of the others. I found her to be engaged in the interview, but her answers were contradictory or she would answer differently when asked a similar question in another context. Like Emma, Tira was more comfortable answering the more structured or closed types of question.

Tira was 13 years old when I interviewed her and in grade 8 at Hilltop Secondary School. She lives in a single parent family with her mother; like her classmate Emma, she has twin sisters. They are one year younger than her. Tira does not really remember her father living with them, as her parents separated when the girls were quite young. She has only lived at their present residence for two years and prior to moving here she lived in other towns and attended numerous elementary schools. She came to Hilltop because her mother moved to town to manage a local small business. She hopes to stay at this high school for the duration which she feels is quite possible, as her mom enjoys her new job and they are happier living here than in some of the other places.

In regard to the phenomenon of care, Tira indicated she felt cared for at home and feels her mom is the most caring person in her life. She feels that Hilltop is a caring school and said, "I think some of our teachers really care about our futures and what happens to us and stuff." When I asked if any of her teachers did not care, she responded, "I can think of one teacher who doesn't care as much as the other ones. I don't really talk to her the way I talk to the other teachers." For the most part Tira seemed to think that most of the teachers at Hilltop care for the students, but she acknowledges that teachers favour some students over others. When I asked what she meant by this, I was surprised by the answer: "I think they help the kids more who are in trouble, they leave me alone because they can see I'm working." She went on to say, "I think the students who are failing or don't really apply themselves get more attention because they need more probing to actually learn." Unlike the other students in the study, Tira seemed to feel that the bad students get more attention and care than the good ones.

In regard to our discussion on economic status, Tira was more realistic than her classmate Emma in how she described Hilltop: "I don't think any of the kids here are wealthy." She went on to say that she believes her mom is about the same economic status as all the other families at the school: "I think my family is pretty much the same as the others here, but no one here is rich." Tira seemed to

have a pretty clear idea of what the economic status of her school was and it was congruent with what some of the staff had to say about the students at Hilltop.

In response to interview questions about school Tira described herself as a good student and that it was important to her mother that she and her sisters do well at school. Her mother wants the girls to graduate and go onto university so that they can have a better life. She indicated that she "got all A's," on her last report card. She indicated that she felt at ease while at school and never felt out of place or different from other students. Tira feels school is useful and what they learn is valuable but she equates most of this to the relevance of the curriculum and whether it is useful or not for getting a job later in life.

> Yes, I think it's all relevant. It helps you in life. Like the math I guess is probably the most useful but it's probably all useful in some way. Math is kind of everywhere. Let's say you want to be an architect when you grow up, pretty much every single job requires math. Some jobs require English and some jobs require French, both of which I'm pretty fluent in cuz I went to French Immersion school before. I think social studies, I mean it's fun to learn and stuff, but I don't see why we take it unless you're going into a job that needs history I guess.

When asked if she thought economic status had any sort of impact on how students perform academically at school, she replied that she did not really know but thought rich kids would likely do worse than the others.

> I don't think it should really matter but probably the middle class to poorer kids would do better. If you're rich, like rich kids get more things, like say they want a new IPod for Christmas or something, they would definitely get it. They get what they want all the time so they're used to that and they generally have more friends so their social time is taken up and the kids that don't have that kind of stuff they spend time at home and when there's nothing to do they spend time reading or spend more time doing their homework. [The rich kids] are used to getting what they want so they don't need to do well at school and because they're really social I guess their time is taken up just doing that and not school.

Tira had an interesting perspective about wealthy kids versus middle-class and poorer kids. It was evident that she had some preconceived and perhaps false notions of what it would be like to be a rich kid.

Upon reviewing Tira's student file it was evident that she is a good student. Her marks were consistently high, like the straight A's that she reported, and the teacher comments were all positive. There were no incidents listed for

poor behaviour or any incidents of misconduct or otherwise. Her student file reflected pretty much what she described about herself—a good student who was liked by her teachers. She was a very pleasant young student to interview and I found her insights, particularly about wealthy students in the educational system, particularly interesting.

GROUP 3 STUDENTS—ECONOMICALLY DISADVANTAGED STUDENTS

Participant 9: Alex

At the time of the interview, Alex was 17 years old and in grade 12 at Mountainview Secondary School. He presently lives with his mother. A younger brother and half-sister live with his father in a different city. During a custody battle between his parents, Alex lived for a short time in a different suburb with his father, but he was unhappy at the school and requested that he be allowed to move back with his mother. He attended two elementary schools before beginning his secondary education at Mountainview. This was interrupted in his grade 9 year when he went to live with his father but he returned in the latter part of grade 10 and was now slated to graduate.

Alex's school counsellor referred him to me to discuss whether he should participate in the study. When I met him he mentioned that he had noticed an advertisement for the study but did not know much about it. When I spoke with him and explained my intentions, he was open to participating. He indicated he had a lot to say about school and teachers and added, "It isn't all good." When I explained to him that the interview would include discussing issues such as educational care and economic status, he identified himself as a "perfect person to interview." I found Alex to be very direct and throughout the interview I found his answers were short but to the point. He was articulate and well-spoken and although the interview was not overly long I found his answers seemed authentic and spoken from the heart.

In regard to the phenomenon of care, Alex indicated his mom is the most caring person in his life. He spoke of the many things she does that shows she cares about him. He spoke about how "you sometimes just know that someone cares about you, and that's my mom." At first I found his feelings about Mountainview confusing, as he indicated he sees it as a caring place but then

added, "I mean I myself don't have too many special relationships with the teachers, they don't seem to really care about me, but yeah I'd say it's a pretty caring school." As the conversation got deeper it became evident that Alex's perception of care at Mountainview is that most of the students at the school are cared for but not him. He could not think of anyone at school who he felt particularly cared for him, but also could not think of anyone who did not care for him. When I prompted him to think about this further it led to a discussion of why teachers favour some students over others.

> I would say that students like me who don't participate in class, just sit there and do the work and that's it, they're probably not going to have a strong relationship with teachers but people who participate in class, speak up all the time and do their homework, would be liked more by the teachers. So like for me, it's not that they care or don't care about me, it's like they just don't really know I'm there so they don't care.

Alex feels that students and teachers develop better relationships if they have more in common with one other. In his case, he feels he is not a good student and does not really have much in common with teachers. He feels it is easier not to get to know them because then "you don't have to put a mask on." When I asked about this, he implied that he does not want to try and pretend he likes school just to get the teachers to like him and if teachers do get to know you they say things like, "you're going down the wrong path, and that kind of stuff, and really it's none of their business." For the most part I sensed that Alex did not have good or bad relationships with teachers, but rather they were neutral. The teachers did not seem to reach out to him and show their care; on the other hand, he was not reaching out for it. Sadly, the more he could remain anonymous the more he remained complacent about school.

In regard to our discussion on economic status Alex had a lot to say. He described Mountainview as a very wealthy school and said, "You just have to look at the architecture here to know it's well off." In regard to his own economic status he felt poor compared to the other students: "Honestly, compared to the others here, I'm poor, really poor." When asked if teachers care more or less for students based on their economic status he said he did not think so and the only form of discrimination he had witnessed at the school was that one male teacher favours girls over the boys. When I asked him what it was like to be poor in such a wealthy school, he said it had been more difficult being there in the earlier

grades before he moved away to live with his dad because "at that age they're all looking at you and notice what you're wearing and shit like that, but in grade 12 that all wears off." It was difficult listening to Alex describe his experience of being at Mountainview, as he clearly felt different from the other kids there and at times he said it had been socially uncomfortable for him. He did not explicitly state that he felt out of place, but I sensed the more he could keep a low profile, the better off he felt about being there.

In response to questions about school and being a student there, Alex indicated that he really did not like school very much and that he was not a particularly good student. "I don't do very well in school and I don't really have the drive to learn a lot of what I'm taking." He felt he generally did a lot worse than most of the students in his classes. The only class he really likes is his foods class, but at his school it is seen as less credible than many of the others. Not only does Alex not like school, he also questions the value of it:

> Well I guess I won't really and truly know the answer to that question until I'm out in the real world but I do think a lot of it really isn't necessary. You know, everybody says, it will be necessary, you will use it, but I really don't know so I guess I'll just have to wait and see. When I think of high school I just think of getting by so I can be done with it and get out of here.

When asked if economic status has any sort of impact on how students perform academically at school or if wealthy students do better or worse than others, he replied that the richer kids do better. He added, "I don't think they're any smarter, but I'd have to say I think they'd do a little better than a poor student because they can pay to get tutors and stuff. They also have the status to hold onto whereas less wealthy kids, it's just sort of whatever." In general, Alex seemed to understand the economic status of his school and his own status within it.

Upon reviewing Alex's student file it was clear that he does not do well at school. His marks were consistently low throughout his years at Mountainview. Many teachers gave comments on his reports such as not reaching his potential or not putting enough effort into his work. There were incidents listed for poor behaviour both in and out of class including some illegal activity. His attendance reports were not good. Alex's student file reflected what he described about himself—someone who really did not like school and a student who did not do well.

Participant 10: Charlie

At the time of the interview, Charlie was 18 years old and a grade 12 student at Hilltop Secondary School. He lives with his father. His biological mother died when he was 11 and his father remarried, but according to Charlie, it ended in divorce because his stepmother had mental health issues. He has two older sisters who live away. He and his father rent a house (which he later described more as a cabin) a considerable distance from town and with limited bus service in their area it is difficult to get around. He comes to school on the school bus. His father is presently unemployed so Charlie works part-time to help with the rent and bills.

Charlie was in a senior social studies class that I spoke to about this study. He was very eager to participate and his teacher encouraged him to talk further with me as she thought he would be a good participant. I met with him and two days later I interviewed him. When it was explained to him that the interview would include discussing some sensitive issues such as educational care and economic status his response was "Bring it on." I found Charlie to be very articulate and well-spoken and I particularly appreciated his honesty about his personal background and present situation, especially given that neither of these had been easy for him. Charlie spoke considerably more than I did in the interview. He really had a lot to say and the interview was just less than two hours.

In regard to the phenomenon of care, Charlie indicated he had felt cared for by his biological mother prior to her getting ill and eventually dying. He tearfully described how even in her final days she would put his needs ahead of her own and make sure he was okay. He feels his father cares for him, but he has a lot going on in his own life, which leaves Charlie fending for himself a lot of the time. In regard to Hilltop, Charlie has mixed feelings about a lot of things. When asked if it was a caring school, he replied, "Umm, at times maybe, but other times no, not at all." When prompted to explain this further, he indicated that his earlier years there had been particularly rough, as he had a lot of difficulties at home and felt the teachers did not notice or care about any of that. He believed in his final year he had made a 180-degree turn around and more teachers cared for him now because he was a better person and a better student. I found it interesting that Charlie seemed to describe caring as an optional thing for

teachers, that it was all right not to care if the student did not care, and if the student cared, the teacher should care. Charlie said:

> At one time teachers probably didn't care about me because I wasn't acting like a very good student, I was immature and all over the place and would talk back to them. Now I'm not and I've noticed a complete change in energy, you could say, from the teacher to me. Teachers take it too personally when you are being a jerk to them. It's not right to be that way to them but it's not right for them to say you're not a good student when you are that way.

According to Charlie, a caring relationship between teachers and students is formed first because of an academic bond and then it evolves into a personal one, which is the best type of teacher–student relationship. When asked if teachers care more or less for students based on any sorts of difference, his reply was: "Yes, definitely, totally, yes!" When asked to elaborate he said, "Definitely the smartest kid gets favoured, that's kind of a given." He indicated there are few racial or other differences at Hilltop and he did not think the teachers would favour kids based on anything like that anyhow, but when asked if teachers cared more for rich or poor kids his response was: "Umm, see that's a really hard one, especially for me, because from a kid's perspective, the kid doesn't want other kids and teachers to know you're poor so you're not going to show it." In other words, Charlie seemed to think that teachers might show less care to poor students but it would not be because the student is poor but for other reasons; the teacher would not know the student is poor so they would not be treating them poorly because of that. When asked if he could describe an incident where he felt uncared for by a teacher, he said there were too many for one interview, but described at length his dislike and anger toward a particular teacher that "really pissed [him] off continuously from grade 8 to 12." On the other hand, he was able to describe a teacher in grade 12 who he feels particularly cares for him, the one who encouraged him to take part in this study. Both of these teachers' actions of caring and non-caring are discussed in the findings chapter.

Charlie described Hilltop as a "middle-class school but no one really notices if you're poor or rich here." When asked about his personal economic status, his response was "Poor-poor-poor." When asked if it was difficult to be a poor student at Hilltop, he responded, "It would be hard anywhere, I mean being poor, that definitely sucks." Charlie definitely felt that he was poor and

poorer than many of the students at Hilltop. When I validated that it must be hard for him, he confided in me the numerous times that he tried to hide his poverty so others would not know. He gave a vivid example of how he could not afford a school ski trip and that to avoid going he tried to get suspended a day or so before the trip. His plan did not work in its entirety but he did serve an in-school suspension while the other students went on the ski trip.

In response to questions about school Charlie described himself as being an okay student now that he was in grade 12, but acknowledged I might not want to see his report cards from earlier grades. He described himself as a student who would be a 7 on a scale of 1- 10 with 10 being the best. He indicated that he felt at ease while at school now, but if I had asked him in earlier grades, the answer would be quite different. Charlie had a fondness for some subject areas over others, including drama and social studies, but I was unsure if this was because of the subjects or the teachers, as in both cases he spoke highly of these teachers. When asked if he thought economic status had any sort of impact on how students perform academically at school, he replied, "It depends, like for poor kids like me, the poor kid might say, this is my only shot. But I'd say that, generally, the rich kids do better, they just have huge advantages I'd say."

Upon reviewing Charlie's student file it was clear that he was aware of what it looked like. His marks for grade 12 were satisfactory but in comparison to his earlier grades they were not good. In grade 8 he was basically promoted to grade 9 without meeting the requirements. His marks were consistently low and teacher comments were all negative. There were several incidents listed for poor attendance and behaviour, including a report of his in-school suspension on the day of the grade-11 ski trip. Furthermore, school-based team notes indicated that he was referred to attend alternate school on at least two occasions. His student file reflected pretty much what Charlie described about himself—a poor (pun intended) student who felt disliked by his teachers until grade 12 when he was still financially poor but a better student academically.

Charlie ended his interview by saying, "I mean I probably bitch and complain about a lot of things, but overall, this school isn't so bad, at least not now." I think the word "now" was timely, as it was obvious that he only now seemed to understand why things were better for him than before. Of all the participants, I was most concerned about how Charlie might feel after the

interview. At times during our discussion he actually sobbed and cried while telling me about his personal situation. I checked with him after the interview to see how he was doing and to see how he was feeling about it and to see if he needed any support or wanted to talk to a counsellor. His response was "No, really, not at all. The interview was better than any counselling session I've ever had. I felt so much better getting all of that off my chest." I followed up with Charlie again a few weeks later and he continued to say he was doing all right.

Participant 11: Donald

Donald was 14 years old and a grade 9 student. He had been attending Hilltop Secondary School when I first met him, but shortly thereafter he was placed in an alternate school. When I actually interviewed Donald it was at the alternate school he had been moved to. He had lived in town for only one year and was presently living with an aunt who was a single mother raising her own three children as well as looking after Donald. He made a point of telling me that his living conditions were very crowded because his aunt was also looking after another cousin and they also had a "gay guy" living with them. He did not want to talk about his parents other than saying his mother was living in a different province and texted him every morning to say hello, and that his father lived in another city and was a truck driver who was usually travelling. He did say, "My whole family's pretty bad. We all hate each other." Donald's student file shows he attended numerous elementary schools in both Alberta and British Columbia.

Donald was referred to me by a principal in the school district who attended a meeting where I spoke about the study and she felt he was an ideal participant so asked if I would like to meet him. He agreed to meet me and I explained my intentions. He was open and willing to participate. When it was explained to him that the interview would include discussing issues such as educational care and economic status, he said he would participate but would maybe not answer all the questions. Donald had experienced a lot of difficulties at school and many of his relationships with teachers had not been good so his insights about these issues were helpful to this study. The interview with Donald was difficult. I found him to be very easily distracted and he found it hard to stay on topic. Nevertheless, his tumultuous experiences at school and with teachers contributed and added some rich data to the study.

In regard to the phenomenon of care, Donald indicated he felt cared for both at home and school. He feels his mom is the most caring person in his life, and indicated, "Dad probably does too, but I kinda wanna just say my mom." I was surprised about his response to feeling cared for at school because the start of the interview had led me to think that his school experiences were far from positive. He felt that Hilltop, where he had most recently attended, was a caring school and so were the teachers there but incidentally he was only there for a short time and could not remember the names of any of his teachers there. He said when he first moved to town and enrolled at Hilltop his attitude was "screw this," which is why he had been placed into the alternate school, something he wishes he had not happened: "Yup, they decided to send me here, but I wish I was back there." Despite having only been placed at the alternate school shortly before my interviewing him, he indicated that he felt the teachers at the alternate school were caring and he spoke of all of them by name and with sincere fondness. He feels teachers who care the most are like one at the alternate school who goes running with him every day and they compete to see who will get back to the school faster. He also indicated that teachers "who think they care but really don't" [are those] who always want to know your business, they're probably just trying to help, but I don't want them to butt into my business." When asked if teachers care more or less for certain students than others, his reply was: "Maybe when a student talks to the teacher, the teacher helps them out, but that would be a good student, and that's probably why the teacher cares more." He added that good students like to read and, "I don't really read, cuz I don't have any books at home."

In regard to our discussion on economic status Donald explained that the students at Hilltop were "some poorer, some richer, some in the middle." When I asked him which of those he felt described him, he replied, "No, I'm not rich. I'm not wealthy I just get clothes, get food and life, but I don't judge people by the way they look, you know. I know I'm not rich or anything like that." Donald did not seem to want to discuss the topic of economic status, particularly his own situation, and he often changed the subject when I asked questions about it. I respected his situation and went on to other questions in the interview.

In response to questions about school, Donald described himself as someone who likes school and is a good student. He likes school so much that he

gave himself a 10 on a scale of 1-10 with 10 being the best. In regards to achievement he figured he was probably a 7 or 8. He was particularly proud of his attendance record:

> Umm, for me, you know how people love weekends? For me weekends aren't all that fun. I'll just be lying there doing nothing and say, "Aww, when's school?" Like sometimes I don't have anything at all to do. I wish I had a basketball or whatever. If I had a skateboard I'd always be skate boarding. So I like school, I've got perfect attendance except for four days in January. I'm always here.

Unlike many of the other participants, Donald felt that what he was learning at school was useful and relevant: "It's definitely useful, it's part of everything we do." He continued to explain why each subject was useful and relevant. When asked if he thought economic status had any sort of impact on how students perform academically at school he said yes, but with a tone of anger: "Probably, cuz they can afford tutors. Oh daddy my cheque just bounced and I don't really need an education! I've got wealth! I should get whatever I want including good grades! Rich, pardon my language, rich bastards."

Upon reviewing Donald's student file it was clear that he is either unaware or in denial of his school record. He has had lots of academic difficulties and in elementary school he was often placed in the next grade without the necessary skills. In some elementary grades he was placed in behaviour programs for support. His secondary grade marks were all low and the teacher comments were mostly negative. There were numerous incidents listed for poor behaviour including verbal abuse toward teachers and both verbal and physical actions toward other students. His student file did not at all reflect how he described himself as a student.

Participant 12: Lily

When I first met Lily she was attending Oceanview Secondary School but shortly thereafter she was placed into an alternate school, as her attendance and other issues were incompatible with staying at regular school. Lily was 16 years old when I interviewed her and was taking mostly grade 11 classes but was also working to finish off some incomplete grade 10 courses. She is the oldest of two children and her parents live in a nearby town but she and her boyfriend were living together along with another friend of Lily's. She does not get along with

her parents, which is why she chooses not to live with them although she does speak to her mother fairly often. Lily has lived in many different towns and cities across British Columbia and Alberta but has lived in the present area for three years. She has attended two of the three secondary schools in her district and is now attending the alternate school.

Lily was referred to me by a youth care worker at the alternate school. The youth care worker had previously met Lily and was aware that she would be coming to their school. The youth care worker expressed to me that much of what Lily was experiencing would be useful to be included in my study. Lily agreed to meet with me so long as the youth worker could be at the first meeting. With the youth worker in attendance, I explained to Lily that the study was about care and she was willing to participate. She indicated that she had felt very uncared for at Oceanview and at her previous school (Hilltop) before that. When it was explained to her that the interview would include discussing issues that might be sensitive topics for some students, she seemed unaffected. Indeed I found Lily to be non-affective throughout most of the interview. She was very numb and monotone in the discussion and I thought of her as a student who had been disillusioned about school and education. She did have some very strong opinions about teachers and care in secondary schools.

In regard to the phenomenon of care, Lily indicated she had never felt cared for either at home or at school. She feels her boyfriend and their roommate care about her more than anyone else. She added that she cared about herself "because if I didn't, I might be dead by now." When asked about school, she said, "The teachers at Oceanview, I mean the whole staff there have issues, and I don't think they care at all, at least at Hilltop where I went before that, there was one teacher who cared about her students." Although she had only been at the alternate school for about one month I asked her if she felt cared for there. Her reply was "this school is [caring]. The teachers here are way more caring than Oceanview, like it's weird but, they're more caring than my parents." When asked if teachers care more or less for certain students than others, she replied, "Oh yeah, mostly the girls, but just because they're usually better students, like they finish their homework and stuff like that. Teachers like good students better."

When I asked if teachers ever seemed to care more or less for students based on their economic status, she indicated that "there are no rich kids at Oceanview, so that's probably why the teachers there are so mean." When I asked if it was different at Hilltop, she said there were some rich kids who went there but she did not know if they were treated differently than the others. She added, "That was a long time ago, and anyhow, I don't remember much of last year or before that."

In regard to the discussion about economic status with Lily it was rather short. She felt that Oceanview was a very poor school and so was Hilltop although the latter had a few rich kids. She talked about a number of kids she knew at Oceanview who had no money and they always had to wear the same clothes and that most of her friends there were on welfare. When I asked her about her own situation she commented that her parents gave her no financial support because she was not living with them, and her boyfriend was on welfare. She felt financially worse off than most kids her age, but added, "I always seem to have some money though, like right now I have $30." Lily definitely identified herself as being poor and she also feels the local area where she goes to school is a poor area.

In response to questions about school Lily described herself as a "not so good student" until she came to the alternate school. She gave herself 2 out of 10 (with 10 being the best) as a student at regular school, but a 7 or 8 at the alternate school. She indicated she had never felt at ease while at school and always felt out of place or different from other students until she came to the alternate school. In regard to what students learn at school she had this to say: "I feel most of it is useless. You won't even use it if you're going to be a rocket scientist I think." Lily was very fond of art classes and incidentally the only teacher she felt cared for her was an art teacher at Hilltop. She felt some subjects are favoured over others and that art was an under-rated subject many teachers see as something the bad students like.

When asked if she thought economic status had any sort of impact on how students perform academically at school she replied:

> It depends, cuz most parents are probably like, you need an education to get a good job and be someone big and go to college and all that. Then other people who are lower down are like I'm not going to get anywhere in life so why try, or some of them are trying to do better. Some of the

> rich kids are failing and some of the poor kids are like, I'm going to do better and make myself a better person. So probably it's different for everybody. It depends.

At the end of this section of the interview Lily paused for a moment and said, "You know, I'm just thinking that teachers at normal schools should be more caring and like, I don't know." I prompted her to continue but she said she couldn't remember what she was going to say.

Upon reviewing Lily's student file it was clear that she had difficulties at school. Her file was a very thick file as there were records from a great number of places. Second, her marks were consistently low and the teacher comments were mostly negative. There were quite a few incidents listed for poor behaviour, a lot of interpersonal difficulties with teachers and other students. Lack of attendance was a huge issue for Lily although she admitted to this in the interview but said she was happy with her attendance at alternate school: "I didn't ever want to go to school, like all this week, if I was still at normal school I would not have gone at all, but I've been here all week." Her student file reflected pretty much what Lily described about herself—a student who had not been doing well at school and was not liked by her teachers. Things were looking brighter for Lily at her new alternate school.

SUMMARY OF PARTICIPANTS

It was a pleasure to interview each of the above participants and to discuss educational care and learn how they perceived and experienced this in their secondary schools. The findings that culminated from the interviews are the subject of the next chapter, but before moving onto the actual findings, there were some unexpected and perhaps smaller themes, which emerged and that are worthy of comment. To some extent, these smaller themes could be referred to as findings but since they are not related to care and economic status in an educational context I have opted to discuss them here rather than in the next chapter. In other words, they are not directly related to the type of questions this study was intended to unravel but they are too important to go unnoticed altogether.

Prior to conducting interviews with each student I had no insight into their family situations or living arrangements, but some obvious patterns or

themes arose from the interviews. All of the advantaged students and the upper middle class students were living in two-parent homes and none of them indicated that either or both of their parents were ever previously married to anyone else. On the other hand, except for Emma, all of the lower-middle-class and the economically disadvantaged students were from single-parent homes or, in the case of Donald, he was living with relatives, and Lily was living with friends. The lower economic status of these children in all likelihood was related to their family situation; a single-parent income would normally be significantly less, which would contribute to their lower economic status.

It is noteworthy that all four economically advantaged students had lived in the same residence all their life whereas the eight other students had all lived in different areas. Robert is upper-middle class and moved only once when he was three years old, but it was because of his parents' upward social mobility. Julia has lived in many other cities in different parts of the world and moved to her present residence because of her parents' upward social mobility. It seems the more advantaged students in the study seem to live more geographically stable lives than the others (except for Julia) and those who have moved have done so to move upwards. Most of the other six students in the study have lived in numerous areas because their parents needed to find new jobs or the students have had to move to areas where the cost of living is less, or in Donald's case he was sent to live with relatives. It could be said that their reasons for moving are inflicted upon them due to economic circumstances rather than a matter of choice.

Another theme relating to family and living situations emerged when I asked the participants to describe their family situations to me. Many of them spoke of their pets (usually dogs) as being part of their family. Regardless of their economic status, at least one student in each group spoke of the family pets as being part of the family. Donald seemed to speak more affectionately about his dog than he did the relatives he was living with. In regard to his relatives he said, "We all hate each other" but in regard to his dog he said, "He loves me." Writers such as Noddings (1992) often discuss how having a pet can help children learn about care and empathy. Although this was not directly related to what I was trying to establish in this study, I found it interesting to hear how some of the participants spoke so fondly of their pets and included them as part of the family.

A second theme that emerged was that the mothers of the participants were most often referred to as the most caring person in the students' life. Regardless of their economic status, all but Robert (upper-middle class) and Lily (disadvantaged) felt that the most caring person in their life was their mother. In the interviews, it took very little time for the students to say who they felt was the most caring person in their life. They did not need to think about it; they all seemed to know who cares about them. Mothers clearly seem to have a powerful influence on whether children feel cared for or not.

Perhaps the most noticeable theme that arose for me while doing the interviews was some of the differences between the students in the different economic groups. Even after the first meeting with each of the participants it became quite evident that the interviews with the more economically advantaged students were going to be different from those with the less advantaged ones. This proved to be true. First, the wealthier students seemed more confident when speaking with me and their self-esteem seemed to be much greater than the less advantaged students. The wealthier students were, for the most part, more engaged in the interview and more verbal than most of the other students. Wealth has certain advantages and one of the more obvious ones is how the advantaged students spoke about things from a more global or cosmopolitan perspective; the activities they spoke of and the places they had travelled to were more extensive than the less-advantaged students.

With the exception of Charlie, the economically disadvantaged students were much less verbal and often required me to guide the interview more than I did with the wealthier students. The economically disadvantaged students were less verbal and tended to discuss what was more local and known to them. An example of this is how Donald described how he was looking forward to summer holidays because for as long as he could remember they always spend a weekend camping at a local waterslide park. In contrast to this, Julia was leaving within a few days to her favourite world destination, London, for a family get-together. Perhaps naively, prior to conducting the interviews, I did not expect there to be such obvious differences between the economic groups as there was. My own understanding of economic difference or otherness has been heightened by this experience.

TABLE 2. PARTICIPANT PROFILE SUMMARY: SCHOOL AND ECONOMIC GROUP

Participant Name	Gender	Secondary School	Grade Level	Self-Identified Economic Group
Richard	Male	Mountainview	10	Advantaged
Brad	Male	Mountainview	9	Advantaged
Colleen	Female	Mountainview	12	Advantaged
Taylor	Female	Mountainview	11	Advantaged
Julia	Female	Mountainview	11	Upper Middle Group
Robert	Male	Mountainview	11	Upper Middle Group
Emma	Female	Hilltop	8	Lower Middle Group
Tira	Female	Hilltop	8	Lower Middle Group
Alex	Male	Mountainview	12	Disadvantaged
Charlie	Male	Hilltop	12	Disadvantaged
Donald	Male	Hilltop *	9	Disadvantaged
Lily	Female	Oceanview *	10	Disadvantaged

Note: * indicates that these students switched schools over the duration of the study. The schools listed are where they were registered upon my first meeting with them.

CHAPTER 5
RESEARCH FINDINGS

The central phenomenon in this research is care and how students from different economic groups perceive and experience care in secondary schools. From the onset of the study it was uncertain what this research and the interviews might reveal but from my professional experience I suspected that students from economically disadvantaged backgrounds might perceive and experience care in schools differently (more negatively) than other economic groups. Even if this were found to be accurate, I wanted to find some explanations as to why this might happen. While coding and analyzing data from interview transcripts, some similarities were apparent between the three groups of students in regard to how they perceive and experience care in secondary schools. In general, more differences occurred. The students described what caring means to them in an educational context and this was quite similar in all three groups, but the students' experiences of feeling cared for at school were quite different. In other words, regardless of economic status, student perceptions of care are similar, although their experiences are different. At the beginning of the next section I have outlined in point form the major findings from this study. This chapter will describe the findings and include narrative examples from the student interviews that substantiate each claim. No analysis of the findings occurs in this chapter, as Chapter 6 presents a discussion of the findings in the context of the literature, giving explanations and reasons for each claim. The findings are presented separately to give the reader an understanding of each one but they overlap with one another. The findings are presented in a given order because one often affects the next. They build upon one another.

GENERAL FINDINGS

1. Regardless of which economic group the students came from, they had a similar understanding of care and a caring teacher.
2. Economic status appears to be a factor in determining whether or not secondary students feel cared for.
3. A sense of belonging is related to feeling cared for and this differs from one economic group to another.
4. Care is relational but this relationship is complex, multi-dimensional and interwoven between students and teachers, their school, and the curriculum.
5. Teachers and schools often create relational barriers that manifest as situations in which some students feel uncared for.
6. In the case of some students, economic status, caring, and academic achievement may be closely related concepts.

FINDING 1: REGARDLESS OF WHICH ECONOMIC GROUP THE STUDENTS CAME FROM, THEY HAD A SIMILAR UNDERSTANDING OF CARE AND OF A CARING TEACHER.

All the students interviewed for this study had similar ideas about care. In his interview, one participant indicated, "Caring people look after the needs of others." While his comment was made in reference to all types of caregivers including parents, the students had similar ideas about caring and what it means to be a caring teacher. Richard stated it best when he said, "I think every teacher can and should care about the needs of their students."

A common theme that emerged from the interviews was *needs.* Many people would agree with Richard that "teachers can and should care about the needs of their students," but what are those needs and how do they translate into care? During interviews with the students, specific words or phrases pertaining to actions and/or attributes of teachers were often used to describe care. These words or phrases were subsequently coded and put into categories. The actions

and attributes described by the students as *caring* are what they not only *want* from their teachers but what they *need* from them. Regardless of their economic group, the students expressed similar needs and hence a similar understanding of care and how they feel it should be exercised in secondary schools. It is important not to confuse their perceptions of care with their experiences, as there were considerable differences in their descriptions of the latter.

WHAT STUDENTS NEED— ACTIONS AND ATTRIBUTES OF TEACHERS WHO CARE

The students used many words and phrases to describe care. These words were narrowed down to main categories that represent care from the perspective of the secondary students interviewed for this study. I have differentiated actions from attributes and categorized them separately because the students spoke of them as being different. Actions were spoken of as being things that people do for others; when they spoke of actions they tended to use verbs. Attributes were spoken about differently. The students saw these as characteristics of teachers; they spoke of attributes using adjectives or descriptors of teachers. The students described the *primary actions* of a caring teacher as helping and supporting. The *primary attributes* of a caring teacher included loving their students and being empathic, genuine, flexible and funny. Each of these actions and attributes is discussed, followed by examples from the interviews. They have been listed in order of how often they were talked about by the students.

Helping

Helping was the most consistent descriptor of care with all 12 students discussing it in their interviews, albeit some more than others. Although helping is seen as a caring action, when the students spoke of different types of helping they always described it as a physical action or something the caregiver actually does. The students were also clear that there are different types of caregivers and the role of educators is different from other caregivers such as parents. They acknowledged that teachers are sometimes expected to be like a parent and help students with the same sorts of things (most felt this was more evident at

elementary school than secondary), but a major difference is that teachers are expected to teach, i.e., "help" with academic skills. For the most part, they felt that the primary responsibility of educators is to provide proper instruction and to help students learn.

In the highest and middle economic groups each student spoke about how care is shown by helping with academic work but certain students mentioned this more than others. Brad indicated:

> I don't know how to explain it but at some level you just know that they want to help you as a student. They don't just tell you to sit down and shut up and learn; they actually help you learn it.

Colleen added, "When you sit in some classes you can get a sense about how they care about their students, just by the way that they are always there to help you and support you." Taylor's advice to teachers was: "Make sure everyone understands everything." Julia's thoughts were similar. She said, "It's important that the teacher, and not your parents or other students, be the one that helps you with your work so that you understand it and they know you understand it." She spoke at length about a caring teacher who "would always talk to me to see if I needed any help." On the other hand, she spoke in depth about a non-caring teacher who would not help her when she once needed it. Julia noted:

> I obviously needed help on that unit and it would've been a caring thing for him to have helped me. It would make him instantly a caring person for wanting to help, voluntarily, but instead he just got mad and made me feel worse.

Emma indicated that caring teachers are the ones "who help you out when you need it." She had this to say about those who do not care: "If they didn't care they wouldn't help you. They'd just assign a bunch of homework and tell you to do it." Tira had similar thoughts to the others but added that a caring teacher will "try and help you with your work but on a different level than some other teachers. They won't give you a really scientific explanation, but they'll actually try and put it into something you'll understand."

At the lower end of the economic spectrum, Donald and Charlie also associated care with meeting the academic needs of students. Donald explained that a caring teacher is "helpful and nice." He went on to say, "They try and help you out, and ask questions and make class fun." On the other hand, he described

a non-caring teacher as "the mean one who doesn't give very good grades, and they probably won't help you out or anything." Charlie felt that care was helping students but a really caring teacher was the one "who is always willing to go that extra step to help you understand." He spoke at length about one teacher who always went beyond what was required by sharing relevant stories that helped the students understand the material better.

It was evident from the interviews that the students felt caring teachers are those who, first and foremost, help their students to learn. They did not omit saying that caring teachers occasionally help students in other ways, but receiving help in the form of academic assistance was seen as an essential need of each student regardless of their economic status.

Supporting

The students differentiated supporting from helping. Brad described this best by giving an example of how his mother drives him to his soccer practice, which he referred to as helping him (addressing a physical need which he is unable to do for himself). She will often stay while he plays soccer to watch and cheer him on from the side of the field and he refers to this as supporting him (addressing an emotional need). In the context of education, Brad explained that teachers *help* you by teaching you, but some of them go beyond this and *support* you by encouraging you to do well on tests or other assessments. "It's kind of like they're cheering for you and they want you to do well." All the students described supporting as more abstract than helping. It was more difficult for them to explain supporting. Supporting involves different actions and the students indicated that *listening* to students, *encouraging* them, and *being there*, were the types of support that students need the most and teachers who do this are thought to be caring. Collectively these three actions make up supporting. *Being there* was something the students often mentioned as a caring action yet none of them could really describe what they meant by it.

Colleen described a caring teacher as one who is "there to help you and support you." When I asked if helping and supporting meant the same thing to her she felt they were not and indicated that helping was more "obvious" and that support "is harder to explain." Although an exemplary student, Colleen missed quite a lot of school due to athletic commitments for a national-level

team. She described how most of her teachers were supportive because they would listen and be understanding about her missing school and this was shown in their willingness to accommodate her and allow her to make up missed work or submit assignments at different times. The same teachers would sometimes help her with the work she missed to make sure she understood it. A few of her teachers throughout high school, however, simply did not seem to care or want to know if she understood the work she missed while away. Colleen felt the few non-caring teachers at her school probably thought she was just making excuses if she asked for assignment extensions or alternate test-writing times. She felt they probably thought she did not care about school so in turn they did not care about her. Colleen believed a caring teacher was one that helped her to be academically successful by both *helping* and *supporting* her attempts at doing so. The fact that most of her teachers understood and supported her challenges of trying to balance a heavy academic schedule with her athletic endeavours led to her feeling most of her teachers cared for her.

Those in the middle of the economic spectrum regarded a caring action as supporting the emotional needs of students by listening and "being there" for them. Robert seemed to be a very well-adjusted person with a good support network at home and amongst his peers. Nevertheless, he said this about his math teacher: "I probably wouldn't ever need to but if I did need someone to talk to he'd be there to listen. I just know he'd be there for me." Robert described this teacher as being very caring to him in math class. Robert identified himself as a good math student (his student file confirmed this) who did not usually require a lot of help from the teacher but the teacher would still encourage him and prompt him to push himself harder and set goals to keep improving and doing better. Robert felt this was a show of support from a caring teacher.

At the time of the interviews, Tira and Emma were classmates in a social studies class with a teacher they spoke fondly of. When asked what might make her a caring teacher, Emma explained how they "talk to her about a lot of things and she really listens." Both students said they would talk to this teacher about personal issues and explained how she would always listen to them. I asked Emma if this teacher ever helped them with the problems they spoke to her about and she responded, "No, she just really listens, but if we talk to her about school stuff, she always helps us." This teacher was one of a few whose classes I

had spoken to about this study and, incidentally, her personal support for it encouraged the girls to participate, something they noted in the pre-interview meeting. Her support for the study and her care for the two girls encouraged them to want to participate. Knowing how these two students admired this teacher, I was careful in the interview to make sure neither of them felt obligated to say positive things about her just because they liked her and she had encouraged them to participate in the study. Both spoke fondly of her but I am confident that they would have done so in any situation where her name came up and not just in the interview with me.

At the lower end of the economic spectrum Charlie felt that care was first and foremost "looking after the needs of others" and students have a need to feel supported by their teachers. When I asked him how teachers can be supportive of their students, he responded by saying, "You have to reassure them that if they need any help they can ask for it and you have to be very motivational." Although he is in a higher grade than Tira and Emma, the same teacher they spoke so fondly of also taught Charlie and he shares the same views about her. Not only did he describe her as the best teacher he had because of the way she taught her classes, he also admired her as a person. Charlie felt she was supportive of him based on a recent encounter he had with her:

> She actually came up to me on the last day of our classes last semester and asked me what was wrong and what was bothering me. Obviously I just lied because kids don't like to talk about that stuff, but I wondered how she knew that I was feeling down.

He talked about how the teacher's perceptiveness and intuition was meaningful to him and that she must have really cared about him to have asked him how he was feeling. Charlie felt she was very supportive and although on that occasion he did not open up and share his feelings with her, he felt she would "be there" for him if needed.

Loving

The third and perhaps the most surprising revelation was that some of the students felt care was like love. Brad, Lily, and Charlie all spoke quite eloquently about how care is similar to love. Although the other students did not include

the word love in their conversations, some of them mentioned similar terms such as care being a show of compassion to other people. Brad explained it like this:

> Well, caring for someone is like showing compassion for them and being there for them when they need you and helping them when they ask for help. If you care for someone it's like loving them, caring for them, liking them. You usually have to love or at least like someone to care for them.

When I asked Lily what the word "care" meant to her, she replied, "A caring person probably loves you first of all, or not necessarily loves you like we usually think about love, but they love humans and everything alive. A caring person is loving toward you." Lily felt that for a person to care for another they usually have to love them which was something she felt little of in her own life. She felt uncared for at school and at home thought her boyfriend and another friend whom she was presently living with were really the only two people in her life who loved and cared about her. When asked to explain how she knew these two individuals cared for and loved her, she replied, "I don't know, they tell me they do and they do things that show me and they act like a caring person towards me. It's hard to explain." Interestingly, Lily felt that the teachers at the alternate education program she had recently been placed in also cared about her. She said, "[The staff] love the kids here, like they're more caring than my parents."

Charlie was the most eloquent of the students in explaining how care was similar to love. He said:

> Well the first thing that comes to my mind is love, people loving each other and I don't mean the love you give to a woman or loving your family, I mean the love that you give to people around you every day. So that's the first thing that comes to my mind. To me care is about love. We care about the ones we love and we love the ones we care about—and I suppose we also care about all the things we love and the things we love to do.

Given that Charlie felt care and love were similar, I prompted him to try and explain what love was to him. His response was "like I said, love is caring, you can't really describe either of them, you just know when it's there." When I prompted him to give an example that might help explain love or care, he referred once again to his favourite teacher and said, "She is the perfect example of a caring teacher, because she loves her students." He went on to say that he could not think of any student who would disagree with him about this teacher, as they all feel cared for and loved by her.

Alex did not use the word love to describe care but he did talk about compassion for other people. He spoke of caring teachers (although he did not think any were) as those who "show compassion in a more visible way than just having general feelings toward others. They really love their job and they like the students." He described his mother as a caring and compassionate person who in turn modelled this to him, which led him to say, "Yeah, I feel compassion and I care about other people."

Empathetic

The word empathy was not used by any of the students but in many instances they referred to what could be defined as such. Empathy is generally defined as "identification with, or experiencing the feelings of another" (Random House Dictionary, 1980). Charlie stated:

> Caring is like kindness for other people. You don't put yourself in front of anybody else. It's when you understand people's emotions, how they're feeling and their perspectives. Like if they're sad you notice and understand the sadness.

Charlie spoke of the one teacher he felt cared for him and based this on how she could sense when he was feeling down and would try to talk to him about it. He spoke of a different teacher, however, whom he had once tried to speak with when he was feeling depressed and having difficulty concentrating at school, but that teacher just got angry with him for not trying to do better at school and did not seem to understand what Charlie was going through. Charlie referred to himself as a caring person because "I'm a very open-minded person and I take in other people's sadness. I take in what's going wrong with them."

Richard described a caring teacher as someone who:

> Tries to understand what you might be going through. Like if you're having a problem they might ask you about it and try to understand it. I can't really think of a word that describes that sort of thing, but you wouldn't just push them aside or whatever.

Richard referred to a teacher he regarded as caring and talked of how she always seemed to perceive when things were not so good for him and would talk to him about it. He went on to say that some teachers take things too personally.

> Like maybe a kid is having a rough day and they choose to listen to their iPod instead of taking notes or whatever. The teacher needs to understand they're having a bad day and not doing it to piss them off.

Donald had experienced a lot of negative episodes with teachers including using foul language and, in his words, "being abusive" toward them, which is why he claimed he was sent to an alternate education program. Nevertheless, Donald felt that a caring teacher would "try to understand the students. They would ask questions and maybe try to talk to the students if they're willing to talk to them." He admitted that he did not like talking to teachers about personal stuff. Donald seemed to know what empathy was and how it was related to care, but his personal issues seemed to interfere with his ability to either give or receive it in his relationships with others. For example, he spoke about being a caring person himself but that others did not get a chance to see this in him. "If I see someone crying I want to ask them why but then I don't because I don't want to butt into their business, just like I don't want people to butt into my business." He did speak about how he cared and felt empathy for his dog, which is how he came to acquire him in the first place. Donald said:

> When I saw him the first time, I just cared so much because he didn't have any food and he looked so skinny and had no stomach. I felt so sorry for him that I wanted to take him home with me so I could help him.

Genuine

Many of the students mentioned how important it was for teachers to be genuine. In regard to care this meant that teachers should not feel obligated to care or pretend they care just because they are supposed to, but rather a caring teacher genuinely cares for his/her students. They should not do it because they have to; they should do it because they want to. Most of the students felt that if teachers were asked if they cared about their students they would answer yes, but they also felt teachers would say this because it is expected of them and it would be the "politically correct" answer.

Robert spoke a lot about one of his teachers as being caring. When prompted to explain this further he said, "He genuinely cares about his students. He will listen to you and is there for them to talk to. He's just a really caring guy." Robert felt that people who are genuine are easier to talk to because "you're not scared to talk to them and you know they really care about what you

have to say." Robert felt the person who cares for him the most in his life is his girlfriend and much of this is because he sees her as genuinely interested in other people and puts the needs of others ahead of her own.

Alex was much more open about the need for teachers to be genuine. For the most part Alex did not have a lot of admiration or respect for teachers and generally felt they were uncaring. His advice to teachers was:

> Just be yourself. Let the students know you. You don't have to put on a mask to talk to them. Strike up a good conversation and there's probably a better chance you will be friends. Get to know the students, get in touch with them and know a little bit about them besides what their mark is in English.

It was encouraging to hear Alex give this advice to teachers, as his own experiences with teachers at secondary school were described to me quite differently. Perhaps if he had experienced more of the genuineness he suggested teachers should show, he might have felt more cared for at school.

Julia did not use the word "genuine" when talking of teachers, but she did discuss the need for them to be honest, which is an aspect of being genuine. In her opinion, even if it might hurt people's feelings, it is better to be honest with them rather than tell them something different only to upset them later. For example, she felt that teachers should not tell students they are doing well on something when they're not because when they write a test and do not do well, they will wish the teacher had been more honest with them. Julia feels that a caring teacher is honest with his or her students. Further to this, Julia indicated that if you really wanted to see which teachers care and which ones do not, you would "do some crazy experiment where you asked teachers to voluntarily come to school and work without getting paid." In her opinion the ones who would show up are the ones who genuinely care for their students and are not doing it for other reasons.

Flexible

Richard spoke at length about how teachers need to treat students as individuals and not assume that one way will work for everyone. "Make sure you treat them as individuals." He feels the worst teachers are the ones who are not flexible and practise "my way or no way." He feels that teachers need to understand that

each person is different and they all have different ways of learning. He emphasized that a caring teacher "does not need to be all uptight and strict" but rather they "should just be chill" and the students would have more respect for them and would usually behave better.

Brad talked about equality and for such a young student I was surprised at how he differentiated this from treating students all the same. "Everyone should be treated equal, everyone should be cared for equally, but that's not the case, that's not the case at all." In contrast, he described it as unfair that some teachers "treat everyone the same," as he feels that each student is different and has different needs. It is up to the teacher to get to know the students and teach them in a way that works.

Colleen spoke about uncaring teachers and how they impose their authority and power onto students and are rigid and inflexible. "If a teacher is only using authority, and that's the only thing they have going for them, they probably look down on the students and if you look down on the students you obviously don't care about them." She spoke of the need for teachers to respect the students and not be overly rigid in their classroom management.

Julia also had quite a bit to say about flexibility in teaching. To her, "there is an imaginary line that divides caring and not caring. My idea of caring might be totally different from another person." Like the others, Julia feels it is a teacher's responsibility to get to know the students so that they will know what works and what does not with each one.

Robert advised teachers to "tailor teaching to the students' needs as much as you can. School is really about the student and not about the teacher. Some teachers put themselves above the students." He indicated the need for teachers to be flexible in their approach to teaching.

Emma echoed this belief and advised teachers to "make it fair for everyone. If someone doesn't get it, then try another way of showing them." She described a teacher that many students disliked because they felt she did not care about them because all she ever did in every lesson was give notes. Every so often this teacher surprised them and did something fun, but it was always ruined shortly thereafter because "after we do something fun she'll still just give us notes to follow up on what we did, and not only that, they have to be written out properly."

Funny/Humorous

Fun and humour are related attributes that most of the students spoke about as being consistent with a caring teacher. From the most economically advantaged to the most economically disadvantaged student, teachers who are funny and/or make their class fun are regarded as more caring than those who are perceived as strict and too regimented in their teaching style. The students acknowledged, however, that it was important for teachers not to be too easy going. Taylor had this advice for teachers: "Don't just stand up and lecture 'cause that's no fun for anyone, but don't be a pushover either. When you're a pushover the students won't respect you and they won't want to learn from you." Richard indicated that he thought caring teachers are those who can "be kind of chill and make it as fun as possible to learn. You know, here's a joke once in a while." Lily agreed that jokes were important. "Teachers that tell jokes every once in a while and make the students laugh, that's a good thing." Emma felt a caring teacher takes the time to ensure that they "make it as fun as possible." Although Alex does not like school, he still feels it is important for a teacher to "try and make it as fun as possible. You know, the students still need to learn but have some fun. Don't be so cold." Donald simply had this advice for teachers: "Relax a bit, chill out, and make the class real fun."

FINDING 2: ECONOMIC STATUS APPEARS TO BE A FACTOR IN DETERMINING WHETHER OR NOT SECONDARY STUDENTS FEEL CARED FOR.

The results of this study show that the more economically advantaged a student is, the more they seem to feel cared for, and the more economically disadvantaged they are, the less they seem to feel cared for. Although this finding was perhaps not as surprising to me as some of the other findings, what is most disturbing is how the students at the lower end of the economic spectrum describe their experiences of care, or rather non-caring, in their respective secondary schools compared to their peers at the higher end.

Mountainview Secondary School is considerably wealthier than the other two sites and, with one notable exception (discussed later), the students feel more cared for than those at the other two schools. This does not imply the students interviewed at the other two schools do not feel cared for, but those at

Mountainview were certainly more positive about their feelings than those at the other two schools. Despite Mountainview's being regarded as a school with a large number of wealthy students, even there the wealthier students seemed to feel more cared for compared to the less wealthy. The findings of this study suggest that the wealthier a student is the more they feel cared for and as the economic status of the student declines so does their feeling of being cared for.

The students who identified themselves as economically advantaged (Richard, Colleen, Brad, and Taylor) all reported that they felt their school (Mountainview) was a caring place and each of them could describe numerous teachers whom they felt cared for them. All four of them had similar positive feelings about their teachers, albeit Brad more than the others. Brad felt that *all* of his teachers cared about him but he acknowledged that he had better relationships with some than others and those ones probably cared for him more. Richard felt Mountainview was a caring place and indicated, "There are definitely teachers here that seem to care about me." Colleen and Taylor had similar thoughts and gave vivid and thorough examples of different teachers who cared for them. Other than Brad, each of these students could describe a non-caring teacher as well, but for the most part their experiences with care were more positive than negative.

The students who identified themselves as being in the middle of the economic spectrum generally felt their schools were caring places but there were significant differences within the group and from the other two economic groups. Julia and Robert are in the upper-middle group and both felt their school (Mountainview) was a caring place and they could describe more than one teacher who they felt cared for them. Tira and Emma are in the lower-middle group and also felt their school (Hilltop) was a caring place, yet neither of them could elaborate on this statement. The four students from the middle group (upper and lower) were notably less positive than their more economically advantaged peers at Mountainview but more positive than the group of students identified as economically disadvantaged.

In regard to the upper-middle economic group, Julia felt there were a few teachers who cared for her and she named other people at school including a counsellor and the principal whom she felt were caring people. She was articulate in her description of why they were caring, but her description of a

teacher she perceived as non-caring was far more vivid as well as critical. Robert indicated he liked most of his teachers but when I asked if there were any who cared about him more than others he mentioned only one. His discussion about this teacher was very positive and he was able to explain and give examples as to why he felt cared for by this person. Robert and Julia were much more articulate about teachers they felt were non-caring as opposed to those they felt were caring. They described themselves as in the middle of the economic spectrum; however, both of them attend a very wealthy school so it was surprising to see how their descriptions of caring teachers differed from the students in the first group who are wealthier but attend the same school.

Tira and Emma from Hilltop School (the least wealthy of the schools) were the youngest students in the study and although they had been in secondary school for less than one year, they indicated they enjoyed it and were quite positive. They both indicated they felt cared for at secondary school but when asked if they could think of a teacher whom they would describe as caring, they initially had difficulty thinking of one. Emma said, "I'd say they're all kind of equal I guess. I can't really think of one who stands out as particularly more caring." When asked to describe what *all* of her teachers do that demonstrated they care about her she was unable to answer the question. "I can't really think of anything." With a bit of prompting, Tira and Emma were both able to think of a teacher they felt cared about them. They chose the same teacher and offered numerous positive comments about her. Incidentally, this same caring teacher is the one who allowed me to speak to her classes about the study and both girls indicated in the initial interview that it was because of her that they inquired about participating. Tira and Emma are in the lower-middle group and felt their school (Hilltop) was a caring place, yet they were much less convincing about this than those of higher economic status including those just above them in the upper-middle economic group. They spoke of only one teacher whom they felt cared for them and despite my efforts at prompting them to discuss others, neither of them could think of anyone who stood out as someone who cared about them.

The most noticeable difference between the middle economic group and the more advantaged group was that these students focused their discussion less on caring teachers and more on those they felt were uncaring. They might have

been able to tell me about teachers who cared about them but they were quicker and more articulate in telling me about those whom they felt were non-caring. Unlike the group of economically advantaged students, these students would often digress from care and begin discussing non-care. The wealthier students were quite the opposite in that they discussed care eloquently and struggled when asked to describe non-caring.

The saddest and most heart-breaking finding from this study was Donald, Charlie, Lily and Alex's discussions of their experiences of care. These four students (from three schools) identified themselves as economically disadvantaged and their experiences of care in secondary school were significantly different from the other two groups.

Donald was perhaps the most positive of this group although his interview was somewhat deceiving. At the time of the interview he had recently been placed in an alternate school where he indicated he felt cared for by the teachers. He did not seem to like speaking about his experience at regular school (Hilltop) and when asked if he felt cared for there he never really answered the question but said, "I sometimes can't control my actions so my behaviour and grades weren't as good. I was being dumb there. I wish I hadn't been put here but that's why I got put here." When asked if he could think of at least one teacher at his regular school who he felt cared for him he simply replied that he could not remember any of their names. As the interview with Donald progressed, I began to notice that Donald blamed himself for a lot of the problems he had experienced prior to coming to the alternate school. When I asked him about his experiences at regular school and whether he felt cared for there, he would sometimes look away from me and say nothing or told me he did not want to answer the question or changed the subject. I never did get a direct answer from him about whether or not he felt cared for at regular school. His student file confirmed that he had very poor relationships with the teachers at regular school but from what I could observe at the alternate school, his relationships with teachers and staff there were going to be far more positive. It seemed that he was feeling more accepted, welcomed and cared for in his new school placement.

Charlie was in grade 12 at the time of his interview and his perception of feeling cared for was quite different from the way it had been right through to

grade 11. Charlie had a lot of difficulty in school and in the community until his final year. His interactions with teachers were mostly negative, something both he and his student file confirmed. He explained how during his early years at Hilltop Secondary he often felt like an outsider. First, he was of a different ethnicity from most of the students and second, he described himself as a poor kid attending a middle-class school. In regard to socio-economic status and British Columbia schools, Hilltop is in the lower half, so it was surprising that Charlie described it as middle-class. Charlie felt that until grade 12 the teachers had not cared about him but he also felt that this was somewhat warranted as he had not cared about them or school either. In his words, "I had too much other stuff on my mind." He gave a long and heart-wrenching story of a teacher whom he felt disliked him. Charlie played on a team when this teacher was the coach but their relationship was not at all positive and he ended up quitting the team before the season ended (this is discussed later in Finding 5). He did not make the connection as much as I did, but much of what Charlie described was related to his poverty. Charlie had felt uncared for throughout high school but in his final year he felt that at least two teachers cared for him. Luckily for Charlie, he had not dropped out (something he had thought of) or been kicked out (something that he had come close to on more than a few occasions).

Lily was perhaps the most economically disadvantaged of all the students in the study. At the time of the interview she was not living at home and was "couch surfing" at houses of various friends. Lily had recently been placed in an alternate program but had previously attended Hilltop Secondary and more recently Oceanview. She felt they were both uncaring schools but described Hilltop as more caring because there was at least one teacher there whom she liked and felt "sort of" cared about her. Oceanview had been a very negative experience for Lily and she felt it was a very non-caring school where none of the teachers cared about her. When asked why she thought it might be so uncaring she replied, "The whole staff system there has issues. They're all fucked up." She spoke of one teacher whom she felt was particularly uncaring and when asked what he did that showed her he did not care, she responded, "It wasn't just me, I don't think he cared about anyone." The one glimmer of hope for Lily was that she felt the teachers at her alternate program were all caring. "I know the teachers here are caring. They always offer to do things for us and help us." This

statement was in contrast to what she had to say about teachers at regular school. "I just think that teachers at normal schools should be more caring".

Alex felt the least cared for of any student in the study. He described himself as poor even though he attended a school where the other kids were mostly wealthy (Mountainview Secondary). He was the only participant from Mountainview who was living in a single-parent household and felt that if it were not for his mother having a long-term suitable rental agreement (in a relative's home) in the area there would be no way for him to continue attending the school. Alex was in his final year of high school at the time of the interview and said that not only did he not like school but "when I think of high school I just think of getting by so I can be done with it and get out of here." Alex had mostly negative comments about care in the context of education. He described elementary teachers: "I don't really view them as teachers. I view them as baby-sitters. They don't listen too much and they don't really care for their students. They're just trying to make their next pay cheque." He felt Mountainview would likely be regarded as a caring place by most of the students who go there but he did not share that sentiment. When asked if his teachers cared about him he replied, "I don't have too many special relationships with the teachers here." When asked if he could tell me of someone at the school he did feel cared about him he simply responded, "Um, I don't think so. I can't think of anyone." Alex did not seem to feel it was important for teachers to care. He said:

> I guess it could help, but teachers don't have time to care. They don't have time to care and their job isn't to care, it's to teach. You're only going to be with the students for like half the year and then you probably won't see them again so it's tough to have a caring relationship for that long.

Of all the students in the study, Alex did not mention even one teacher, either elementary or secondary, whom he felt cared for him and only one that he even spoke of positively, albeit very little. Secondary school had clearly not been a favourable experience for Alex and he certainly did not feel cared for during his time there.

FINDING 3: A SENSE OF BELONGING IS RELATED TO FEELING CARED FOR AND THIS DIFFERS FROM ONE ECONOMIC GROUP TO ANOTHER.

Based on professional observation while working as an alternate education teacher with many students who were economically disadvantaged and from literature regarding high school drop-outs (Bates, 2005; Cassidy & Bates, 2005; Kozol, 1992, 2006; McWhirter et al., 1998; Payne, 1996), I felt there was a likely connection between a sense of belonging (or not) and feeling cared for . Many students I worked with in alternate education programs, including those living in poverty, would talk about feeling as though they did not belong at regular school, they did not fit in, or they felt different and out of place. They would often add that they felt as though no one cared. One objective of this study was to explore this perception further and see if this was indeed the case. What I found was that students in the advantaged and middle economic groups all reported they felt a greater sense of belonging at their schools than the disadvantaged, who reported they felt they either did not belong or had previously felt that way. As discussed above (Finding 2), students in the higher and middle groups more often feel cared than those in the disadvantaged group. Similarly, this finding claims that a sense of belonging is greater in the first two groups than the latter. Students in the economically disadvantaged group feel they do not belong and they do not feel cared for, making it appear that care and belonging are related to one another.

The students who identified themselves as economically advantaged (Richard, Brad, Colleen, and Taylor) all felt a strong sense of belonging at Mountainview Secondary. When asked a direct question as to whether they felt socially comfortable at school and felt they fitted in, they all answered yes. Richard, Colleen, and Taylor said they had always felt comfortable at secondary school and continue to feel that way. None gave any indication that they felt different or out of place at Mountainview. Brad was surprised by my question and asked me to clarify it. He asked if I wanted to know if he fitted in with the crowd and felt like the other students. When I confirmed that this was what I was asking him, he responded by laughing and saying:

> Of course I do. I don't really ever feel uncomfortable here, especially with the other students. The only time I might feel uncomfortable is when I don't get something or I don't understand something but that's rare; it happens but it's rare."

It should be noted that Brad appeared more confident than the others about his social status and his feeling of belonging at Mountainview. He is also the only student in the study who reported that he felt cared for by *all* of his teachers.

The students who identified themselves as in the middle of the economic spectrum felt the same as those above. Julia, Robert, Tira, and Emma all felt a sense of belonging and indicated they were socially comfortable at their secondary schools. Julia answered, "I'm always comfortable and at ease. I feel like I fit in and belong." Robert responded similarly: "I'm definitely very comfortable, I don't know what it would be like to not feel comfortable at school 'cause I've never felt that way." Tira and Emma both felt a sense of belonging. Emma said, "I think I fit in here. I like it better here than elementary." She added, "I'm a very friendly person" and believed her friendliness contributed to her sense of belonging. Tira said she felt as though she belonged at Hilltop and simply said, "I think I'm pretty comfortable here."

Responses about belonging at school were quite different when the question was posed to the students who identified themselves as economically disadvantaged. Some of the questions I asked Donald were difficult for him to answer and others he avoided answering altogether. In regard to a question I asked him about belonging, he said, "I liked it pretty good up there," which was in reference to the time he had spent at Hilltop Secondary prior to being placed in the alternate education program. When I asked him if "liked it pretty good up there" was the same thing as feeling he fitted in and belonged at Hilltop he looked away and just said, "I don't know." I never did get a definite sense of whether Donald felt he fit in at Hilltop or not

> Charlie found the topic of belonging to be interesting and had this to say: "Umm, that's a really good question actually. I'd probably have to say 50/50. Before this year, I would have said I felt really different and didn't feel like I belonged here, but like I said before, I've changed."

He added, "It is really hard to be really poor at this school." When I asked him what had motivated him to stay and turn things around in his final year he replied, "That's a good question too, but as a poor kid I think you just say to yourself, 'This is my only shot at making things better.'" Charlie might not have felt he belonged at Hilltop but it was the only secondary school in town (aside from an alternate school) and he was determined to finish high school regardless.

Lily indicated that she never felt she belonged at either Hilltop or Oceanview. She missed a lot of days at both and never wanted to go to school. Lily noted:

> Probably no, I didn't fit in at either of those schools. I didn't ever want to go to school. I only had like a few friends. All this week for example, if I was still at normal school I would not have gone at all.

Lily was feeling much more comfortable and at ease in her new alternate school.

Alex felt he did not really belong at Mountainview. He felt there were various reasons for this. First, most of the kids who go to his school were wealthy and he is not. Second, he felt the family situation of most of the students at his school was different than his own. "I live with just my mother and no other kids in the family, and that's pretty different for around here." Third, the other students were very academically oriented, whereas he did not like school and the only class he did like was Foods but that class was often looked down upon by the other students and teachers. "Like for me, I have no use for math or social or classes the other kids like. I like Foods class but they all think Foods is a waste-of-time class that is just a narrowed down and easy class." Alex said he felt even more uncomfortable in his earlier grades at secondary school "when they're all looking at you and what you're wearing. I think that wears off a bit in grade 12. Thank goodness!" Alex was in his final year of school but still not feeling totally comfortable at Mountainview. He indicated he felt different from most of the other students at his school and really did not feel that he fitted in or belonged there. He made it clear that he was just putting in time and counting the days for the year to end.

FINDING 4: CARE IS RELATIONAL BUT THIS RELATIONSHIP IS COMPLEX, MULTI-DIMENSIONAL AND INTERWOVEN BETWEEN STUDENTS AND TEACHERS, THEIR SCHOOL, AND THE CURRICULUM.

Noddings (1992) described care as relational. In the context of education she described care as being a positive and reciprocal relationship between a teacher and a student. The findings from this study would support this claim but the students discussed other types of relationships that determine whether they feel

cared for or not. In the interviews, the students talked about three types of relationships that contribute to whether or not they feel cared for. These include the two-way relationships between teacher–student and school–student, and a three-way relationship that occurs between student–curriculum–teacher. Based on what this group of students said, it seems that the first type of relationship is the most important followed by the other two, in that order. The number and intensity of the relationships a student experiences will increase the likelihood that she or he will feel cared for. Furthermore, each of these relationships is complex and interwoven with one another. They are presented here in order of how often the students spoke of each type of relationship.

Teacher–student relationships

Noddings (1992) suggested that care is often determined by a relationship between a student and his/her teacher. Of the three types of relationships mentioned above, this is the one the students spoke of the most. It may be the most important one to students but it is seemingly the most complex as well. Many factors must come together to build a caring relationship between a teacher and a student. The students felt the three factors that contributed most to the development of a caring relationship between a teacher and a student are (a) when the student is a *good* student, (b) when the two parties have similar interests and things in common beyond school, and (c) when the teacher treats students as people and interacts with them on a more personal level.

In each of the interviews I asked the students three questions about their relationships with teachers. First, I asked them if they felt teachers cared about them. Second, I asked if teachers cared about certain students (which could include themselves) more than others. Third, I asked them if this were so, could they explain this. Most of the students were quite surprised by the second question. It seemed as though they assumed it was common knowledge that teachers care about some students more than others and that they have favourites. In most of the interviews, the students were nodding their heads or began answering the question before I finished asking it. With the exception of Alex, who did not feel any of his teachers cared for him, they all indicated they had a better relationship with some teachers than others and all of them (including Alex) felt that teachers care for certain students more than others.

Brad was the only participant who believed that all of his teachers cared about him but when I asked him if he felt his teachers cared about all of the students the same way or if some were cared about more than others, he gave me a puzzled look and replied, "Yeah, of course! Naturally teachers care for some students more than others." Charlie echoed Brad's comments and added, "Yes, there's definitely favouritism, I think that's pretty much a given." Each student in the study was asked the same question and each one answered remarkably similarly. The students in this study all felt that teachers care more about some students than others. It is important to explain their perceptions as to why this occurs. Which factors influence a caring relationship between a teacher and student?

The predominant belief of the students in this study was that teachers care more for *good* students than they do others. Their idea of a good student was one who not only behaved well and did what the teacher asked of them but, a good student was also one who did well academically and got good marks. Regardless of their economic status, every student felt this was the case. They described being cared for as the same as being favoured by a teacher. Before I even finished asking the question Taylor blurted out, "Yeah, for sure they have favourites, they obviously care for you more if you're successful in the class. They definitely favour the more studious kids." Charlie seemed puzzled that I would even ask the question or perhaps he was just surprised that I did not know the answer. "Oh yeah! Definitely the smartest kids get favoured. That's just kind of a given too." Brad answered the question more personally by saying, "Why wouldn't they care for me? I'm a good student." Richard was more philosophical in his response but basically felt the same as the others.

> Some teachers are going to develop more personal relationships with some students and have harder times with others. And you know, I think grades are a big part of it because if they have a student who's excelling in their class and getting 95% I think they're going to have a lot easier time having a personal relationship than with a student who's failing.

He added, "If the students don't care, then why should the teachers?" This response implied that Richard, an exemplary student himself, perhaps feels students who do not do well at school simply do not care about school. Robert also answered the question before I finished asking it but his response was more directed at why a teacher might not have a relationship with a student.

"Definitely! Definitely! Everyone has a bias right? Teachers are entitled to their bias. Some people are going to piss you off, like students who are rude or don't do well in your class." Each student in this study felt that *good* students are cared for and favoured more by teachers. It is worth mentioning here that the students in this study who felt the most cared for also happened to be very good students who are academically successful and the ones who felt the least cared for tend not to do as well at school.

Another theme that emerged from the interviews was that relationships between teachers and students was stronger and the students felt more cared for when they and a teacher shared similar interests or had experiences in common. Brad explained this more articulately than some of the others:

> Well, I think I have a relationship with all of them, but some are stronger than others. Like [Teacher X], he's a really nice guy and I have a much better relationship with him. I guess I could assume that he cares for me more than some of the others since I know him as a teacher but I also do things outside of regular class with him such as cross country and working out and stuff like that so we definitely have a better relationship. Like, I actually see [Teacher Y] more often than any other teacher and I like him and think he's a good teacher but I wouldn't say he cares for me as much as [Teacher X]. I guess you can base who cares for you more based on the quality of the relationship you have with them. It's like the ones that do the same sorts of things that you do out of school or when you have something in common with them. I'd say I'd bond with someone if they were like me 'cause you understand them more and know them better if they're like you. I think that's kind of natural.

Colleen said, "Teachers have to care about everyone equally but realistically that's not possible. I think you have a better connection with people when you're interested in each other's life and then you have a mutually supportive relationship." She spoke of how some of her more caring teachers often talk with her about non-academic pursuits such as her athletic endeavours or just how she is doing. The caring ones are the ones who will talk to you and say, 'Hey how's it going?' or ask how a tournament went on the weekend. You know they really care about you if they ask you this stuff because a lot of teachers don't care about these things." She described one teacher as a particularly caring guy, "who knows a lot about what his students do outside of school and talks with them and asks questions about their activities with a genuine interest."

Robert talked about how some adults, including teachers, probably see a little bit of themselves in some students and naturally care more about them than some of the other students. "I think it's kind of cool because I've seen situations with adults and kids and the adult will be like, 'Oh I was kind of like you as a kid.'" Robert went on to describe a teacher who once told him that he reminded him of himself when he was his age and he really felt that teacher understood him and cared about him more than his other teachers. He also noted that another reason this teacher might have cared more about him was because he was the top student in his class. Robert explained how he and his dad are similar to one another and that he has a particularly strong relationship with his father because of their commonality. He feels his dad is more caring toward him than others in his family and vice versa.

Richard and Taylor's ideas were similar to those of the other students. Richard said, "I think [teachers] have a better relationship with a student if they have similar interests or they're alike in personality." Taylor echoed similar thoughts. "Yeah, because you can relate to one another so you feel like you know each other." She provided an example of one of her friends who was in a class with a teacher who was also his coach outside of school. He felt particularly cared for by this teacher until he quit playing on the team. According to Taylor, when the boy quit the team he felt the teacher was upset about it and did not like him as much and did not continue to care about him.

The economically disadvantaged students had less to say than the others about feeling cared for by teachers who share similar interests or are more like them. This is partly because few of them feel as cared for in the first place but none of them felt they had much in common with their teachers anyhow. Lily said that during her brief time at Hilltop she felt the art teacher probably cared about her and attributed this to her being a good artist and that both she and the teacher share a love of art. Donald talked about a teacher at the alternate school whom he would go running with each day and felt the teacher cared about him.

A third theme that emerged, related to the one above, is that caring teachers are often those who treat the students not just as students but as people. Such teachers will talk about non-academic and personal matters with them rather than just school-related topics or concerns. Teachers who seem more personable are perceived as more caring. Many of the students in the study

thought of the more caring teachers as the ones with whom they have a personal relationship. How personal this relationship will be, however, seems to depend on which economic group the student belongs to.

The economically advantaged students and those in the middle seemed to think that teachers who are caring often have a personal relationship with their students. Brad identifies himself as being wealthy and says that teachers who really care are those who "care about you as a person." Taylor mentioned a teacher she often talked to about personal matters, saying, "It's just like we're friends." Richard described a teacher with whom he had engaged in many personal discussions that had nothing to do with school-related matters. Overall, the wealthier students seemed to be more comfortable discussing personal matters with teachers than the others, particularly compared to the students in the economically disadvantaged group.

At the lower end of the economic spectrum, the students felt that it was good to have a personal relationship with teachers but, unlike their more advantaged peers, there were more boundaries or limits to what this would entail. Donald agreed that a good relationship with a teacher is when you have similar interests and do things with them beyond academic duties. He spoke of his favourite teacher at the alternate school who went running with him and they would compete against each other. Donald felt this teacher cared about him and that he knew him as a person and not just as a teacher. When I asked if he ever talked to any of his teachers about personal matters he said "no" and adamantly stated that his personal business was none of their business. "Well, a teacher might think they're just trying to help you, but kids just think they're butting into our business. The thing is they think they're trying to help, but really it's none of their business."

Charlie believed that teachers who really care about you have a personal relationship with you beyond an academic one. In the interview he asked to borrow a pen and drew a picture with arrows that showed how a teacher could have a relationship with an individual as a student and have a relationship with that same individual as a person. His diagram (a triangle) showed that a teacher can care for you as a student but if they really care about you they likely also care about you as a person and will support you. He felt that one of his teachers particularly cared about him as a student, as she would often help him with his

schoolwork but she also cared about him as a person. On more than one occasion, this teacher had tried to talk with Charlie and seemed to sense when he was upset or sad but every time she offered her support, Charlie responded by saying that everything was okay. He was like Donald in this regard in that he felt it was probably good to have a personable relationship but it was uncomfortable discussing personal matters with his teachers. Charlie believed that "kids don't like to share their personal stuff with teachers."

Lily spoke of once seeing a teacher outside of regular school hours in a local store. She did not know the teacher very well because she had only been in his class a short time but he recognized her and asked how she was. He also knew some of Lily's friends, as they had been students in his class and he took the time to ask her how each of them was doing. Lily said she was surprised that a teacher would take time to talk with a student outside of school "when he didn't have to" but thought he must be a very caring person to do this. Lily had not experienced the best relationships with teachers and even though she was not a student of this teacher, she felt in this situation that he had treated her as a "real person" and differently from the way teachers usually treat students.

School–student relationships

The students talked about a second type of caring relationship as one that exists between a student and the school. The students who felt the greatest sense of being cared for spoke of their school as being a caring place and that they felt a strong sense of belonging there (discussed above in Finding 3). What do students mean when they say their school is a caring place? How does this differ from the relationship they have with teachers at the school? How can an inanimate structure such as a school be defined as a caring place? The students talked about the school as a system and many of them began statements by saying "the system, or they …" when talking about their school. The students acknowledged that teachers, like any other professionals, have certain parameters in terms of what they can and cannot do and sometimes "the system" does not allow for certain things. The system dictates what teachers can and cannot do, which affects how they interact and work with students. Two themes emerged from this study that help explain whether students perceive their school, or rather the system, as caring or not. The two themes were equality and inclusivity.

Student equality

The first theme the students described as contributing to a caring relationship between a student and the school was when they feel they are treated equally. When prompted to explain what "equal" meant, many of the students replied that it was about giving every student an equal chance to succeed academically. Unfortunately, the students may acknowledge equality as important but for some of them this might not be a reality. The findings differ in that some of them feel their schools are caring places that promote equality while others feel their schools are uncaring and promote inequality. The more economically advantaged the students were, the more they felt their schools were caring places where students were given equal opportunity.

Brad confidently stated:

> I think equality is important to care. I think everyone should be given a chance, but for the people who don't really care, they need to be given a chance, but if they abuse their chance it's not the school's fault.

He added:

> There are kids who are only good at some things and not everything, like for me it's math. It's how my brain works. But there are other kids who are super good at art, which I'm no good at. I think there should be ways, like I'm not in the older grades so I don't know how it works later, but there should always be ways, as many ways as possible to let everyone go to their full potential.

When asked if his school (Mountainview) allows for what he suggests he said, "Everybody has a fair chance at being successful at this school." He feels the students are all treated equally and if they want to succeed then it is a good place for them to achieve their goals. According to Brad, Mountainview is a caring school that allows opportunities for all students to do well academically—if they want to.

Colleen also feels that Mountainview is a caring school because it strives to make equal opportunities for everyone to develop their strengths. "You know this is really a pretty good school. It offers lots for everybody regardless of what kind of student you are." Colleen feels that offering lots of choices to the students is a form of equality, as this approach tries to include everyone, which, in turn, signifies a caring institution. She spoke about the many non-curricular activities and clubs that are available to students and mentioned how many there were relative to the school population.

Robert felt he is not as financially well off as a lot of the students at Mountainview but he also thought it is a caring school and that everyone is given a fair chance to succeed. "There's something here for everybody." He admitted there were probably some students who felt the school was not fair because "it's hard to get the perfect system that works for everybody. There's always going to be someone opposing it, but it's not that bad here." When I asked if he felt the school emphasized some subject areas over others he responded that he felt math and science were more respected. He acknowledged that math is his favourite subject and he does well at it. He said his math teacher seems to care about him more than his other teachers. I asked him how others who are not as good in math and science might feel about Mountainview and he responded, "Well there are alternatives for them too, right? They can go to art school after high school if they want." Despite his awareness of a hierarchy of respect for certain subjects, Robert still feels the students are treated equally and that they have choices, which makes his school a caring place.

Julia was an anomaly amongst the more economically advantaged students in the study. She also attends Mountainview and although she feels cared for by some of her teachers and indicated that she was very comfortable and felt a sense of belonging there, she did not feel as strongly as the other Mountainview students that it is a caring place for all students. She feels the system does not offer equal chances for everyone since some courses are looked upon more favourably than others. She spoke of math as being a difficult subject for her but emphasized that it has more status than some other curricular areas at the school. She asked:

> How can that be fair? It's not my fault that I'm not good at math. I think school is set up to help you succeed [in life] but if you have some sort of problem, it's not on your side at all.

Julia is a good student who enjoys classes such as Foods and Physical Education, which she feels others sometimes look down upon. "It's not right to judge me, but sometimes I feel like they think those subjects are not a real class or whatever." For this reason, Julia did not feel her school communicated caring towards all of the students.

Lily does not feel that either Hilltop or Oceanview are particularly caring places. She not only felt socially uncomfortable at both places, but she also felt that both schools treat the students unequally. For example, Lily expressed

disdain for Physical Education class but felt it was highly admired, especially at Hilltop where the head of the athletics department was at one time a highly regarded athlete and is looked up to by a lot of the students. According to Lily, she is one of the few students who did not like this teacher. She reported, "I'd always get frustrated in that class. He's just really mouthy and lippy and tries to push everybody past what they can do just because he's so athletic." Some of the students at Hilltop admired this teacher and his style but Lily certainly felt he was uncaring. She left Hilltop primarily because she found it uncaring and the school treated students unequally. The only subject Lily really likes is Art, but she felt that Art is seen as an easy course designed for students who are not as smart as the others. She was originally looking forward to changing schools and going to Oceanview, as she heard there was a very strong Art program there. She felt there would be more courses offered there for students who really like Art, but when she got there and was only allowed to take one Art course she complained. The principal told her, "With all the cuts to our system there's no money to run all those kinds of courses so you'll have to make do with the ones we have." To Lily, the school system was not an equal playing field, as it discriminated against certain courses and hence schools were non-caring places. She did, however, feel that her new alternate school was a caring place, as they seemed to recognize and support her talents in different areas.

Alex attends Mountainview Secondary and finds it to be a very uncaring place. He feels it is a very "academic school" and for those who are not academic oriented it is not good. "Some people are just not gifted at all those hard things." Alex particularly loves cooking and enjoys Foods class but feels it is looked down upon by other students and even some of the staff. "If they cared about me, they would care about what I'm interested in." He believes that students have different interests and if a school truly cares then they should care about each of the subject areas equally.

Charlie's thoughts were much the same as Alex's in that he felt Hilltop cared more about some subject areas than others, which meant some students were cared for more than others. For Charlie, Drama and Acting is a passion for him but he feels that many students and staff feel classes like that are "a waste of time." Emma, who attends Hilltop, confirmed what Charlie felt. She said, "If you're doing electives all day, you're not going to learn anything and you're

not going to get far in life because you won't be doing much. You won't be able to get into a college or a university." Charlie did not feel Hilltop was a particularly caring school and said, "If a school cares about the students it should also care about their interests."

Student inclusiveness

The second theme that emerged regarding a caring relationship between a student and the school was inclusiveness. According to the students in this study, inclusiveness is respect for all students regardless of differences. It is non-hierarchical and no students are seen as better or of higher status than others. This finding was particularly interesting given that all the students acknowledged that teachers care about certain students more than others and have favourites, yet when it came to whether their school was inclusive, many of them felt it was. Regarding the issue of equality, it was the students in the higher and middle economic groups who felt their schools were more inclusive.

The economically advantaged students (Richard, Brad, Colleen, and Taylor) all felt that Mountainview is an inclusive school and despite diversity (including economic diversity), everyone is included and treated with respect, making the school a caring place. Despite their statements that everyone is included, without realizing it, they mentioned hierarchies and some students not being included. This double standard could occur because none of the four students experienced exclusion themselves so they may have been unaware that other students might feel differently. None of these four could think of an incident where a student was treated negatively based on any sort of difference. Richard spoke about this more than the other students in this group. He claimed that no group of students at Mountainview was treated differently or was excluded, yet some of his comments contradict this:

> As for ethnicity and things like that, all the students have the choice to be included equally, but in a school like this where we have a lot of Asian exchange students, and it seems that there's as many of them as there is of the white students now, I'd say because of some of their attitudes, and I don't want to stereotype, but I think some of the teachers don't view them as the same as the mass of the student body. I think the teachers view it as almost two student bodies. I think there's a big difference because they come over here and they don't socialize with any of the students here so really they could be included but they choose not to be included.

According to Richard, it is not the school's fault that some students are not included. It is an inclusive school but the fault rests with the large group of Asian students who choose not to be included.

When I asked Richard if he felt that a poor student or someone from an economically disadvantaged group might feel out of place or excluded at Mountainview, he said:

> Nah, I wouldn't say. I've never really seen any difference in a teacher liking a student because of their economic status because really in a classroom you're not even going to see it. You can't really tell if a person is super rich or really poor. You may be able to get some idea but not only that, I think even if you could tell, most teachers wouldn't really care. I don't think most people care about another person's economic status and how much they're going to like them and I can't ever think of an example in a classroom when I've see a student be preferred or treated badly because of that.

Brad reiterates Richard's concept of Mountainview as a caring, inclusive school but his comments are contradictory:

> Well, it's not like the teachers here are teaching Bill Gate's kids or something or Marcus Naslund or Roberto Luongo's kid. I mean naturally those kids would be treated with more respect because they're celebrities and stuff. It doesn't happen here like that. I mean yes the teachers here respect the guys who play on the X team because that's such a big thing here, but this school cares about everyone equally.

Taylor had similar thoughts. "I've never seen any blatant examples of people being treated differently here. I guess we have a pretty diverse school so we're more accepting." Like Brad, she talked about the X team and how they were looked up to by the students and staff. When I asked if such admiration for the X team perhaps made some of the other students feel less included, she said, "No, it's not that the other kids here aren't included. It's just [sport X] is such a big thing here. That's just the way it is." In other words, Taylor seemed to think that having a status hierarchy was a natural thing and she did not make any connection to this making some students feel less included in the school.

Julia was the only student in the middle economic group who did not feel that her school was inclusive. She felt Mountainview was not inclusive, particularly for the Asian exchange students with whom she felt a special connection, as she had attended a number of schools in Asian countries. She explained to me that if she were one of those students she would feel like a "total outsider" and

that a lot of the staff never even took the time to try and learn their names. In some instances they would ask the students to use an English name because it was easier for them to pronounce and memorize.

The other middle economic students (Robert, Tira and Emma) indicated they felt their schools were caring and inclusive. Robert said he had never seen anything discriminatory. "Nothing racist at all. Maybe like the occasional sexist thing but it's not really sexist if it's just like meant to be a joke." Emma indicated that she did not think any of the teachers at Hilltop would care about any sort of difference and that everyone would be included. Tira felt the same way. Neither Emma nor Tira talked about the possibility of someone from the First Nations' community feeling excluded, even though their school (Hilltop) has a large Aboriginal population.

Charlie attended Hilltop and was one of the few visible minority students who went to the school (he was not a First Nations student). He felt extremely out of place but felt it had more to do with his economic status than his race. "This school is very middle class and if you're not in the middle with them it can be a very hard place for a poor kid to come to school." In regard to his racial/ethnic difference he explained he had never experienced any blatant racism but described what he referred to as "closet racists" or those he felt did not like him or would not include him. They distanced themselves from him but were never outright racist toward him. "Closet racists—they're not open about it, which really is worse!"

Alex and Lily did not feel their schools were inclusive. Both students were in the lowest economic group but their feelings of not being included had less to do with finances and more with certain subjects being held in higher esteem than others. In each case, the subjects they liked, such as Art and Foods class, were looked down upon and students who enjoyed non-academic subjects were valued less than those who were academically oriented.

Student–curriculum–teacher relationships

The third theme that emerged in regard to caring relationships was an over-lapping three-way relationship that occurs between students, the curriculum, and teachers. I will first describe this relationship as it was discussed by some of the students and then use examples from the interviews to illuminate the claim

that the way teachers and students interact with the curriculum may contribute to feeling cared for or not.

Secondary students come to school knowing that they will need to engage in a number of curricular or subject areas. Students usually enjoy or have a better relationship with some of these subjects than others, a situation which is based on numerous factors. Many of the students pointed out that they enjoy subjects more when they feel they are getting something out of doing it. The students expressed a notion that the things we like doing are things that matter to us or we care about and the things we do not like doing are often things we care less about.

Secondary teachers differ from the students in that they come to school knowing they will be teaching one or perhaps two (maybe more) subject areas. They are usually selected to teach these areas because they have specialized training and understanding of the subject matter. Given that the teacher spent time and money at university to learn certain subjects they likely did so because they had a relationship with the material and liked it; it mattered to them. The students spoke of many situations, however, where a teacher may like and care about the material they teach but not all students share the same passion for the subject. This discrepancy can translate into either a caring or a non-caring relationship depending on how the teacher and student interact with each other and with the subject material. For example, some students might not care about a subject area but if they feel the teacher cares for both them and the subject, they may come to care about it more. On the other hand, if a student does not like a subject and feels the teacher does not care about it or him or her, it is less likely they will come to care for that subject.

Julia is an example of how this three-way relationship may work and how it is complex and interwoven. She reported that in grade 10 she liked Social Studies but it was far from being her favourite subject. She did not care about it as much because she did not feel it was as important as some other subjects. Her grade 10 teacher, however, loved Social Studies and would explain to the students why it was important and why he loved and cared about it so much. Julia felt inspired by this but she also felt this teacher really cared about his students, including her. She indicated that she wanted to do well in his class because she sensed he wanted her (and the other students) to do well, so to do

this she had to engage with the material. Because of him she came to care more for Social Studies than she might otherwise have done.

Social Studies in grade 11 turned out to be quite a different experience for Julia than it had been in the previous year. She began her grade 11 year enjoying Social Studies, but shortly into it she started to feel that the teacher did not care about her. She felt this way because of the times she had asked him for help and he had either refused or ignored her. Social Studies did not come easily to her and prior to grade 10 she had not liked it. She felt the grade 11 teacher really did not care whether she did well in his class or not. The situation worsened when she wrote and "bombed" a unit test that many of her classmates, fearing the test, had skipped that day. When she asked if she could rewrite the test, the teacher refused. She explained to him how she felt this was unfair and that she could have done what some other students had done and simply not shown up for the test and got a parent to phone and say she was ill. Her discussion with the teacher made a bad situation turn worse.

> I obviously needed help on that unit test because I didn't do well on it. When I asked for help he refused it and then I bombed the test and he wouldn't let me rewrite it. That would've been a caring thing to do instead of getting mad at me and making me feel worse than I already did. It's not like I'm a student who doesn't care about my marks. I like to do well at school. Whatever–I don't care about Social Studies—it doesn't matter to me anymore. If he doesn't care about me then why should I care about his stupid class? I don't care what I get in that class now. But I still feel that he should have been the one to motivate me more and to help me out.

Julia was visibly upset and actually cried when she described this incident to me but her experience helps to illustrate how caring, in this instance, is a complex and intertwined relationship. The teacher may have cared about Social Studies but Julia stopped caring about it because she perceived he did not care about her. This is the opposite of what happened in grade 10 when she came to care more about Social Studies when she felt the teacher cared about her and the subject he was teaching.

Alex described a similar experience with Math class that illustrates the complex relationship between student, curriculum, and teacher. Alex had never enjoyed Math and found it difficult. In earlier grades he felt his teachers became frustrated when he could not understand it and they seemed to get annoyed that he always asked for help. He began to feel that they did not care about him

or how he did in Math and he increasingly disliked the subject. By the time Alex got to secondary school he hated Math. This changed for a while in grade 10 when he was placed in a Math class with a teacher who "absolutely loved Math." Alex said, "He made the class fun. It was a Math class! I'm terrible at Math and I don't like it but he enjoyed it so much and made it fun that I actually did okay in that class." Alex clearly noticed how this teacher cared about Math, which, at least temporarily, helped him succeed. Alex did not go so far as to say this teacher cared about him, but he admitted he came to care more about Math that year than he ever had before. In grade 11, with a new teacher, Alex went back to his old pattern of disliking Math and not caring about it: "I just wanted to get it over with."

Lily and Charlie are examples of how the relationship between a student, the curriculum, and a teacher can develop differently. In their case they both had a subject they loved and cared about, Art and Drama respectively. Neither student felt they had good relationships with many of their teachers throughout secondary school, but both of them perceived that the teachers of these subjects cared about them. Lily and Charlie already loved and cared about these subjects so it was not because of their teacher's care for them that they came to enjoy Art and Drama. Lily and Charlie felt these teachers came to care more about them because they cared about the subject area the teachers were responsible for. They compared this to other subject areas that they did not care about where they felt the teachers did not care about them.

The third example of a student–curriculum–teacher relationship was the most surprising. The economically advantaged students felt less connected to the school curriculum than students from the other economic groups. Each of the four most advantaged students said that a lot of what they were learning at school was irrelevant or "a total waste of time." All of them were getting good grades but they did not have a strong connection with much of what they were learning. Most of them saw what they were learning was necessary only because it was needed to achieve their goal of going to university. This group of students seemed to have the strongest relationships with their teachers and felt the most cared for, yet the curriculum did not play a strong role in how they felt about the school and teachers. The economically disadvantaged students were less likely to feel cared for but in some instances, if they felt a relationship to the curriculum, it

increased the chances of their feeling cared for. Unlike their advantaged peers who were getting good grades despite not liking much of what they were being taught, the students at the lower end of the economic spectrum seemed to get better grades only when they felt the teacher cared for them or when the teacher had a passion for what she or he was teaching. The strength of the interrelationship between these three dimensions of student, curriculum, and teacher was strongest among students at the lowest economic level and weakest among students at the high end.

FINDING 4: SUMMARY (CARE IS RELATIONAL, BUT THIS RELATIONSHIP IS COMPLEX, MULTI-DIMENSIONAL AND INTERWOVEN BETWEEN STUDENTS AND TEACHERS, THEIR SCHOOL, AND THE CURRICULUM.)

Noddings (1992) pointed out that care is relational. Based on the findings from this study, three types of relationships determined whether students feel cared for or not. Regardless of the economic status of the students, out of the three types of relationships, the most important one was that with individual teachers, followed by the school, and then the curriculum. In the case of the most economically advantaged students, their relationship with the curriculum had little influence on whether or not they felt cared for. In contrast, for those at the lower end of the economic spectrum, the curriculum could enhance the chances of their feeling more cared for, particularly when the other two factors had less influence.

Regardless of economic status, the better the relationships of students with teachers or their school, the more likely they were to feel cared for. A third type of relationship between a student, the curriculum, and a teacher had an effect for some of the middle group and the economically disadvantaged students in terms of their feelings of being cared for. Relationships with teachers were thought to be the most important ones in determining whether or not a student felt cared for. This situation was dependent on three factors: (a) if the student is a good student, (b) if the teacher and student share common interests, and (c) if the student feels a personal relationship to the teacher. A relationship with school was thought to be the second most important type of relationship in determining whether or not a student felt cared for. This relationship depended upon two factors: (a) whether or not the student felt he or she was treated

equally with other students, and (b) if she or he felt included. A relationship with the school curriculum was thought to be the least important type in determining whether or not a student felt cared for. This was more dependent on the economic status of the students and whether or not the first two types of relationships were intact.

FINDING 5: TEACHERS AND SCHOOLS OFTEN CREATE RELATIONAL BARRIERS THAT MANIFEST INTO SITUATIONS WHERE SOME STUDENTS FEEL UNCARED FOR.

The students in this study discussed many incidents in which they felt teachers demonstrated non-caring. The economically disadvantaged students gave more examples than the more economically advantaged group, but both gave examples of situations in which they felt the actions of teachers created relational barriers between them. This section includes examples of situations that occurred between teachers and students (from different economic groups) that created problems for the students and led them to believe that certain teachers did not care about them.

Taylor generally felt cared for at her school (Mountainview) but spoke of a few teachers there who assume all the students are wealthy and have made jokes about them. She realized they were probably trying to be funny, but also felt there was a tone of criticism or cynicism in their actions. She said:

> I think there are some teachers here who might not like the students all that much. Our student parking lot has some really nice cars on it and I think [some teachers] think we're all spoiled. They look down on us because we're rich, but that's not being fair to us.

Colleen attends the same school and feels that some of the teachers think all the students are "super-rich." She spoke of a teacher who was new to Mountainview and joked with the class about how it was different from his previous school. He told the students there was more physical violence at his previous school and joked that the kids at Mountainview probably did not have time for fighting, as they were too busy counting their money to see who was the richest. Colleen reflected on this moment and admitted that she and some of her

friends simply rolled their eyes at his stupidity and their impression of him from that time onward was negative.

Charlie was from the economically disadvantaged group and he provided a vivid example of how some teachers demonstrate non-caring. Charlie's economic situation often prevented him from doing activities that other students might take for granted. When he first came to Hilltop School he wanted to play on a particular team but knew he would have difficulty attending the after-school practices. He lived too far from school to walk home and he relied solely on the school bus because his father did not have a vehicle. The team practised twice a week at lunchtime and once after school. Knowing that he could attend all the lunchtime practices, he signed up for the team but the coach interpreted his once-a-week after-school absenteeism as non-dedication to the team. The coach began to treat him more negatively and humiliated him in front of the other players. This is Charlie's perception of the situation:

> I didn't show up for the after-school practices and he really didn't like that. I mean you should see this guy. He's a pretty sporty jock kind of a guy so he wanted everybody else to take it as serious as he does. I wanted to take it serious but I couldn't. Sometimes at lunchtime practices he would get me to demonstrate a throw and then he'd make fun of it in front of the other guys and say that's what happens when you don't show up for practice. One day I just thought this is fucking ridiculous and walked out of the gym and I just didn't go any more. Even though that was a couple years ago now, I still hate that guy and when I see him in the hallways I just always want to say, "Fuck you."

When I asked Charlie if he had ever considered asking if another player's parent could drive him home from the after-school practices he indicated that he was always embarrassed that his dad (a single parent) never had a vehicle and could not afford one. He never discussed his personal problems with the coach and admitted he did not feel comfortable doing so. Charlie perceived him as too uncaring to even try to talk to him.

Charlie told me of another incident in grade 11 when he purposely got himself into trouble so that he would get suspended and prohibited from going on a class ski trip. He did not have $35 to pay for the trip and did not want to ask his dad for money. He certainly did not want to tell the teacher he could not afford to go. In Charlie's mind it was better to be incorrectly seen as a "bad" kid than to be correctly seen as a "poor" kid.

Charlie described yet another incident that had occurred more recently in his grade 12 year. At Hilltop some of the teachers held after-school tutorials to help the students prepare for final exams. Because of transportation problems Charlie could never attend these and prior to a provincial exam, one of his teachers scorned him for not showing up and implied that it would be Charlie's fault if he did not do well on the test because he obviously did not care enough to show up and get extra help.

Alex was another of the economically disadvantaged students who described incidents in which teachers behaved in ways that made him feel uncared for. His earlier secondary experiences had not been good because his parents were going through difficult times and they eventually separated. Alex's grades and behaviour were affected by this but in his mind the teachers often attributed it to his not trying hard enough or not caring about school. His personal difficulties reached a climax late in his grade 9 year and he left Mountainview to go and live with his father in a different city for a short while. While living with his father, some of the teachers and students at the school he attended presumed he must be rich because of where he came from. One teacher jokingly told him, "Being here will show you how the rest of the world lives." He found it difficult to make friends there so part way into grade 10 he returned to Mountainview (although he had few friends there as well). It was hard to catch up on all the missed work and he was behind in a lot of classes. Rather than try and help or support him, he felt many teachers did not understand his situation or interpreted it as his not caring about school (something that did eventually happen). He spoke of some teachers who said to him, "You're going down the wrong path, Alex." He believed they thought he was intentionally not doing well at school. Alex felt they did not care about him and so he gave up caring about school.

Lily spoke of her experiences at both Hilltop and Oceanview as uncaring. She felt this way partly because no one at those schools ever seemed to listen to her or care about what she had to say. She gave an example of this at Hilltop. Lily hated her Gym class and the teacher because she felt she was always being picked on by the other students and by the teacher. On numerous occasions she had reported this. "I'd always go to the principal and complain, and he'd be like, okay I'll deal with it, but nothing was ever done about it." When I asked what made her believe the principal never did anything about it she said, "I just know

he didn't. He didn't care. He would just sit there and look at me pretending he was listening but I knew he would never go to the teacher and tell him." After many complaints, Lily began to feel the principal was becoming irritated at seeing her and on more than one occasion she felt he tried to avoid her. She felt that no one was listening to her and when she angrily visited the principal's office for what became the last time, she was told by the principal, "Okay, you don't have to go to that class any more, but maybe you should consider going to alternate school and see what PE is like there." As it turned out, she did stop going to that class *and* she changed schools but she did not go to the alternate school, she went to Oceanview. Unfortunately the situation was no better for her there than it had been at Hilltop.

At Oceanview, Lily experienced further problems with teachers and the school. Lily wanted to take a regular math class but it was recommended that since she had transferred from another school with a low mark in math, she should take an easier math class. Lily felt they were making judgments about her before giving her a chance to prove she could do regular math. She insisted that she was going to take regular math class but felt that no one listened or cared about what she wanted. Despite her efforts, she was not allowed to take the math class she wanted. She described the situation as: "It's like they didn't really care what I wanted." Lily was at Oceanview for only a short time before she was referred to an alternate school so her math class became irrelevant. At alternate school, Lily felt the teachers actually listened to her and respected what she had to say. They did not want her to take regular math either but they let her do it because she wanted to. She explained how this evolved.

> Like when I first started here they wanted me to take the easy math and at first I thought about it, but then I looked at it and thought, no way, I hate words and the easy math course is all words. Words are the worst thing on the planet. I wanted to do the math that had numbers. The teachers here said if I couldn't do it at regular school I probably shouldn't do it here either, but I am, and I'm almost on Chapter 7. It's hard but I'm doing it. At least here they listened to me and let me try it.

Most of the students in this study felt that teachers and schools valued certain subject areas or activities over others. In situations where they perceived that a teacher did not care about a subject or an activity that the student feels

connected to, they felt this created a barrier that prevented them from developing any sort of a relationship with some teachers.

At Mountainview, a particular sport was held in high regard at the school. The students indicated that those who played on this team often seemed to be held in higher regard than others. In other words, if you played on this team you were more special or more cared for than those who played on other teams or were involved in other activities. Special provisions were made for this group of students whereas other teams did not seem to receive the same recognition. All the students, including Brad and Robert who played on the team, spoke about the revered status this team held at their school. Colleen and Taylor even spoke of how a table in the cafeteria was more or less reserved for the team players and their friends. They noted that certain teachers could often be seen joking around and associating with those students. Colleen admitted that she knew a lot of the players on this team and felt included at the school because of it, but she also found it somewhat humorous that she was a member of a national team and yet she received less recognition for her status than her friends on this team. It appeared to the students at Mountainview that many of the teachers cared deeply about this team and its members and other students were sometimes excluded because of it.

The students at Mountainview referred to their school as being a very academic school that holds mathematics and sciences in high regard. Alex did not like academic subjects at all. He aspired to become a chef but felt marginalized by the other students and felt less valued and less cared for at the school because of the low regard for his interests.

Lily's experience at Hilltop was quite similar to what Alex experienced at Mountainview. Lily described herself as someone who loves art and felt she was a talented artist. Unfortunately she believed her passion and love of art was not shared by many of the students and teachers at either of the secondary schools she attended in School District B. Aside from her experience at the alternate school, Lily spoke of only one teacher she felt cared about her; coincidentally, it was her art teacher at Hilltop. Lily described her as the only teacher who would "stand up for me and get mad at people when they bugged me." This teacher cared about art and since Lily cared so deeply about art, she felt valued as a person.

Regardless of economic status, the students in this study could describe numerous incidents that they perceived as non-caring. Many of them indicated that these incidents had prevented them from wanting to get to know or develop any sort of relationship with certain teachers. These relational barriers often prevented some of the students from feeling cared for.

Although not mentioned by any of the students in the study, at one of the schools I witnessed what I felt was indicative of non-caring while interviewing students on Halloween Day. The event stood out to me, enough so that I decided to record it in my field notes. Many of the students and staff at the school that day were dressed up for Halloween but what particularly stood out was a small group of students parading through the hallways with a sign identifying their group as "trailer park trash." They were getting many laughs and positive reinforcement about their creative idea and costumes. The male costumes included dirty jeans or gym pants, sleeveless T-shirts or shirts with beer advertisements, unkempt hair, and blackened teeth. One of the shirts had "No. 1 Wife Beater" written on it. The two young women in the group were wearing heavy make-up and were dressed in short skirts with large T-shirts covering their supposedly pregnant bellies. As the group paraded the halls some of them also held unlit cigarettes and pretended to be smoking.

FINDING 6: IN THE CASE OF SOME STUDENTS, ECONOMIC STATUS, CARING, AND ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT MAY BE CLOSELY RELATED CONCEPTS.

This finding discusses the relationship between economic status, feeling cared for, and academic achievement. First, the students in this study who are economically disadvantaged do worse at school than those in the other groups of students who are more advantaged. This situation probably does not surprise many people. It is already well understood that economically disadvantaged students often do worse at school than others (Kozol, 1991, 2005; Mandell & Duffy, 2000; Payne, 1996). What is less clear is *why* these students do worse than their more advantaged peers. Numerous researchers have been trying to answer this question for some time. The findings from this study support the belief that economically disadvantaged students often do worse at school, but the findings

also reveal that this group feels considerably less cared for than the students in the other two economic groups. Economic status, feeling cared for, and academic achievement may be closely related concepts.

The students in the study were asked to self-report on how they do at school in terms of their academic achievement. This result was compared to individual school reports found in their student files. With one exception (Donald), the student self-reports were consistent with their school reports, meaning that all but one of the students were aware of how they perform academically.

Three of the economically advantaged students (Richard, Brad, and Colleen) are exceptionally good students. They indicated that they feel very cared for at their school. Their report cards show consistently high marks and they are on the school's Honours with Distinction list (86% - 100% average). Taylor does not do quite as well as the others in this group of students but was not at risk of failing any subjects. She goes to a tutor, which she feels helps her marks especially in math.

The two students in the upper-middle economic group also do well and feel cared for at their school. Robert is an exceptionally good student with consistently high marks; he is on the school's Honours with Distinction list. Julia is also on the honours with Distinction list as she is a very good student although her math was a bit weaker than her other marks. At the time of the interview, she was feeling negatively toward her social studies teacher and was uncertain what her mark in that class might be, but she still had high marks in most of her other classes and was confident she would remain on the school's Honour roll.

The two students in the lower-middle economic group (Emma and Tira) also do well at school. They indicated that for the short time they had attended secondary school, they felt cared for. They were in grade 8 at the time of the interview and had completed just one semester or half a year of secondary school but if their subsequent reports continued to be like the first, they were at no risk of any academic difficulty. They both felt they were good students and this was reflected on their report cards, which showed high marks and positive teacher comments.

Of the economically disadvantaged group, Charlie was doing considerably better than the others. His marks were in the C+ to B+ range with his favourite subjects both being the latter grade. His report cards from earlier

grades, however, were by no means as positive as the most recent. Charlie spoke about how things had changed for him in grade 12 and he was determined to do better than previously. He had not achieved high grades or experienced much academic success until recently. Charlie indicated that he had never felt cared for until his final year and even then he felt only a few teachers cared about him.

Alex was in grade 12 and just wanted to finish high school and get out with passing grades and that was essentially what he was doing. He felt very uncared for at school and he was barely passing his classes. This result had been his pattern throughout high school. His favourite class was foods but that mark was only slightly higher than the others. His report card indicated a lot of absenteeism.

Lily was doing much better at alternate school than she had at regular school. She did not feel she was a good student but she seemed determined to do better at her new school. Her student file confirmed most of what she said about herself. Her report cards showed she had failed a lot of classes and those she did manage to pass were with low grades. Absences were a big problem for Lily, which likely contributed to her poor grades at regular school. She was feeling much more cared for at her new school and she felt it contributed to her better grades, including math, which she struggled with but was determined to keep going.

Donald was the only student in the study who seemed to have an inflated and unrealistic opinion of his academic achievement. He claimed to be a good student but there were no documents or evidence to support this. Donald was also the only student from this group who indicated he felt cared for yet he could give no evidence to support his claims. He was what most would consider a very unsuccessful student at regular school and had mostly negative teacher comments on his report cards. His file was noticeably and strikingly thick, which was due in part to having attended so many different schools. He had been placed in and out of behaviour programs throughout his school history, a fact he revealed in his interview and was confirmed in his student file. His most recent report card from the alternate school was looking slightly more promising. His grades were higher than they had been at regular school but still not above letter grades of C. His recent report had some good news in the form of positive

comments from the alternate education teachers about his attendance and behaviour, which was much better than at regular school.

Based on the findings of this study, economic status and academic achievement appear to be related, but to simply state that economically disadvantaged students do worse than others still does not explain why this might be. Each student in the study was asked whether they felt economic status affected how a student might do at secondary school. They all felt it *should not* but all of them agreed it *does.* Regardless of their individual economic status, the students felt that economically disadvantaged students should be able to achieve at the same levels as other students but that they often do worse. When asked why this might be, most of them were uncertain, although a few of them gave some possible reasons. None of their explanations made any reference to the possibility that feeling uncared for might be a reason. They did not make that connection during the interview and I avoided asking a direct question about whether they felt that care and academic achievement were related, as I felt that might lead them to say it did.

Generally speaking, the most common theme that arose was that having money brings with it certain advantages, which helps some students to be more successful than others. Charlie was one who confidently stated that money could buy advantages in the school system. "Rich kids have huge advantages I'd say." Brad's attitude was similar. He felt that "the richer students do somewhat better" but he added that "it shouldn't really matter and money shouldn't be a huge factor in it but money helps because you can use it to pay for tutors and other ways to get extra help." Emma was more cynical about why the wealthy students might do better. "I think a rich person would probably just get someone to do it for them." She added, "The rich kids have tutors and stuff like that." Alex agreed that there were advantages to being a student with money. He said:

> I don't think they're any smarter, but I'd have to say I think they'd do a little better than a poor student because they can pay to get tutors and stuff. They also have the status to hold onto whereas less wealthy kids, it's just sort of whatever."

Even Donald recognized that the rich kids, or as he called them, rich bastards, might do better. He claimed this was "probably, 'cause they can afford tutors."

Two of the students did not see money as the reason why some students do better than others. To them, hard work and motivation were the reasons, although neither of them were particularly articulate or could explain why wealthy kids might choose to work harder and be more motivated than others. For example, Julia said, "I don't think wealth has anything to do with brains. It's not linked. It's really just how hard you work at it. I guess wealthy kids maybe just work harder because their parents probably expect that from them." Taylor agreed that wealthy kids often do better but she felt poorer kids could do so if they wanted. Taylor said:

> Poor kids can do really well in school and sometimes wealthy kids can too but sometimes [the richer kids] think they'll just live off their parent's money and they don't do well. [Academic success] is not about how much money you have, it's about how badly you want it or need it.

It is clear from the findings that the students acknowledge that economic advantages can mean academic advantages, but their reasons are less clear. They all acknowledged that economically advantaged students often do better than less advantaged students but few could explain why. The students in this study may not have made a direct connection between care and academic achievement but they seem to acknowledge that care is a complex relationship. Perhaps it is too complex for them to see how it can affect academic achievement. Regardless of their belief that money, hard work and motivation are the predictors of academic success, it is difficult to ignore the role of care also being a contributing factor.

CONCLUSION

Studies that use a grounded theory design often present their findings in different styles (Charmaz, 2000). Because this study is about student perceptions of care and experiences of being cared for and not being cared for, I chose to present the findings in a narrative that included the voices of the participants. This chapter has presented empirical findings based on an analysis of the statements and opinions that were expressed to me in interviews as well as observations that were recorded in field notes taken while conducting the research. A discussion of these empirical findings is included in the next chapter in the context of the theoretical and philosophical literature.

The findings from this study indicate that (a) care in an educational context is a complex phenomenon involving multi-dimensional relationships, and (b) economic status is often a factor in how students perceive and experience care in schools. The students in this study had similar ideas about what care means to them, yet what they perceived and experienced as care sometimes differed from one economic group to another. Different students see some actions and attributes of teachers as caring whereas others see them as non-caring. Some students have a greater sense of belonging and feeling cared-for at their respective schools while some feel the school curriculum does not offer what they need and therefore the school does not care. The findings in this study show that caring means different things to different students and confirms that for caring to be recognized as such it must be perceived as care by the one receiving it. The inferred needs of teachers and schools should not supersede the expressed needs of students and students from different economic groups who may have different needs. The findings suggest that relationships are central to caring and that caring can be demonstrated by one incident or the interconnection of several incidents.

CHAPTER 6
DISCUSSION OF THE FINDINGS

The findings in the previous chapter described how students from different economic groups perceive care in secondary schools and what teachers do that affects this experience. The purpose of this chapter is to compare the findings to the literature that offers an explanation for these claims. The title of this paper includes two questions: *Who Cares?* and *Who Doesn't?* This chapter will explain why some students, depending on their economic group, perceive and experience care differently. It will also explain why they might feel certain teachers care (who cares) but others do not (who doesn't).

This chapter has been divided into sub-sections based on themes that arose from the research findings. Each theme is presented as a separate topic, discussed in relation to the findings of this study, and compared to the relevant literature. Some of the themes are congruent with explanations that contribute to feeling cared for whereas others are more congruent with non-caring. The themes or topics are presented below in a particular order because they build upon one another and often overlap.

Some of the sections below refer to literature that was not included in the original literature review. A study using grounded theory methods sometimes requires the researcher to draw from literature other than which what was used in the original literature review (Cresswell, 2002). The reason for this is that when researchers using this method make a particular claim, they often find themselves searching for explanations that were not a consideration at the beginning of the study. As a research study progresses, grounded theorists need to engage with more and more literature, which will help them to understand the phenomenon they are researching. Some of this literature will be more familiar to them, while other literature will be new.

CARE AND STUDENT NEEDS

Noddings (2005) claimed, "An ethic of care is needs-based" (p. 147). This study confirms that such a claim is valid. All the students in this study described actions and behaviours of teachers that they felt represented care and these behaviours are what students felt they *needed* or expected from *caring* teachers. When they were asked to describe what caring meant, the participants responded with comments similar to one made by Brad: "Caring people look after the needs of others." Richard echoed this claim but discussed caring in an educational context by saying, "I think every teacher can and should care about the needs of their students."

Needs was a common theme throughout the interviews and evidently one that all the students, regardless of their economic status, deemed as important to the role of care in an educational context. Noddings (2005) claimed, "Assessing and responding to [student] needs is one of the most difficult tasks faced by parents and teachers" (p. 148). She made a distinction between two types of needs, expressed and inferred, and argued that this is why teachers often have difficulty meeting the needs of students. The expressed needs of students are often not properly addressed (if addressed at all) since the inferred needs of teachers are usually given higher priority. In other words, teachers often think they know what their students need and work from this premise rather than acknowledging the expressed needs of their students. This does not imply that each expressed need of a student has to be honoured but rather, she argued that if an expressed need is ignored altogether or not responded to with sensitivity, students are less likely to feel cared for. "There are times when I cannot respond by meeting the expressed needs . . . . [But] in all cases, I try to respond in a way that will maintain the caring relation" (Noddings, 2005, p. 147). Addressing student needs can be problematic for many teachers and this dilemma likely contributes to why some students feel more cared for than others. It seems pertinent, then, for teachers to have some understanding of the needs of their students and respond to them accordingly.

The findings from this study could help teachers by giving them a starting point for understanding some of the needs of students. This does not suggest there is a specific or exhaustive list of universal needs that *all* students need but there may be some needs that are more basic to most students. For example, *all*

the students in this study gave similar descriptions of caring and caring teachers. They described actions such as helping and supporting as being congruent with a caring teacher, along with attributes of loving, empathy, genuineness, flexibility and humour. To look at this description from a needs perspective, these actions and attributes can be thought of as needs that the students in this study have come to expect from teachers. It is quite possible that other groups of students might have similar expectations. How teachers meet these needs will determine whether or not students feel cared for.

If meeting the needs of students is central to forming a caring relationship with teachers, it is difficult to ignore the work of William Glasser (1986). Glasser claimed that *all* human beings share some common and universal needs that go beyond those that are required for survival. Since Glasser suggested these needs are basic for *all* of us, they can be placed in an educational context and include secondary students of all economic groups.

> As creatures have evolved from simple to complex, the basic need to survive has been augmented by additional basic needs. Humans not only need (1) to survive and reproduce, but also (2) to belong and love, (3) to gain power, (4) to be free and (5) to have fun. All five needs are built into our genetic structure as instructions for how we must attempt to live our lives. (Glasser, 1986, p. 25)

Whether these five needs are built into our genetic structure or not can be left for another to determine, but I support Glasser's claim that certain needs are basic to all of us. For students to be successful or to use Glasser's terminology—to survive—in the academic realm, it is pertinent that teachers acknowledge their needs and try to accommodate them. The basic needs Glasser outlined were consistent with the findings in this study.

The students in this study talked about love and belonging, power, freedom and fun as aspects of caring. Glasser placed belonging and love together as one of the basic human needs whereas the students in this study discussed them separately. The other needs were not all worded as Glasser termed them but the students alluded to them in their interviews. After survival, Glasser put belonging as first in his list of needs. Belonging was emphasized by the students in this study and was presented as one of the major findings in the previous chapter. Belonging turned out to be a key concept of this study. Rather than

discuss it here as part of student needs, I have presented it separately in a later section of this chapter. The other needs are included here.

Love was discussed in considerable detail by at least three of the students in this study. hooks (2003) indicated that when we speak of love in education it is usually considered a "taboo" subject. Love may be considered taboo in some circles but some students in this study felt it was an integral characteristic of a caring teacher. Those who expressed love as caring came from all three economic groups which suggests it is a basic need shared by many students. Students need to feel that their teachers love them. The students differentiated between the type of love that intimate partners share from that which teachers and students might share. As one participant, Charlie, put it, "A caring teacher is one that loves their students." He added that it is a different kind of love from that which we share with a partner. Charlie went onto say, "We love the ones we care about, and we care about the ones we love." hooks (2003) would add that a caring teacher not only loves their students but they also love what they are teaching and students observe their love of both (p. 127).

The word power was not used directly by any of the students in the study but many alluded to it being a need. Power (and control) is often seen as a negative word in some circles (Glasser, 1986) but if we replace it with terms such as self-regulation or autonomy, it has a more positive connotation. The students in this study described caring teachers as those who are flexible and non-controlling. Taylor advised teachers "not [to] be control freaks or power crazy, but don't be a pushover either." When teachers are too controlling, students have no sense of autonomy and their own need for power is not acknowledged. This does not imply that caring teachers should relinquish all their power and control and allow the students to have full control over their classroom. It means, instead, that the power or control over educational decisions should be shared between the two parties and reciprocity should be encouraged. A caring teacher will acknowledge the need of his or her students to have some power over how their classrooms are organized including what they might want to learn and how they learn it.

The students did not address freedom directly but hinted that it was an important need. Take for example the issue of curriculum choices. Many of the students spoke of the need to have more choice over what subjects they wanted to learn. Some of them described the school curriculum as rigid and said that it

did not allow freedom of choice for students to learn what might interest them. Noddings (1992) argued that a liberal arts education, which is the most commonly prescribed school curriculum, does not meet the needs of all students. A one-size-fits-all curriculum that does not allow for flexibility or freedom for what students want to learn does not meet the needs of all students. This validates the claims of the students in this study who stated that teachers need to be flexible and allow students to make some choices in the classroom. The students recognized that teachers are required or mandated to teach certain subjects and suggested that allowing more choice or freedom in how the students learn could be one way of addressing this need.

Glasser indicated that fun is a universal need of all people. Many of the students in this study spoke of fun and humour as essential aspects or needs of a caring relationship. Regardless of which economic group the students were from they felt teachers should make learning fun. They also felt it was good when teachers could be funny at times or have a sense of humour. bell hooks (2010) reminded teachers of the importance of humour when she said, "Being smart and being serious are traits that teachers value. However, we can become so serious that we leave no place for humour in the classroom" (p. 69). She went on to describe an event that took place in her classroom that helped her recognize the need for students to experience humour in the classroom. "I joined in the laughter, and it was one of many moments of illumination that can happen in the classroom. I realized then that both wit and regular old everyday humour could really serve to create a more open atmosphere in the classroom" (hooks, 2010, p. 71).

The connection between what Glasser claims are universal needs (belonging, love, power, freedom, and fun) and the findings from this study are strikingly similar. If care is, as Noddings (2005) claimed, needs-based, then, it would be helpful for teachers to acknowledge these needs and implement them in their teaching practice. Care was perceived in a similar manner by all the students in this study, which suggests that there could be needs that are basic to all students. Indeed, the Cassidy and Bates (2005) study of students' perceptions of care found that middle and secondary level students had similar conceptions of a caring teacher. The students in this study described a caring teacher as: providing a welcoming and accepting environment, showing love, making learning fun, being flexible, and providing curriculum options. This does not

suggest that the five needs Glasser referred to are the *only* needs that students have; rather, it suggests that these five might be basic to all and that students have different needs beyond these. This study also found that care was not experienced by all of the students in the same manner, which suggests that for some, their needs are either not being addressed or not being recognized or perceived as caring.

CARE AND RECEPTIVITY AND RECIPROCITY

The discussion (above) suggests that students may have similar needs that teachers should strive to meet in their classrooms. This situation becomes complex, however, when we consider claims made by Noddings (1992). She theorized that for any action or behaviour to be defined as care, students must receive, recognize and respond to it as such. Her theory was validated in the findings from this study with numerous examples where students described certain actions as caring whereas others saw them quite differently. This makes it difficult for teachers, as there is clearly no recipe or prescribed approach they can use to care for their students. Teachers must recognize that students have needs and try to address them, but each student reacts differently. If a teacher infers that a student has a need but the student has not expressed that need, it will likely not be received as caring and may negatively affect the relationship between the two parties.

To illustrate this more clearly, I will use the example of how most of the students in this study identified caring teachers as those who would engage with them in a personal manner rather than just an academic one. What defined a personal manner, however, varied between students. For some of the students it included talking to them about personal matters, whereas others felt differently. In other words, many students may need and benefit from the personal attention of their teachers but what this entails differs from one to another. The students in the economically advantaged group (Brad, Colleen, Richard, and Taylor) all spoke about caring teachers engaging in personal discussions with them. Taylor spoke about one teacher and said, "It's just like we're friends," but the students at the lower end of the economic spectrum felt quite differently. They were more restricted in what they were willing to discuss and share with teachers and if

they did discuss anything personal there were more boundaries or limits to what would be included. For Donald, a personal relationship with a teacher was the sort he had with one whom he went running with every day. He indicated he never wanted to talk to any of his teachers about personal matters and went on to say that his personal life was none of their business. He added that it bothered him when some teachers tried to "butt in" to his personal matters. In my interview with Donald there were times when he did not answer questions that were of a more personal nature. Alex shared Donald's beliefs about personal relationships with teachers. Alex did not believe it should even be in the mandate of teachers to care. He said, "Their job isn't to care about us, it's to teach us." He spoke of incidents where teachers would comment on his behaviour and attitude about school or they would express concern about his personal choices. He indicated strongly, "It is none of their business." Donald and Alex both agreed that teachers who try to engage their students in a more personal relationship may believe that they are doing so because they care but as Donald said, "They only make things worse."

A caring teacher should recognize Donald and Alex's *need* for privacy and would respect this so that it does not interfere in building a caring relationship with them. This acknowledgement would require what Noddings called "motivational displacement." The inferred need or motivation of the teacher to talk about personal matters, thinking it is something the student wants or needs would be replaced by the expressed need of the student for privacy. The teacher might like to discuss a personal matter with a student and feel that this represents caring but if it is not the expressed need of the student, it will not be received or accepted by them as such.

Care, then, is relational and based on needs but unless students perceive teachers' actions as caring, it cannot be considered caring. Noddings (1992) argued that care is subjective, which puts a tremendous burden on the care-giver but she also stressed the importance of reciprocity. A caring relation must include reciprocity wherein the student has acknowledged that the teacher's actions were caring. The student will then respond in such a way that the teacher acknowledges that her or his actions have been received. Noddings (1992) described it in the following way:

> [F]or the relation to be properly called caring, both parties must contribute to it in characteristic ways. A failure on the part of either carer or cared-for blocks completion of caring and although there may still be a relation . . . it is not a caring relation. . . . No matter how hard teachers try to care, if the caring is not received by students, the claim "they don't care" has some validity. It suggests strongly that something is very wrong. (Noddings, 1992, p. 15)

CARE AND BELONGING

Belonging was discussed earlier as one of five needs that Glasser (1986) claimed as a basic need for everyone including students. Osterman (2000) emphasized that it may well be the most important need for students. Belonging emerged in the interviews with students in this study so often that it was presented as a major finding. The students sometimes interchanged the word "belonging" with "fitting-in," but regardless of the term, there was a relationship between belonging and feeling cared for. The students in this study who felt the most cared for also indicated they had a strong sense of belonging or that they fitted in at their schools, whilst those who felt less cared for indicated they felt they did not belong or fit in. There was also an obvious relationship between the economic group the students came from and their sense of belonging. The more economically advantaged the students were, the more they indicated they felt they belonged or fitted in at school, whereas the less advantaged they were, the less they felt they belonged or fitted in. From my observations, it seemed to be the wealthiest student in the study was the one who felt the most cared for and this trend continued downward to the poorest student who felt the least cared for.

Pierre Bourdieu's (1977) concept of social field and habitus was discussed in the original literature review and it provides a good explanation for why some students feel they belong at their school and why others do not. Bourdieu claimed that habitus may work in the following way when one feels they do not fit in or belong at their place of work, and presumably this applies to being a student at school:

> Imagine a social situation in which you feel or anticipate feeling awkward, out of your element, like a "fish out of water." You may decide not to go, to declare it as "not for the likes of me," or (if there already) to make your excuses and leave. In this case the structuring of your habitus

> does not match that of the social field. (Bourdieu, 1977, as cited in Grenfell, 2008, p. 57)

It could be said that schools are a middle-class institution where the curriculum and policies are based on middle-class ideals (Lott, 2001; Kozol, 1991, 2005; Payne, 1996). This could lead some economically disadvantaged students to feel unfamiliar or out of place within the social field of school and with the habitus of those they interact with at school. Compared with the smaller private domain of their home and community, the larger public domain of school and the habitus of the other students and teachers may be quite foreign to the disadvantaged students. This can lead to a sense of not fitting in or belonging.

The concepts of social field and habitus help to explain why some of the students in this study felt a sense of belonging while others did not. Each of the four economically advantaged students and the two upper middle class ones in this study indicated they had a strong sense of belonging at school. They felt very comfortable at their school and they fitted in there. Bourdieu's theories explain why this is so:

> Children from culturally wealthy backgrounds inherit that wealth in the form of embodied dispositions which are recognized and valued both by teachers and by the institutional procedures of the educational field. These students appear brighter and more articulate to their teachers because they "speak the same language" and because the cultural knowledge and abilities valued and rewarded within the educational system are those which these children have experienced and acquired at home. Perhaps their parents read the books that are taught in literature classes or listen to the music that features on the school syllabus. Certainly, their parents have succeeded in school, before them, and are in a position to help with their schoolwork. In this way, the embodied cultural capital of these pupils is used (however unknowingly) to procure the qualifications (institutionalized cultural capital), which in turn afford power in the job market. (Bourdieu, 1984, as cited in Grenfell, 2008, p. 95)

Students such as Brad, Richard, Colleen, and Robert identified themselves as good students and agreed that most if not all of their teachers cared about them. The social field and habitus of this group of students is often valued more by teachers who themselves come mostly from middle-class backgrounds or have arrived there due to upward social mobility (hooks, 2003; Kozol, 1991). Some of these middle-class teachers perhaps look down on the habitus of the economically disadvantaged students. In either case, how teachers treat and

respond to their students affects how the students feel about being at school and whether or not they experience a sense of belonging.

Bourdieu's (1977) theory can also be applied if we look at it from the perspective of the disadvantaged students in this study. In the case of Tira and Emma, both students identified themselves as [lower] middle-class yet the teacher who referred them to me identified them as being economically disadvantaged. As a researcher, this was a confusing situation because I was faced with the difficult dilemma of having to accept either the girls' or their teacher's opinion of their economic status. In the end I chose to accept how the girls identified themselves. It makes more sense to me now why these two students felt they were middle class. Emma and Tira both attended Hilltop where there are a large number of disadvantaged students and very few wealthy ones. They indicated they both felt at ease and had a sense of belonging at their school. Their social field and habitus is similar to the majority of the students at their school so they felt they fitted it and belonged. The girls acknowledged that there were poor kids at their school but they felt their families were financially better off than some of the others so it makes sense that they would identify themselves as middle-class. In a roundabout way they were situated in the middle of the economic spectrum at their school, albeit a school where there are disproportionate numbers of economically disadvantaged students. Further to this, the fact that both girls felt they belonged and fitted in at Hilltop made being at school a more comfortable experience and they were more academically successful than many of their less advantaged peers. Their teachers would therefore like them more because they were "good" students.

The other economically disadvantaged students in this study all indicated they did not experience a sense of belonging at their school and they felt less cared for than the more advantaged students. Charlie, Alex, Lily, and Donald all felt out of place at school, although the latter two indicated this had changed once they began attending alternate schools. Of all the students in the study, Alex felt the least cared for at school and experienced the least sense of belonging or fitting in.

Bourdieu's (1977) concept he referred to as "hysteresis" would fit with what some of the economically disadvantaged students felt. Before Donald moved to alternate school much of what he described of being at regular school

(Hilltop) was hysteresis. It was also what Alex experienced at Mountainview. Hysteresis may be defined as what people experience when they are placed in an environment (social field) that feels foreign to them or when people feel *like a fish out of water.* Hysterisis creates "a painful struggle to maintain a desirable place in the [new] field" (p. 132). Alex was an example of this state and even confided that with me that he had previously been seeing a counsellor for anxiety and depression. He strongly indicated that he did not like being at school, he felt he did not fit in or belong there, and felt the teachers did not care about him. He was the only student who could not identify anyone in his school who he felt cared about him. Why might Alex be defined as a student who was experiencing hysteresis more strongly than any of the other disadvantaged students? I would argue the reason was that Alex felt different from most of the other students at his school. He attended Mountainview, a very wealthy school, yet he identified himself as a poor student, which made him feel very uncomfortable. He was also the only Mountainview student in the study who lived in a single-parent household, which he stated was something that also made him different from many of the other students at the school. Alex admitted that he simply could not identify with most of the other students (or staff) at his school—he felt *like a fish out of water*—and felt he did not belong there. This caused him great stress and anxiety. Quite frankly, Alex hated school. He hated being there and he felt that no one there cared about him. His situation was somewhat different from the other economically disadvantaged students in the study. They also felt out of place at school, but unlike Alex's situation, a significant number of students in their respective schools shared a similar social field and habitus. Some of them were able to cope with their situation better than others. Alex was essentially a hostage in a social field that was completely foreign to him and because of this he experienced a great deal of hysteresis including feelings of not belonging and not being cared for.

Bourdieu's (1977) theories explain why some students feel a greater sense of belonging than others but they do not explain why those who feel they fit in are also more likely to feel cared for and vice versa. It is difficult to ignore the fact that each student in this study who felt they belonged also felt cared for and vice versa. McWhirter et al. (1998) have conducted a considerable amount of research regarding at-risk youth and high-school drop-outs, and found a similar

co-relationship between belonging and care. They identified a number of reasons that students give for dropping out of high school. Among their reasons, one was that they often felt that no one, including other students, teachers or staff ever noticed or cared about them. They felt they were invisible, unnoticed and that they did not *fit in.* The "at risk" students in the Cassidy and Bates (2005) study made similar comments when they were reflecting on their experiences in regular public school. In comparison, the alternate school described in the same study catered to their needs and they considered it to be a caring, accepting and respectful environment. These two studies suggest that many at-risk students, which would include those from economically disadvantaged backgrounds, feel they do not fit in or belong and they also feel uncared for. Does this mean that belonging and care are synonymous? I have pondered this question throughout the study.

There is a relationship between a student feeling cared for and feeling he or she belongs, but I do not believe they are the same thing. In this study I found that one often precedes the other. Care usually precedes belonging but sometimes belonging can precede care. It might even be possible that a student could feel they belong but still not feel cared for, although this finding was not evident in this study. Care and belonging begin to occur when a student enters an unfamiliar public realm or social field such as a school.

If a student of a different social field and habitus enters a school where the field and habitus of the others is unfamiliar to them, they may initially feel uncomfortable and want to retreat to the safety of their own comfort zone. They would feel they do not belong there. The same reaction occurs when any of us finds ourselves in an uncomfortable social situation where we feel we do not belong and would rather not be there. We plan physical and emotional escape routes accordingly. The way those in the social field respond to the newcomers determines whether or not the newcomers feel they belong. If the newcomers are treated with dignity and respect they are likely to feel they matter to the others there, they will feel that the others care about them, and they will begin to feel that they belong. If on the other hand they are not shown care and are treated with indifference or as though they are invisible, they will feel uncared for and feel as though they do not fit in or belong. This type of scenario suggests that care precedes belonging.

If a student enters a social field such as a school, which feels familiar to them and one where the other students share a common habitus, the student is likely to feel comfortable right from the beginning. This is like times any of us might have entered an unfamiliar place but we feel ok about being there; we feel comfortable with those who are there and we feel a sense of belonging. For students, this perception allows them to feel at ease and to go about developing relationships with other students and staff. If they feel comfortable and have a sense of belonging at school they will likely engage in classroom and other activities at the school. This will likely help them feel cared for by teachers, as it was noted earlier that teachers often care more about "good" students than others, and a "good" student is one who participates and is involved. What is not always considered is that for a student to be "good" they have to feel comfortable and that they belong. This type of scenario suggests that belonging precedes care.

The four economically disadvantaged students in this study all felt uncared for and did not experience a sense of belonging. Presumably some economically disadvantaged students do feel cared for and feel they belong at their respective schools. Why is it, then, that some economically disadvantaged students can find themselves in what may be an uncomfortable social field but still manage to survive and even thrive in such a situation? Different educational theorists offer insights that help to explain this.

Jonathon Kozol (1991, 2005) claimed that teachers have the biggest impact on the way economically disadvantaged students come to feel about school and subsequently how they might do academically. Many types of differences or otherness are quite unfamiliar to the teacher and many if not all of the other students. For the most part, however, it is the teacher's responsibility to ensure that such differences are accommodated and that no student feels uncared for. Deschenes (2001) argued that schools are organized in ways that serve privileged groups much better than marginalized ones including those who are economically disadvantaged. In *Savage Inequalities* (1991) Kozol indicated that even in the worst of physical conditions in some inner city schools, and despite immense social and economic barriers, when teachers strove to understand poverty, maintain a positive rapport, and establish relationships with their students, they often managed to help their students feel cared for and do well academically. These teachers worked hard at not letting poverty interfere in their

relations with students. Bingham (2001) echoed the need for teachers to ensure that students feel recognized and cared for at school. He stressed that, regardless of any real or perceived differences that exist in classrooms, teachers must do whatever they can to make sure that *all* of their students receive the dignity they deserve. hooks (2003) claimed that in regard to what matters most in education, it is the relationship between teacher and student. She indicated that for academic growth to occur, students have to feel cared for by their teachers (p. 127). Cassidy and Bates (2005) wrote about the need for care to be embodied in the "soil" of the school, so that marginalized and disadvantaged students see and experience acceptance and worth in all policies and practices.

The effect of care on helping students feel a greater sense of belonging cannot be underestimated. When teachers demonstrate care in a manner in which students feel their needs are being met, they will feel cared for and that they belong. Many economically disadvantaged students, including the ones in this study, have indicated that they felt un-cared for and that they do not belong at their respective schools. It is imperative, therefore, that teachers understand how care and belonging are related. It is also imperative that they are aware of factors that contribute to or hinder their chances of forming positive caring relationships with *all* students.

Relational Barriers and Non-Caring

Readers may note that the previous titles of sections were all prefaced by the word care and followed by terms such as needs, receptivity, and belonging. For this section, I have intentionally changed the order of the wording by placing relational barriers before non-caring. I chose to do this because the relational barriers described below occur first and then contribute to a feeling of non-caring. I am using the term *relational barriers,* as it fits with the many examples given by students in the study about instances when they felt teachers did not care about them and subsequently they had a poor relationship with the teachers. Relational barriers often come between teachers and students, which limits or prevents the two parties from forming a caring relationship. It is important for teachers to recognize these barriers so that they can circumvent their interfering with any relationships with students. I have used terms from

relevant literature to label and describe each aspect of what I call a relational barrier. They include: misrecognition, symbolic violence, distancing, oppression, and classism. They are presented in descending order based on how often the participants discussed each one.

Misrecognition

The students in this study talked most often about misrecognition as a type of relational barrier. None of them specifically used this term to describe incidents as cases of misrecognition but this is what many of them experienced. Misrecognition appeared to be more prevalent in the conversations with the economically disadvantaged students but the more advantaged students also spoke of incidents when they were "misrecognized." In its most basic definition, misrecognition occurs when individuals make false assumptions about another person. It is the opposite of being recognized.

One of the most informative and insightful works on recognition in educational settings is Charles Bingham's *Schools of Recognition* (2001). Bingham's work derives in part from Hegel's (1770/1831) philosophical notion of recognition but he applied it to education. Bingham drew on the work of a number of theorists but the four frameworks that he described are those of Charles Taylor, Martin Buber, Judith Butler and Jessica Benjamin. It is not within the scope of this thesis to describe each of these models in detail, so I will provide only a brief overview of how recognition, or rather misrecognition, can be understood in relation to economic status in an educational setting.

> Human beings need something from one another when they come together in places such as schools. Human beings need dignity. It is my claim that dignity is nurtured through recognitive means within human encounters. . . . My bottom line is that human beings *need* recognition because they *deserve* dignity. (Bingham, 2001, p. 9)

Bingham (2001) emphasized dignity throughout his work. The way others get the dignity they deserve is dependent upon how others recognize and treat them. Bingham suggested that each time we encounter a new person we must assume that we know nothing about him or her. We must cast aside any assumptions about them or any discourses that may influence our recognition of the other person and come to know them in their own way. In order to do this it

seems prudent that we must first learn about the process of recognition and increase our awareness of how we encounter others. Despite what we see when we first encounter another person, including things that seem familiar or different to ourselves, we must regard that person as a clean slate. We must give people dignity and trust that whatever they are doing, even if it is different from our own beliefs, they are doing it for a reason and it is not our place to judge it as wrongful. This does not suggest that we have to accept every action and behaviour that another exhibits, but rather, we have to trust that the other has the potential to do things differently (and perhaps better) if given the chance. Carl Rogers (1981) would call this unconditional positive regard. Nel Noddings (1992) would call it positive affirmation or confirmation. Whatever we call it or whichever theory supports the notion of recognizing others in a positive manner, the most important aspect is that other human beings receive the dignity they deserve.

The economically advantaged students in this study were all from the same school (Mountainview) and some more than others felt that certain teachers misrecognized and did not understand them. Taylor and Colleen gave examples and spoke at length about incidents of misrecognition. They believed there were a few teachers at the school who assumed every student at Mountainview was wealthy and they sometimes made inappropriate comments or jokes about the student body. Both girls indicated these teachers were probably just trying to be funny but they noted there was often a tone of criticism or cynicism in the teachers' actions. The teachers seemed to "misrecognize" the students and made wrongful assumptions about them based on their economic status, in this case, their advantaged economic status. Both girls agreed that these teachers' negative (and wrongful) feelings toward them inhibited their wanting to have any sort of positive relationship with the teachers.

The economically disadvantaged students in this study also felt that incorrect assumptions were made about them and cited many more examples of this than students from the other groups. Charlie and Alex's situations best represent this type of relational barrier. Neither student felt he had good relationships with teachers. Both students cited numerous examples where incorrect assumptions were made about them, which created a relational barrier between them and many of their teachers.

Charlie was described in the previous chapter so he and his situation will not be repeated here, but his experiences at Hilltop clearly demonstrated how economically disadvantaged students can be misunderstood or misrecognized. The incidents he described with a coach and teachers who felt he did not care about his involvement in sports and school respectively are blatant examples of incorrect assumptions being made about him. The incident where he got himself into trouble to avoid going on a ski trip so that he did not have to face the embarrassment of not having the money to pay for it is perhaps not atypical of what other students like Charlie might experience. For many of them, like Charlie, it is possibly perceived as being better to be misrecognized as a "bad" kid than to be correctly recognized as a "poor" kid.

Alex's situation is worth noting again in regard to misrecognition, as he experienced it in two schools and quite differently at each one. In the first instance, he had moved from Mountainview to a new school where many of the students and teachers wrongfully assumed that he must be a "rich kid" because of where he had come from. One teacher at this school welcomed him to "the real world." He was misrecognized as being a "rich kid" in a school where there were not many wealthy students and wrongful comments and jokes (like those described by Taylor and Colleen) were directed at Alex. When he eventually returned to Mountainview (where he was a poor kid) he encountered teachers who said to him, "You're going down the wrong path, Alex." He believed that because he was perceived as being different from most of the kids there, they interpreted his actions and beliefs as intentionally not doing well at school. In reality, these teachers did not understand how out of place Alex felt at Mountainview and were in effect preventing what might have been a better relationship which might have made him feel more in place. Alex felt they did not care about him and he subsequently gave up on caring about school.

How can recognition be applied more effectively in an educational setting to offset the damage that misrecognition so often does to children? All four models of recognition that Bingham (2001) discussed are relevant to this question but I will look at the one I feel best addresses issues of misrecognition in schools. I will look at the role of confirmation. Bingham (2001) and Noddings (1992) used the work of Buber (1878-1965) to propose their own notions about confirmation although they each defined it in a slightly different manner. Rogers (1961, 1980)

used the term "unconditional positive regard," but it is strikingly similar to what the others call "confirmation."

Hegel described our natural instinct as seeing ourselves in the other and "suppressing otherness into sameness" (Hegel, 1770-1831, as cited in Houlgate, 1998, p. 99). In other words, when we first meet a person we compare them to ourselves and from that impression we make some sort of a recognition or acknowledgement to the other person that they are deemed as either positive or negative by us. True confirmation of an "other" is to "conceptualize the other as absolutely unknowable" (Bingham, 2001, p. 19). In such cases we do not make any attempt to see ourselves in the *other* and we see them as a clean slate that we will come to know and who will show us who they are. If we believe that each new person we encounter is a clean slate, we are less likely to misrecognize them. "Buber's insistence that we treat the other as independent and unknowable is squarely within the modernist tradition of presence-with-an-other. It is a human quality to be embraced through the act of confirmation" (Bingham, 2001, p. 19).

Noddings (1992) also used Buber's ideas of confirmation as recognizing another person in a positive manner although her interpretation was different from Bingham's. Noddings claimed, "Martin Buber described confirmation as an act of affirming and encouraging the best in others" (p. 25). Her interpretation differs from Bingham's because it suggests one would first have to know the other in order to confirm them. Noddings noted:

> When we confirm someone, we spot a better self and encourage its development. We can do this only if we know the other well enough to see what he or she is trying to become. . . . We do not set up a single ideal or set of expectations for everyone to meet, but we identify something admirable, or at least acceptable, struggling to emerge in each person we encounter. The person working toward a better self must see the attribute or goal as worthy, and we too must see it as at least morally acceptable. We do not confirm people in ways we judge to be wrong. . . . [In other cases] we see a self that is better than [an] act. (p. 25)

Whichever philosophical definition of confirmation we use (Bingham or Noddings), it is less important than focusing on the positive outcome of confirming another person. In one situation the *other* person is recognized as unknowable and in the second they are recognized for having positive characteristics. In either case the *other* is less likely to be misrecognized which will have a more positive than negative outcome.

Noddings (1992) described confirmation as not unlike the act of unconditional regard that Carl Rogers used in therapeutic settings. In his experience, when clients experienced themselves as fully received, regardless of whether they expressed characteristics such as fear, anger, shame, pleasure or even affection, they got better (Rogers, 1961, as cited in Griffin, 1991). Rogers made no judgments about his clients and he came to know them in their own right and accepted them for who they were. Even in situations where clients would most often be revered by others, Rogers tried to understand what had shaped them to become who they were and he ensured that they were treated with unconditional positive regard in the hope that they would strive to become a different person if they so wished.

Similarly to Rogers, Nel Noddings implied, "Confirmation lifts us toward our vision of a better self" (Noddings, 1992, p. 25). Her notion of confirmation is somewhat different in that it suggests there are times when we must look beyond actions and a person's behaviour to see them in a favourable light, but nevertheless we must see that there is "a self that is better than [their] act" (p. 25). Like Rogers, then, we see that Noddings believes that we must always regard and recognize a person in a positive manner and not judge them by any particular characteristics or behaviours that they may exhibit when we encounter them.

To relate this concept to the context of education and economic status we can see how confirmation as a form of recognition would be useful in interacting with students. If teachers approached their students and treated them as a clean slate, not judging them based on past history, and confirmed them for who they are and not who they think they might be, students would develop better relationships with them. I have already mentioned that many children from disadvantaged backgrounds have limited educational success and that many of them drop out of school earlier than their peers. I have also pointed out that many students who drop out feel that they do not belong or that no one understands them. Many feel they are misrecognized. So if confirmation were practised on a more regular level and became common practice for teachers, it could decrease the chances of a relational barrier between teachers and students. Confirmation could counteract misrecognition and enhance the relationships between teachers and students.

I have spent considerably more time discussing the concept of misrecognition than the other relational barriers between teachers and students. This was deliberate because I think misrecognition is more common in schools than the other barriers, a claim that this study validates. Furthermore, I believe there is hope for teachers to curb misrecognition in schools. The act of confirmation could help in recognizing each student in a dignified manner and ensuring they are not misrecognized. Teachers must learn about confirmation. They must practise it and make it a way of living, an ontological process that is built into their educational practice. By doing so, they are more likely to develop positive and caring relationships with their students.

Symbolic Violence

Pierre Bourdieu (1977) defined symbolic violence as something that occurs in a wide range of settings from public consumerism to institutional domains such as schools. The most simplistic definition of symbolic violence is when something (or someone) is highly valued or held in greater esteem than other things (or people) and when it is reinforced to others that they or the things they value are of less value. The violence associated with it is shown by degrading and sometimes humiliating things or people who do not quite attain the social status attached to the symbol (thing or person). In the case of education, many of the students in this study spoke of incidents that could be defined as symbolic violence. The students seemed to take for granted that it was natural for some things or people to take precedence or have a higher status over others. In some instances their comments inferred a relationship between symbolic violence and non-caring.

At Mountainview, a particular sport was held in high regard. Each of the students from Mountainview indicated that those who played on this team are held in high regard at the school. They felt that many of the staff cared more about this sport than any other activity at the school and if you played on this team you were more cared for. Brad and Robert played on this team and agreed that it gave them an elevated social status at the school. Robert admitted that there were times he used this to his advantage when he handed assignments in late. Colleen and Taylor were friends with many on this team and often sat at *their table,* but indicated if you were not associated with this team you were not given the same social status at the school. It appeared to the students at

Mountainview that some of the teachers cared more about this team and its members than other students who were not considered as special.

Another example of symbolic violence in secondary schools is that certain subjects are held in higher regard than others. This is perhaps more problematic than the elevated social status of a team and likely has a greater effect in determining whether or not students feel cared for. It appeared that subjects such as mathematics and science are held in higher regard than many other curricular areas, but overall, any subject considered "academic" is more prestigious than others. This situation made it difficult for students such as Alex, Lily, and Charlie who cared more about subjects such as cooking, art, and drama class respectively. These students felt their interests did not matter to a lot of the staff at their schools and in turn they felt less valued and cared for.

Colleen commented that her school offered lots of activities or courses for everybody and that each student could thrive at Mountainview if they wanted to. The school did indeed seem to offer a lot of curricular choices for students. It is a relatively small school, with a grade 12 class of only about 160 students, yet they have three Advanced Placement classes of calculus (which is not a required class) accommodating about 90 students. On the other hand they offer only one each of cooking, textiles and woodworking classes and these are combined with other grade levels to ensure that the class size warrants having these classes at all. The issue here is not whether schools should offer more of one class than another, particularly in cases where student demand warrants having, say, three classes of calculus. The issue is rather about ensuring that whichever classes are offered, regardless of number, they are respected equally. At some schools, it appears that this is not the case and it is not surprising that students such as Alex, Lily and Charlie felt out of place at their schools.

Bourdieu (1977) pointed out that symbolic violence is prevalent, if not rampant, in greater society, as it contributes to consumerism and capitalism. It seems unlikely, then, that schools will ever be immune from it altogether. This does not diminish the need for teachers to recognize and understand how it can affect some students. Symbolic violence has a permeating effect on them in that they feel they or their interests do not matter to others and that no one cares. Some students may feel less valued or less cared for if their interests are not congruent with the social norms of the majority. Teachers must appreciate and

value all subject areas and activities in which their students participate. This does not imply they need to have the same passion and admiration for each one. It simply means they should model respect to students and show them they care about whichever activity they are involved in. The teachers should value and respect all the subject areas and activities in a school equally.

Writers such as Noddings (1992), Bingham (2001), and hooks (2003) stressed the importance for all students to be regarded equally so that symbolic violence is not perpetuated. We do not want certain students to feel they or their social status is better or more worthy than others. These writers suggested that students need to be included and recognized in the school curriculum. Noddings suggested that this be done by giving students greater autonomy and choice over what they learn in school. She noted:

> [A] liberal education is a false ideal for universal education. . . . These students should have educational opportunities that credit and enhance their talents, and they should not be regarded as inferior to the mathematically talented. After all, there are also many people who will never understand the techniques of impressionist painting, the structure of a musical fugue, or the fine points of theology. (p. 29)

Other writers such as Huddleston-Edgerton (1996) and Nussbaum (1997) have argued that it is not so much that a liberal arts education is problematic for students, but rather, many of them feel alienated from the curriculum because they are not recognized in it. These writers focused less on which subjects students are offered in the school curriculum and argued that more representation and inclusion of different voices needs to be placed in the curriculum. Nussbaum stated:

> As education progresses, a more sophisticated grasp of human variety can show students that what is theirs is not better simply because it is familiar. . . . People from diverse backgrounds sometimes have difficulty recognizing one another as fellow citizens in the community of reason . . . [but] one must first learn many things before one can judge another's action with understanding. (pp. 62-63)

Bingham (2001) and hooks (2003) stressed the importance of students' feeling they are recognized in the curriculum. They argued that diversity must be represented in the literature and content of whichever subject area students are exposed to. "A diverse curriculum is necessary because the selves of students are implicated in what they read and learn" (Bingham, 2001, p. 31).

Symbolic violence exists in secondary schools and many students and teachers seem to have accepted it for what it is and do not question it. For those who are included and represented it is perhaps understandable that they have not questioned or challenged it. Teachers should, however, try to combat symbolic violence by modelling respect for all forms of difference whether it is individuals or the things different people engage in while at school.

Distancing

Distancing is another form of relational barrier that occurs in education (and other institutions) that can alter the relationships of teachers and students. In this study, the economically disadvantaged students experienced distancing the most. The best way to understand distancing is to take the term and apply it in a literal way. For example, it is when people distance themselves, either physically or emotionally, from others. It is usually characterized by "a dominant response of distancing, that is, separation, exclusion, devaluation, discounting, and designation as 'other' and this response can be identified in both institutional and interpersonal contexts" (Lott, 2002, p. 100).

It has already been mentioned that two parties raised or living in different social fields or economic cultures often have different worldviews. To assume that one view is superior to another is classism and would be similar to claiming that a certain race (racism) or sex (sexism) is superior to another. Differences exist and they do not have to be seen as either right or wrong. They should be seen for what they are—differences. But many people want to distance themselves from certain groups of people for different reasons. This is called interpersonal distancing.

In the case of economic status, some people want to distance themselves from the poor. We have all been shaped by capitalism where some happen to be more fortunate (or perhaps luckier) than others in that they are not at the bottom levels of the economic hierarchy. Shipler (2004) claimed that poverty scares us! No one wants to be poor but many aspire to join the ranks of the upper class. Ironically, if we did want to be poor it could be accomplished quite easily, whereas becoming rich is next to impossible. Many middle-class people are essentially one pay cheque away from being poor (Shipler, 2004) so the face of poverty simply reminds them of their vulnerability. Since people do not want to

think about their vulnerability, they choose to distance themselves from those who remind them of what they could easily become. Fears and insecurities encourage people to distance themselves from certain types of people because they do not want to be like them but recognize that they easily could be. They convince themselves that if they avoid or do not think about it or distance themselves, it will not happen to them.

Those who perpetrate distancing send messages to the other party that they clearly do not want to have anything to do with them. In cases where they are forced to interact with them, they will only do what they *have* to do and will not go out of their way to do anything more than that. If a teacher happened to dislike a particular student for some reason, she or he might distance him or herself from that student and avoid him or her or do as little as possible to help them. A teacher who distances themself from a student would certainly not go that extra mile to help him or her. Distancing has been documented quite frequently in queer literature in terms of how some people will consciously distance themselves from gay or lesbian people (Butler, 1990; Warner, 1993, 2000). Whether this is because of insecurity and not wanting to be reminded of their vulnerability is less certain.

> Dominant group members may show that they are uncomfortable or nervous around persons of a subordinate group by avoiding eye contact, increasing the physical distance between them, using kinetic gestures of defence and aversion, or going out of their way to avoid interaction or sharing the same approximate space. (Mullaly, 2002, p. 55)

The examples above are what would be called interpersonal distancing. We should hope that any student, including those who are economically disadvantaged, never have to experience this type of discrimination and indifference toward them. Some students in this study, unfortunately, did experience interpersonal distancing, which means there are some teachers who might be uncomfortable around students that are different from them. Kozol (1991, 2005) claimed that in his observation of middle-class teachers working with students in inner city schools, he witnessed many incidents in which they distanced themselves from the students.

In this study, Lily gave vivid examples of times she felt no one listened to her or cared about what she was experiencing. She spoke of at least two incidents that fittingly describe interpersonal distancing. One was when she repeatedly

went to the principal to explain how she was being treated badly in her PE class but nothing was ever done about it. When asked why she thought nothing was or would be done about it she responded, "I just knew he wasn't going to do anything about it. He didn't care." The principal eventually distanced himself even more from Lily by supposedly having the office assistants tell her he was not able to see her even though Lily thought he could have. On her final visit with him he recommended she leave the school. At the next school she experienced further distancing, which resulted in no one listening to which courses she wanted to take and instead placed her into ones she did not want but they felt were more suited to her ability. Lily ended up going to alternate school where she reported she was feeling much more cared for and the teachers there listened to her.

Institutional distancing is also prevalent in education. This type of distancing is more systemic than personal. It is perhaps easier to explain by giving an example. Lott (2001) has written extensively on the treatment of low-income parents and students in public schools in the U.S. In many cases, poor people might not be shunned in an interpersonal manner but in other ways they are given strong messages that their input or ideas are not taken seriously. For example, Lott found that "low-income parents only heard from school when their children were in trouble and even then, the message was one of blame for not parenting properly" (p. 255). In other instances, "low-income parents felt that their views were discounted by school officials" (p. 251).

Interpersonal and institutional distancing is equally harmful and bound to create a divide between teachers and students. If teachers care about their students and want to have healthy positive relationships with them, they should educate themselves about economic status and ensure that they are not perpetrators of either interpersonal or institutionalized distancing.

Oppression

Oppression is generally understood as the domination of subordinate groups by a more powerful group, which in the context of this paper would mean the oppression of students who are economically disadvantaged.

> What determines oppression is when a person is blocked from opportunities to self-development, is excluded from full participation in society,

> does not have certain rights that the dominant group takes for granted, or is assigned a second-class citizenship, not because of individual talent, merit, or failure, but because of his or her membership in a particular group or category of people. (Mullaly, 2002, p. 28)

Based on this definition, in an educational context the subordinate group would be economically disadvantaged students and the dominant group would be the school system, including teachers. Myths, stereotypes, and dominant discourses are very powerful tools in ensuring that unequal power structures remain in society (Mullaly, 2002). Freire (1970) argued that oppression occurs because it benefits the more dominant groups in society. It protects a kind of membership or social role that is superior to that of oppressed groups. Illich (1970) stated that so long as there is capitalism there will be schools and hence there will be oppression. He defined schools as breeding grounds for oppression and claimed that education merely transmits the seeds of capitalism.

In this study, internalized oppression was more apparent than other forms of oppression and it seemed to create a relational barrier between some of the students and their teachers. When internalized oppression occurs between the teacher and the student, the rupture in their relationship is often precipitated by the student. In other words it may be the student who chooses not to establish a relationship with a teacher rather than other cases where a student would like to have a relationship but the actions of the teacher prohibit this. To understand how this might occur, I will give an overview of internalized oppression and how it affects students who are economically disadvantaged.

Students who are economically disadvantaged are often well aware of what some people think about poor people. A recent study showed that the majority of citizens in Canada believe the poor are responsible for their own economic situations (Vancouver Sun, March 1, 2011). When poor students enter the public space of school they begin to hear numerous myths about poverty. They have already heard the dominant discourse of why some people have wealth and others do not. They have heard poor people be referred to as lazy, unmotivated, apathetic, and labelled with derogatory terms such as "welfare bums," "trailer trash," "white trash," and such. In some cases these negative beliefs or stereotypes of poverty become internalized and a poor person begins to believe that everything said about them is true. Internalized oppression is a form

of self-hatred (Mullaly, 2002; Payne, 1996). hooks (2008) argued that internalized oppression is synonymous with shame.

> Shame is an inner sense of being completely diminished or insufficient as a person. It is the self judging the self. A moment of shame may be humiliation so painful or an indignity so profound that one feels one has been robbed of her or his dignity or exposed as basically inadequate, bad, or worthy of rejection. A pervasive sense of shame is the ongoing premise that one is fundamentally bad, inadequate, defective, unworthy, or not fully valid as a human being. (hooks, 2008, p. 94)

Internalized oppression is a likely cause of many ruptured alliances or relationships between teachers and students. Poor students, if they can, may want to hide the fact they are poor for fear that they will be ostracized or seen like the stereotypes of poor people. This fear could explain why some teachers are perplexed when they know that one of their students is poor, but they cannot help but notice that the student always has nice clothes, designer sunglasses or gadgets that even some middle class children do not have. Some students who are poor will go to great lengths to try and convince others that they are not poor and they often do this by advertising nice clothing or other consumer goods (Payne, (1996). They may have internalized their oppression and believe they are inferior to others and think this is why they are poor. Rather than take the risk that their teacher could be educated on matters of economic inequality and might actually understand their situation, they find coping mechanisms to convince them otherwise.

The economically disadvantaged students in this study all realized they were poor and some of them talked about times they hid personal aspects of their lives from others because they did not want people to know much about them. Charlie tried to hide the fact that he was poor perhaps for fear he would be ostracized or judged by others at the school. This reaction is sad. Given that his school had many other students who lived in poverty and given that he lived in a small town, one might assume that people already knew he was poor. He may have been concealing something that was already known. Charlie felt his family was worse off than most at the school and went to great lengths to ensure that his family's economic situation remained hidden. He did not want anyone to know that he and his father, who was unemployed, lived in a small cabin some distance out of town that was designed to be a summer getaway for the landlords, and that

they had no vehicle. This interfered with his ability to be socially connected to the school and to other people. He certainly did not want to invite other students back to his house. Keeping his personal situation private from his school life was safer in Charlie's opinion than the judgment he feared if anyone found out. He wept about the times he could not participate in school events because of transportation difficulties. I asked if he ever considered asking other students if he could ride with them and he responded that he was too embarrassed.

Donald also seemed to be ashamed of his situation. At the beginning of the interview he presented a very different and more positive impression of his situation than the reality. He was referred to me because he was considered to be at risk and his economic situation was in crisis. On one of my visits to his school I recorded in my field notes how one of Donald's teachers, who saw me talking with him, expressed concern about him. According to the teacher, Donald lived in crowded conditions at a trailer park with relatives on social assistance. He had been placed in alternate school because of difficulties getting along with teachers at regular school, including a rather serious incident, and he did not do well academically. Despite these circumstances, Donald presented a different image of these things, at least in the first part of the interview. In the first part of the interview he tried hard to make sure I liked him and had a good impression, but almost all of what he presented was in contrast to what his student file revealed and what at least one of his teachers told me about him.

Early in the interview, without any prompting, Donald took the liberty to explain himself and his situation to me this way:

> I'm a good guy. I'm a nice guy. I have a family and all of that. I mean I live with my cousins and my aunt and everything, but everything's good. I talk to my mom in Alberta every day and she sends me money for clothes. I've got all I need. I could be with my dad but he drives truck and is away too much.

I recall thinking it odd that he felt compelled to tell me this so early in the interview. In my time as director of an alternate education program I found many students would say similar things to social workers out of fear that if they told the truth they might be put into foster care. It seemed as though Donald had maybe rehearsed these lines in case he was ever interviewed by social workers wanting to apprehend him. In relation to school, he initially told me that he did well at school and that he felt his teachers cared about him.

Donald seemed to gain trust in me as the interview progressed and he ended up telling me a very different story, at least in regard to his experiences at regular school. A lot of his problems at regular school were because of his poor relationships with teachers. He claimed that he got into a lot of conflict with them and that he was often rude and did things that "pissed them off." At regular school he felt that teachers did not care about him and he blamed himself, saying that they had good reason not to like him given some of the things he had done. Donald seemed to do things that prevented him from developing a relationship with his teachers. Perhaps he thought it was better to do things that would prevent teachers from getting to know and like him rather than finding out that he was a student living in poverty.

Most students need positive caring relationships to do well at school but some economically disadvantaged students may purposefully sabotage the chance of this happening. The teachers become angry and frustrated and hence stop caring about them. Donald demonstrated how this could happen, at least based on his experiences at the regular schools he attended. The teachers at his new alternate school seemed to understand his situation and he was feeling more cared for. Donald said that he felt good about his relationships with the staff there.

Many students who experience internalized oppression or shame withdraw and choose to not let teachers (or others) get to know them at all. To understand this phenomenon, the scenario involves thinking of it from the perspective of a poor person who is ashamed of being that way. If he or she were to develop a relationship with someone, the other person is likely to find out about his or her situation, including things she may wish to keep private. In such cases it is better to not develop any sort of relationship in the first place or put guardrails around the relationship so that it can only develop to a certain point. The students' indifference toward the teacher or their withdrawal from the relationship could be upsetting to the teacher who would begin to treat the students differently. A caring teacher would likely not let this occur but would try even harder to learn why a student is withdrawn or afraid of relationships. A less experienced or insecure teacher could take the students' lack of reciprocity personally and begin to have negative feelings toward them. Either way, the relationship between the two parties would likely become more complex, as the teacher may see the student as the problem rather than the poverty. Internalized oppression is like a vicious circle

or chain of events. Regardless of how it is described, students who are already marginalized internalize their oppression and become further marginalized in the education system. Internalized oppression is another form of a relational barrier that comes between students and teachers and prevents them from developing a caring relationship with one another.

Classism

Kumashiro (2000) claimed, "Educators have come a long way in detailing approaches that address different forms and different aspects of otherness" (p. 25). He acknowledged that problems still exist but contended that discrimination in the form of racism and sexism seems to have gone underground; blatant comments and actions are less visible. Even if racism and sexism have gone underground, which is questionable, what about classism? Does classism exist in secondary schools? According to the students in this study, it does *not* exist, yet based on field notes I kept while attending the different schools, I would claim that classism does exist. I witnessed at least one example of classism and from what I saw it has not gone underground.

The Halloween "trailer park trash" event (discussed in Chapter 5) has stuck in my mind throughout this study, as it was difficult for me to ignore. As a guest in the school it was not my place to comment on it but it was difficult to let it go unnoticed. A psychologist might even suggest that I experienced what is called *imprinting*; it is imprinted in my mind. The most difficult part of witnessing the Halloween event was that just a few days earlier, two of the students I interviewed, lived in trailer parks. I kept imagining how this event might be received by a child who lives in a trailer park. To see the other children at your school portraying such a negative and stereotypical depiction of a trailer park resident is nothing short of classism and discrimination. It hardly comes as a surprise that some students might feel bad about living in a trailer park and would want to hide this from others.

What remains puzzling in terms of whether or not classism exists in schools is that none of the students in this study felt that any of their teachers would discriminate against a student for being poor. Even the economically disadvantaged students who all felt their teachers did not care about them thought this had nothing to do with their being poor. Alex does not like teachers

very much but still claimed, "I can't think of any teacher here who would treat a poor kid badly. That would be outright discrimination." Other students such as Charlie said, "The teachers here don't really notice poor and rich. They wouldn't treat them any different because of that." The students who were economically advantaged felt there were really no poor kids at their school but Richard said that if there were, "I can't see a teacher liking or not liking a student because of their economic status. I think most teachers don't really care about another person's economic status."

Perhaps the "trailer park trash" event was an isolated example of classism and maybe it can be excused, given that it was Halloween Day. One could ask, however, if the same group would consider dressing up for Halloween and stereotyping a different group. How would the students and the staff at the school have reacted if this group had instead dressed up as an ethnic group or a sexual minority group and portrayed them in a harsh and negative way? Classism is a relational barrier. Students who are economically disadvantaged are certain to internalize negative feelings about themselves if others display discrimination toward them. This situation will affect the types of relationship they have with others and their sense of belonging and care at school

ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT

> Commitment to teaching well is a commitment to service. Teachers who do the best work are always willing to serve the needs of their students. . . . Caring teachers are always enlightened witnesses for our students. Since our task is to nurture their academic growth, we are called to serve them. (hooks, 2003, pp. 83-89)

A great deal of research on students who have difficulty at school and do not complete high school concentrates on personal factors that inhibit educational success rather than institutional or systemic ones (Bates, 2005; Cassidy & Bates, 2005; Morris, 2000; Wotherspoon & Schissel, 2001). Research on high school dropouts often cites such things as disliking school, feeling like a failure, having a low self-opinion or a history of failure, and being in conflict with teachers as typical reasons for students quitting school (Morris, 2000, p. 7). These reasons emphasize the personal deficits of the student whereas in many cases the deficits of teachers and schools are more likely to be the cause. Why are

we not asking questions such as: "Why do they dislike school? Why do they feel like failures? Why do they have a low self-opinion? Why do they always fail?" and "Why do they not get along with their teachers?" Many students who struggle and drop out of school report they had difficulty getting along with teachers and had poor relationships with them (Bates, 2005; Cassidy & Bates, 2005; Waterhouse, 2007).

This study found that economically disadvantaged students tended to do much worse than those in the other two groups. Some studies attribute this lack of success to the student and his or her inadequacies, whereas other studies have pointed to the faultiness of this personal deficit model (e.g., Cassidy & Bates, 2005; Wotherspoon & Schissel, 2001). Some studies fail to acknowledge that economically disadvantaged students tend to feel less cared for than their advantaged peers. I would argue that economic status alone is not a predictor of academic success. Academic success has little to do with ability but teachers and schools have a lot to do with it. This opinion does not imply that if teachers cared more and schools were set up to meet the needs of all students they would all thrive. It suggests that regardless of risk factors such as poverty, caring teachers and a caring classroom climate and school environment might make a significant difference.

At this point in the discussion it is helpful to include the role of alternate schools and how many of them have contributed to helping at-risk students, including those who are economically disadvantaged. Studies of students in alternative schools find that they tend to feel both a greater sense of being cared for and a sense of belonging (Bates, 2005; Cassidy & Bates, 2005; Waterhouse, 2007). These studies found that many students who were unsuccessful at regular schools have been placed in alternate schools where they have done much better. The same students indicated that they feel they are cared for more at alternate schools and have a greater sense of belonging, which helps them do better at school. The same researchers would add that the needs of these students are being met at alternate school whereas they were not at regular school. A study done by Cassidy and Bates (2005) found that caring had a positive impact on students in an alternate school. Cassidy and Bates noted:

> Each student said that his or her attitude toward school had changed. Students said that they felt safe to ask questions, to take chances and to

> share their inner thoughts in creative writing and other forms of expression. . . . Students said that they felt they had a chance to succeed at this school and that they were not judged according to their past files or history. (p. 91)

The findings from the present study also show a relationship between feeling cared for, a sense of belonging, and academic success. Those in the study who were economically advantaged and upper-middle class were all good students; most of those in the advantaged group (Colleen, Brad, and Richard) could actually be considered exceptional. Emma and Tira identified themselves as lower-middle class and although they were not as financially well off as some other students in the study, they did well at school. Incidentally, they felt they fitted in at their school and felt cared for. The economically disadvantaged students in the study felt they were not cared for and did not belong; they had all been unsuccessful at school. For three of them (Charlie, Lily and Donald), this had changed. For Charlie, it changed because he was feeling more cared for by some of his grade 12 teachers than he had in previous years and he was more determined to complete his grade 12. For Lily and Donald, they had both been expelled from regular school and were placed in alternate schools where they were beginning to feel a much greater sense of care and belonging; subsequently, both were both doing better academically. Alex had never felt cared for. He had never done well at school and was "counting the days" until his final year was over. He just wanted to pass grade 12 and get out of Mountainview.

Rice (2001) indicated that care leads to a sense of belonging, which promotes better learning outcomes and academic success for students (p. 104). Wentzel and Watkins (2002) echoed this claim and stressed the importance of relationships as an impetus for greater academic achievement. Economic status and academic achievement have previously been thought of as being closely related. This study would support this claim, but would add that the role of care and non-caring should be factored into this relationship. Care is a predictor of academic success and students who are economically disadvantaged often do not experience enough of either care or good relationships.

SUMMARY—CARING FOR THE OTHER

Most secondary school teachers expect their classes will be comprised of diverse students, including cultures, ethnic groups, religious groups, and a host of other differences. These differences or forms of otherness may be quite unfamiliar to teachers and many of the other students, but one commonality is that most of this diverse group of students have entered secondary school with the aspiration of completing a high school diploma. In order to achieve this they are often at the mercy of their teachers, who are responsible for ensuring that classroom conditions accommodate a caring learning environment. This situation begs the questions:

- How does one care for the other if we are not the other?
- How might a middle-class teacher care for a student who is economically disadvantaged?

A central argument of this thesis is that economic status is a form of otherness that teachers have a responsibility to learn about. Many of the public schools in Canada have students from different economic groups. Some might have more students from one economic group than another but it is uncommon for schools to be made up entirely of students of the same economic status. The schools in this study reflected this claim. Each school had a similar grouping of students from a particular economic group but there were also some students who did not fit the economic norms or status quo. In such cases, these students could be considered the "other" at least in regard to their economic status.

Teacher education programs include various courses pertaining to multiculturalism and diversity, yet often there is little taught about economic diversity (hooks, 2003; Kozol, 1991; Levine, 2006; Nussbaum, 1997; Payne, 1996). It has been noted throughout this thesis that caring is central to forming positive relationships with students and that it helps them achieve a sense of belonging and greater academic success. Noddings (1992) claimed that "to care and be cared for are fundamental human needs" (p. xi). In order to live up to this ideal, it is pertinent that teachers (and prospective teachers) be given information that will help them understand how economic status forms a culture of its own, an elusive culture, but a culture nonetheless. When teachers understand economic status as a form of otherness they are in a better position to care for students

from different economic groups and to ensure that each of them is afforded equal access to educational opportunities.

Each of the topics discussed above are relevant to understanding how secondary students from different economic groups perceive and experience care in secondary schools. It is clear there are differences between the groups. Educators who genuinely want to learn how to care for their students can use the voices of students from different economic groups to begin their own conceptualization of what care is and begin to enact it in their own classroom and school.

> As a nation [Americans] have become passive, refusing to act responsibly toward the more than thirty-eight million citizens who live in poverty and the working masses who labour long and hard but still have difficulty making ends meet. The rich are getting richer. And the poor are falling by the wayside. Citizens in the middle who live comfortable lives, luxurious lives in relation to the rest of the world, often fear that challenging classism will be their downfall, that simply by expressing concern for the poor they will end up like them. At times it seems no one cares. (hooks, 2000, p. 1)

CHAPTER 7
CONCLUSION

At this stage of writing a doctoral thesis it is difficult to think of what has not already been said. So much has been discussed, yet it feels there is so much more that could be. All discussions must come to an end, including this one, and I have opted to use this chapter as an opportunity to present a shortened version of what has not been said. This study was about care and how students from different economic groups perceive and experience care in secondary schools. This final chapter will reflect some of my own perceptions and experiences about the study itself and the important role of care in education. It is a culmination of thoughts and further questions that I have about care and economic status in relation to education. I am presenting each of the subsequent sections in the hope that they encourage further discussions and stimulate more questions about the role of care in education.

CONVERSATIONS

During this study I engaged in several conversations with people who knew that I was pursuing a doctoral study. Some of these conversations were more personal and others were more professional. In some cases it is difficult for me to define them as one or the other, as many of my relationships tend to overlap and are personal and professional. Depending on whom I was talking with, the conversations were somewhat different but each one was appreciated and helped me feel supported and encouraged. Each conversation met my needs as a person and as a professional. I felt cared for.

At the personal level a number of family members and friends would ask how the academic work was coming along and the conversation would then lead off in another direction. Some would ask what the study was about and then

politely respond with "that sounds interesting" and move on to another topic. Most of these people were less interested in the doctoral study than they were about me. I felt my family and friends *cared* about me and were there to support my endeavours on a personal level. *What* I was doing mattered less to them than *how* I was doing. I needed that type of support.

In the academic realm there were many conversations with graduate students and professors from the university. These conversations took place on and off campus. It seemed that whenever I encountered a familiar face from the university we would end up engaged in philosophical discussions about my research. I felt most of these individuals *cared* about me too, but in the social field of academia many seemed more interested in *what* I was doing than *how* I was doing. I needed that type of support too.

Of all the conversations, it was the ones I had with other educators in the public school system that sometimes left me the most baffled. Where I work, at other schools I visited, and at professional development events there were many colleagues who seemed interested in hearing about my doctoral study. Some of these conversations resonated with me more than others and these were often recorded in my reflective journal and/or field notes. The conversations would usually start with their asking me what my research was about. I would explain that I was exploring how students from different socio-economic backgrounds perceive and experience care in secondary schools at which time I would often get the same familiar response I was used to from family and friends: "Oh, that sounds interesting." Many would go on to ask what I hoped to unravel from the study. I would start by explaining that my hunch was students from economically disadvantaged backgrounds would tend to feel less cared for while the wealthier students would likely feel a greater sense of care. At this point, many would respond with a comment such as: "That doesn't really surprise me" or "Yeah, I would think so too" and that would be the end of the conversation.

I have always felt that doctoral research, particularly in education, should have a practical purpose and I never doubted the importance and value of this study, but there were certainly times following conversations with other educators that I questioned why I was spending so much time studying something that appeared to be common knowledge (at least to many of my colleagues). Now the study is completed, I am in a better position to answer that

question. Perhaps it is not surprising to many educators that students from various economic groups perceive and experience care differently but what is less understood is *why* this happens. The abrupt ending of many conversations I had with educators convinces me even more that discussing care and economic status and its relationship to education should continue. My doctoral study may be done, but the conversations are not.

OBJECTIVES

Noddings (1992, 2002, 2005) claimed that the most important objective of any educational program is for young people to feel cared for. I agree with Noddings' claim. Her theoretical conceptualization of care in education is what motivated me to undertake this study. If I were to ask most educators whether or not they care about their students, most of them would likely say they do. Throughout my career, however, I have heard many secondary students say they feel uncared for and many of those experience economic disadvantage. My main objective for undertaking this study was to understand this problem in more depth, which I feel I have accomplished. At the end of a doctoral study a researcher should reflect on his or her original questions and see if he or she has answered them (Blaxter et al., 2005). It is much clearer to me now why some secondary students feel more cared for than others and how economic status contributes to this. I feel this study has contributed to the theoretical body of research regarding care in an educational context and I would argue that it serves a practical purpose. Educators can use the findings from this study to help them understand the theoretical foundations of care and why some students feel cared for while others do not. This understanding, in turn, will help them to understand how they might best care for their students. In this regard my theoretical and practical objectives for doing this study have been accomplished.

LIMITATIONS

A discussion of limitations was included in an earlier chapter but it is worth revisiting at least one of them again. My intention was never to make claims that the findings from this study could be extended to *all* secondary students in *all*

schools. The data and findings in this study are limited to the twelve students who participated in it. I found significant differences in the way the students from different economic groups perceived and experienced care but I do not want to generalize the findings. A different group of participants might describe different perceptions and experiences of care than those in this study. Indeed, I feel certain there would be economically disadvantaged students in secondary schools who feel cared for and advantaged students who do not feel cared for. Regardless of the small number of participants in this qualitative study, I feel what was uncovered is useful for educators. The study exposed invisible perceptions and experiences of a group of students and made them visible.

IMPLICATIONS

"We all need to be cared for by other human beings." (Noddings, 1992, p. *xi*) If we are to embrace this ideal in an educational context, it will be necessary for teachers to have an understanding of care and learn how they might implement it in their classrooms. One objective of this study was to understand how care, or a lack of care, contributes to the climate of classrooms and schools and how this affects academic success. It is well known that many economically disadvantaged students often do worse at school than others. Care, or rather a lack of care, was found to be co-related to this. I would argue that if care is implemented in classrooms in ways that this and other studies such as Beck and Cassidy (2009), Cassidy and Bates (2005), and Waterhouse (2007) suggest, the needs of at-risk students could be better met and they might experience more success at school. I would go even further and argue that if an ethic of care were implemented in all classrooms it could also benefit those who are not considered at risk. In my opinion, *all* students would reap the benefits of feeling cared for. Many teachers likely feel they already do this but a large number of students, particularly those who are at risk argue otherwise. This study can help teachers address this paradox.

CHALLENGES

Before any educational reform will put care at the center of the educational curriculum in our schools it is necessary to confront some of the challenges that might prevent this initiative. I believe two types of challenge face those wanting to include an ethic of care in their educational practice. Both types are discussed in more detail below. The first challenge is institutional and the second is individual. The school system as it is currently designed tends to work in opposition to an ethic of care (Noddings, 1992). The second challenge is individual attitudes. When I say attitudes, I am mostly referring to complacency and hopelessness on the part of some educators. I realize these are *big* words with multiple meanings so I will try to explain them by giving examples of what I witnessed in schools and subsequently recorded in my field notes and/or reflective journal.

In my conversations with educators I often sensed feelings of complacency and hopelessness. I mentioned earlier that many colleagues commented that they were not surprised (*That's not so surprising!*) when I told them the *first* finding of my study. Many stopped the conversation at that point as if they assumed it was the *only* finding. Few seemed to want to continue the conversation and discuss *why.* Is this because many educators are willing to accept the situation for what it is and not take any initiative to improve it (complacency)? Or is it because they do not see any real chance of making changes that would benefit more students (hopelessness)? Perhaps some are simply resistant to any form of educational change at the school or classroom level.

These next few paragraphs describe a conversation with a colleague that I recorded in my field notes. I interpreted the situation as one of complacency. It was one of the few conversations I had when a colleague engaged in further conversation beyond the first finding. In this instance my colleague asked directly: *"Why do you want to fix something that isn't broken?"* I struggled for an answer to this question because I had never actually considered there might be teachers who thought the education system was working. When I asked this teacher for clarification, his response was that the system works for the vast majority of kids in schools, so why would I want to revamp it for the few who do not succeed?

I responded that I felt the education system is not working for a large number of children in secondary schools. I could not resist pointing out to him that he and I work in a school that is made up predominantly of students who

are economically advantaged and where the vast majority of them feel cared for and they are academically successful. The system is working for most of the students *we* work with. I suggested that working in an environment of privilege had perhaps skewed his perspective whereas things might be quite different in a less affluent school.

Freire (1970), hooks (2003), and Kozol (1991, 2005), claimed those for whom the system is working have the least interest in changing it, yet it is they who are in a better position to do so. It is as though there is a sense of complacency (and entitlement) if you are in a position of higher status and the educational regime is working to your advantage. I do not think any of the above writers were referring to teachers when they talked about this, but I could not help relating their claims to this discussion. Why would a teacher whose students are doing so well have any concern for other students who might not be faring as well? Perhaps some teachers are not even aware that the school system is not working for certain students. The issues that arose from this discussion with my colleague could be the topic of another thesis so in the meantime I will simply suggest that his attitude seemed to me to be one of complacency.

Additional journal and field notes include other conversations with colleagues where I sensed their feelings of hopelessness. Some of them would ask what I was hoping to achieve by undertaking this research. When I explained that I wanted to see more schools enact an ethic of care in hopes that it might help more students be successful, many responded by saying, "Good luck." Another teacher said, "There's only so much we can do." I did not disagree with her but I was tempted to ask if that meant, "We shouldn't do anything." Another colleague offered this: "I've been teaching for a long time and I've seen so many changes in education, been there done that, there is nothing that seems to work for all kids." I suppose many educators have seen numerous changes that have not worked so any suggestion of a new one initiates feelings of doubt or hopelessness.

Other teachers I spoke with insisted that the current system is not set up to care for students and hinted that my objectives were idealistic. Even one of the students in the study, Alex, argued, "Teachers don't have time to care." He went onto say that the job of a teacher is not to care but to teach. His thoughts seem to be shared by some teachers. Is it that some teachers do not want to care or is it that they do not know what this really means or do not know where to start?

Systemic barriers, whether they are perceived or real, seem to prevent teachers from thinking they can implement an ethic of care into their classrooms. Many educators may want to care; indeed, many of them report that they already do, but they also feel a sense of hopelessness.

Cassidy and Beck (2009) worked with a small group of educators who were dedicated to enacting an ethic of care in their schools and classrooms. Many of these educators felt restricted and presented numerous obstacles they felt prevented them from enacting care in the ways they envisioned. A major difference with this group is that they refused to be complacent about the present situation in education and they did not give up hope that things could change. Many held onto the belief that caring should be the major objective in their educational practice and found ways, both big and small, to do this. They studied it, they believed in it, and they practised it.

I believe individual attitudes play a major role in whether or not an ethic of care will be enacted in education, but I do not place the entire blame on educators. Several institutional or systemic barriers prevent well-intentioned individuals from enacting an ethic of care in their classrooms. Noddings (1992) suggested many changes that need to occur in the education system before care can be given the priority status it deserves. Her first complaint concerns the emphasis of liberal arts being the most commonly prescribed curriculum in most schools (p. 28). Noddings' primary complaint about a liberal arts curriculum is that she feels it does not address the varied interests of many students. If students have little or no choice in what they learn, they are less likely to feel cared for and less likely to care about school. A liberal arts curriculum simply does not meet the needs of all students. Noddings' second complaint concerns the systemic structure of many secondary schools, which she feels prevents the forming of positive relationships, a necessary aspect of care.

Relationships are central to Noddings' (1992) notion of caring in schools. She argued, and rightly so, that the way many schools are set up make it difficult for teachers to practise ethical caring in their classes. One of the many problems teachers encounter is the number of students, which makes it difficult to establish relationships with students. A second problem is that secondary schools do not support notions of continuity that make caring easier. One suggestion Noddings makes about continuity is that teachers and students need

to be together for more than one year so they have more time to develop relationships with one another. Some of her other suggestions include continuity of purpose, place, and curriculum. It is not within the scope of this thesis to delve into each of these and the other systemic barriers that Noddings exposed, but what she has tried to point out is that collectively they make it difficult to enact an ethic of care in schools.

SUGGESTIONS

For the challenges (stated above) to be solved, consideration needs to be given to educational reform and policy. Noddings (1992, 2005) claimed that an entire reform of the education system would be necessary to enact care the way it should be in schools. This is unlikely to happen soon, which begs the question: What might be done in the meantime? I would argue that school policies could be altered without a complete reform of the education system.

Policy-making requires a personal, professional, and political commitment on the part of those who want to see change in educational practice and I believe each of these needs to happen in the order stated. Caring begins with a personal objective, a willingness to implement it in one's professional practice together with the political drive to remove systemic and institutional barriers that hinder one from doing so. Those wanting to enact an ethic of care in their practice can do so at either a micro or macro level of implementation. Unless reform of the education system becomes a reality, the micro level change is more likely to happen. It may not be as difficult to care for students as some educators think.

Care is about relationships, which could be a good starting place for all educators to begin enacting the ethic of care into their practice. Noddings (2005) claimed that in all of our interactions with students we should try to "respond in a way that will maintain the caring relation" (p. 147). If educators began to work with this objective, schools might be perceived as more caring places. Principals and vice principals could enact care in the way they deal with student discipline as well as how they interact with their staff. Counsellors are well positioned to commit to an ethic of care, as they spend considerable time with fewer students than most teachers, making it easier for them to get to know the students they work with and care for them better. The focus of this study was mostly about

teachers, but it would be insightful to also understand how students perceive and experience the actions of counsellors. Counsellors often help students find ways of resolving conflict with others. In regard to caring in schools, counsellors could enact care by helping students understand both their needs and those of other parties including other students, their teachers, and their parents which could alleviate some of the conflict that sometimes arises between these parties. Counsellors who commit to practising from an ethic of care approach could also ensure that positive relationships are sustained between all parties within the school. Teachers might experience obstacles that prevent them from enacting care but even small gestures of caring go a long way in making schools a better place for students. Giving students some autonomy over their learning and handling classroom discipline with an ethic of care are manageable places to start. In this study it was often the small things teachers did that the students described as caring.

The students interviewed for this study shared many thoughts about what caring means to them. If teachers were to implement just one of these, the likelihood of another student feeling cared for might increase. If the entire system cannot be reformed, a one-student-at-a time approach might be an alternative objective. Imagine the situation if every teacher in a school thought of one student each with whom they felt they did not have a good relationship and made a commitment to change the situation and try to find ways of caring for that student differently.

It is fine to suggest that schools and teachers find ways to enact care in their classrooms, but some of this responsibility has to be given to the universities that offer teacher education programs. This study was about care and I have claimed that students from economically disadvantaged backgrounds often feel less cared for. I completed my teacher education degree some time ago, and hopefully things are different now, but I do not recall many, if any, discussions about care or economic status in my classes. Some attention was given to the fact that poor students do not do as well as other students, yet no discussion pertained to what could be done about it or how teachers might care for these students. If changes to teacher education programs have begun to address these issues, this should be commended. Careful consideration should

also be taken to ensure that what is taught at university translates into classroom practise and that teachers learn how to care for a diverse range of students.

INSIGHTS

Toward the end of this study I could not resist the urge to look back at my own time as a student at secondary school and try to place my experience in the framework of this study. I asked myself if I felt cared for during my time at secondary school and why this might be. I did feel cared for and I felt like I belonged or fitted in at my school and, for the most part, with the exception of one year, I was quite successful at school. The year I was less successful had more to do with an active social life than not feeling cared for.

As a young person I do not recall ever spending much time pondering the economic status of my family. I do not think I would have thought of us as rich or poor. I recall that we seemed to be pretty much like everyone else who lived around us. Looking back at it now, my family and the other families I grew up alongside would have been identified as working class. Growing up in a small rural town in Saskatchewan, there was not a lot of economic diversity so, in effect, most of us came from the same social stratum and shared the same habitus as almost everyone else at our school. Come to think of it, this probably explains why the few professionals such as doctors, dentists, or lawyers who came to live in our small town stayed for relatively short periods of time. The social field and habitus of our town was probably quite unfamiliar to them and some of them probably felt quite out of place. There was little diversity of any kind, including economic, but I felt pretty much the same as everyone else I went to school with and I believe this helped me feel a sense of belonging and a sense of care at secondary school. To place my life in the framework of this study, it makes sense that I felt cared for at school. I did not feel like a fish out of water and, from my perspective, my teachers cared about me in the same way they did most of the other students.

QUESTIONS

At a certain point, a conversation might stop but that does not mean it has to end. I have answered much of what I wanted to find out about care in relation to students from different economic groups and in this regard I feel justified in ending this thesis. It does not suggest there are no further issues to consider or questions to address. What follows are some further considerations and questions.

This study explored the perceptions and experiences of students from different economic groups and found that those who were at the low end of the economic spectrum felt less cared for. These youth are not the only students in secondary schools who are oppressed or marginalized. Undoubtedly there are more students who come from different backgrounds with various types of "otherness." It is worth asking how these youth might describe their experiences of care in secondary school and if some of them feel the same as the economically disadvantaged youth in this study. It could be insightful to do a similar study with students from other marginalized groups such as First Nations youth, international students, or those of a different sexual orientation, to name but a few.

- Could the findings from this study be extended to other groups of marginalized or oppressed students?

Noddings (1992, 2003) claimed that caring starts at home. How we care for others is often modelled after how we were cared for (Noddings, 2004). She argued that when care is modelled by caring parents, those who have been well cared for are more likely to extend this behaviour into other domains such as schools. This statement is questionable. First, many teachers come from middle-class homes (hooks, 2003; Lott, 2001; Kozol, 1991, 2005; Payne, 1996). Second, if they had care modelled in their own homes and then became teachers, they do not always appear to extend this same type of caring to each of their students. The economically disadvantaged students in this study did not feel cared for by their teachers so I would argue that our own experiences of being cared for do not always translate into caring for others. We could say that the experience of having been cared for might be a necessary but not sufficient condition for caring for others in the future. Those who are similar to us may be the recipients of our care, but others may not. It was stated earlier that many, if not most, teachers come from middle-class backgrounds. The findings from this study would suggest that teachers find it easier to care for middle- and upper-class students

than those who are poor. A most likely explanation for this is because the upper and middle class students are from a more familiar social field and habitus as most of their teachers and therefore it is easier for them to develop caring relationships with one another.

- If learning to care starts at home then why are so many supposedly cared-for middle-class teachers unable to care for students who are not of the same economic status as them? Why do they have difficulty caring for the student who is the "other?" How can we learn to care for the other when we are not the other?

While writing this thesis I read articles in a national and local newspapers describing the public outrage and ensuing controversy about opening a school in Toronto that will be designed to meet the needs of economically disadvantaged students (Globe and Mail, February 26, 2011; Vancouver Sun, February 3, 2011). In conversations with other teachers, the general reaction to this was one of outrage. In my opinion we may have buried our heads in the sand about what already exists. Economic apartheid already exists in our schools (Kozol, 1991, 2005). During my time as director of an alternate education program I often felt that economic disadvantage was a one-way ticket to alternative school. The majority of students that were referred to the program came from economically disadvantaged backgrounds. This is like many other alternate schools in this country which are comprised of marginalized students, including many who are poor. Newspaper articles attest to the great work that is being done in alternate schools and how they are helping at-risk students stay in school through to graduation. (Vancouver Sun, September 21, 2010). Exclusion of any group of students is regarded as politically incorrect by many, but if regular schools are not meeting the needs of at-risk youth while alternate schools are, then one might ask why there is so much opposition towards designing schools for certain groups of students.

- Is the inclusive model of education the best model for all students? Are there some groups of students who might do better in schools where they are more similar to the other students?

Technology seems to be changing faster than ever and secondary schools are not immune from this. It is my belief that many secondary students have closer and more intimate relationships with their computers, cell phones, Blackberries and other devices than they do with other human beings. It seems

many younger (and older) people communicate with others via technology more often than person to person. If care is about forming inter-personal relationships, then technology may be inhibiting this possibility.

- Does technology help or hinder our efforts to encourage secondary students to care for one another and to develop positive relationships with other human beings?

FINAL COMMENTS

> Why do we establish schools and pay for them? Is the fundamental purpose of education the training of obedient citizens, or is it the development of free men [and women] in a democracy? Shall the church or the state dominate the schools? What shall we teach in our schools? (S. E. Frost Jr., 1989, p. 207)

Complex questions such as these have been debated since the early times of ancient Greek philosophers and continue to be at the centre of educational debate in academic institutions in modern times. Clearly there are no simple answers to such questions or these questions would no longer be the subject of such intense debate. Since there is little or no consensus on the main objectives of education, it should come as no surprise that we have difficulty deciding on the emphasis we should put in an educational curriculum. Imagine being asked what your goal would be for students to have achieved at the end of their secondary school education. What would that be?

During my career as an educator I have worked with students from diverse economic backgrounds. I have worked with students from impoverished backgrounds, others from privileged and affluent families, and many others somewhere between these two extremes. Based on the findings from this study, some students are more likely to feel cared for than others. Economically disadvantaged students tend to feel uncared for and do not perform as well at school while middle-class and wealthy students report they feel cared for and seem to be doing relatively well academically. This finding could suggest that one group of students needs our care more than another. I would argue they *all* need our care. We cannot become complacent about any group of students and feel they do not need our care. How we care for each group may be different but they all need to feel cared for. Wealthy students might indicate they feel cared for and are doing well academically, but many of them might not be faring as well

emotionally. Many wealthy students present themselves as models of competence but in keeping up with such images, "many of them are, in fact, depressed, anxious, and angry" (Levine, 2006, p. 5). Economically disadvantaged students need our care for other reasons. They are not faring as well academically as their advantaged peers and the possible social implications of this go without saying.

In regard to the question that was presented earlier, my goal for students after twelve years of schooling is that they feel they have been cared for and they have learned to care. The word 'care' conjures up many meanings but, in a school context I am referring to it as the building of positive relationships. For me, the voices of the students who participated in this study have been heard. I have heard what *all* of them had to say about care and what makes a caring teacher and a caring school. I am now committed to help each of my students, regardless of their economic status, to feel cared for.

As educators, if we can learn to set aside some of our pre-conceived notions and ideas about what care is and care for students in ways that the participants in this study suggest we will be caring for our students more effectively. We will not only be caring for them but we will also be teaching them what care is and modelling how to care. Our students can learn to make moral decisions based on their relationships with other people and ethical decisions will result in sustaining (rather than straining) their relations with other parties. We will be teaching and modelling the importance of care and healthy relationships, and will have hopefully contributed to the creation of a more caring (and ethical) society for all to live in. Indeed, an admirable goal or aim of education!

> Without a minimum of hope, we cannot so much as start the struggle. But without the struggle, hope, as an ontological need, dissipates, loses its bearings, and turns into hopelessness. And hopelessness can become tragic despair. Hope, as it happens, is so important for our existence, individual and social, that we must take every care not to experience it in a mistaken form, and thereby allow it to slip toward hopelessness and despair. Hopelessness and despair are both the consequence and the cause of inaction or immobilism. (Freire, 1992, p. 3)

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX 1

PARENTAL/GUARDIAN CONSENT FOR STUDENT PARTICIPATION

I am a PhD student at Simon Fraser University and I will be completing a research project in school district #A (not-named) & #B (not-named). Your son/daughter has been asked to participate in this educational study which aims to address *student perceptions of care* in secondary schools. More specifically the study will address how students from different socio-economic backgrounds may (or may not) describe care in secondary schools. This study will involve participating in a tape recorded confidential interview with your son/daughter. I have enclosed some sample questions which will be asked in the interview, which will allow you to have better insight into the nature of this study (see other side). In addition to the interview which will be conducted by me, I will also be reviewing student files of each participant. The purpose of the file review is to see how your son/daughter is performing at school in regards to academic, social and behavioural achievement.

Some important points for you to understand:

- this research project has been approved by the Simon Fraser University Ethics Review Board
- School District A & B approval has been obtained to conduct this study
- your son/daughter's real name will not be used or published in the final paper
- your son/daughter's school and school district will not be named or published in the final report/paper
- your son/daughter's participation in this research project is voluntary and they may choose to withdraw from it at any time
- refusal to participate or withdrawal after agreeing to participate will have no adverse effects on you son/daughter's grades or course evaluation
- the data that is collected and analyzed for this research study will only be shared with others in a confidential manner
- upon completion of the interview your child may request to review and/or revise the written transcript of their interview
- if you wish to review the results of this research you may contact me or any of the other persons named below
- if a participant feels that emotional stress has been encountered as a result of their interview, they can obtain advice with respect to counselling services from the principal investigator.

If you have any further questions about your child's participation in this research project and/or this study you may contact Dr. Hal Weinberg, Director of Office of Research Ethics at: hal_weinberg@sfu.ca or 778-782-3447.

Upon completion of this study, you can obtain the research results by contacting me at, 604-312-7606 or by e-mail: kmcdowell1@shaw.ca, or my senior supervisor Wanda Cassidy, at cassidy@sfu.ca or 778-782-4484.

Sincerely Yours,

Kel R. McDowell (PhD Candidate)

Sample Interview Questions:

1. When you hear the term "care", what exactly comes to mind and/or how would you define the term "care"? What is it to you?
2. Do you ever feel that teachers "care" about some students more than they care about others? (explain)
3. Do you ever feel that teachers "care" about some students more than others based on any sort/s of differences such as their economic background or other factors/characteristics?
4. If you were speaking to a new teacher or a student teacher, what advice would you give to them about caring for their students?
5. Do you think the present school curriculum or program meets the needs of all students? (explain)

Please Complete:

I, _____ (name), hereby give permission for my

son/daughter _____ (name) to participate in the

research project described above.

Signature: _____

Date: _____

APPENDIX 2

CONSENT FOR STUDENT PARTICIPATION

I am a PhD student in the Faculty of Education at Simon Fraser University and I will be completing a research project in school district #A (not-named) and #B (not-named). Your voluntary participation in this educational study which aims to address *student perceptions of care* in secondary schools is greatly appreciated. More specifically the study will address how socio-economic status might affect perceptions of care in secondary schools. The study will involve participating in a tape recorded confidential interview with you. I have enclosed some sample questions which will be asked in the interview, which will allow you to have better insight into the nature of this study (see other side). In addition to the interview which will be conducted by me, I will also be reviewing the student files of each participant. The purpose of the file review is to see how you are performing at school in regards to academic, social and behavioural achievement.

Some important points for you to understand:

- this research project has been approved by the Simon Fraser University Ethics Review Board
- School District #A and #B approval has been obtained to conduct this study
- your real name will not be used or published in the final paper
- your school and school district will not be named or published in the final report/paper
- your participation in this research project is voluntary and you may choose to withdraw from it at any time
- refusal to participate or withdrawal after agreeing to participate will have no adverse effects on you grades or course evaluation
- the data that is collected and analyzed for this research study will only be shared with others in a confidential manner
- upon completion of the interview you may request to review and/or revise the written transcript of your interview
- if you wish to review the results of this research you may contact me at the address listed below
- if a participant feels that emotional stress has been encountered as a result of their interview, they can obtain advice with respect to counselling services from the principal investigator.

If you have any further questions about your participation in this research project and/or this study you may contact Dr. Hal Weinberg, Director of Office of Research Ethics at: hal_weinberg@sfu.ca or 778-782-3447.

Upon completion of this study, you can obtain the research results by contacting me at, 604-312-7606 or by e-mail: kmcdowell1@shaw.ca, or my senior supervisor Wanda Cassidy, at cassidy@sfu.ca or 778-782-4484.

Sincerely Yours,

Kel R. McDowell (PhD Candidate)

Sample Interview Questions:

1. When you hear the term "care", what exactly comes to mind and/or how would you define the term "care"? What is it to you?
2. Do you ever feel that teachers "care" about some students more than they care about others? (explain)
3. Do you ever feel that teachers "care" about some students more than others based on any sort/s of differences such as economic background or other factors/characteristics?
4. If you were speaking to a new teacher or a student teacher, what advice would you give to them about caring for their students?
5. Do you think the present school curriculum or program meets the needs of all students? (explain)

Please Complete:

I, _____ (name), hereby agree to participate in the research project described above.

Signature: _____

Date: _____

APPENDIX 3

MAIN INTERVIEW SAMPLE SCRIPT & QUESTIONS

- Remind students of the interview protocol regarding confidentiality and recording of the session.
- Students should only answer questions they are comfortable responding to and may ask for any question to be clarified at any time.
- Students will be asked to choose a pseudo-name which is the name that will appear in the written report
- Students may request to review and/or revise the transcribed interview if they wish.

PART 1

Rapport / Relationship Building Between Researcher and Participant

I'd like to begin by introducing myself to you and letting you know a little bit about my background as a teacher and counselor in secondary schools and as a doctoral student at Simon Fraser University.

Now that you know a bit about me, I'd like to hear a bit about you. Feel free to tell me whatever you would like to tell me so that I can get an idea of who you are.

Prompts: age, grade, schools attended, family members, sports, arts, other interests, places you've lived,

PART 2

Care and Perceptions of Care

Questions may not be read directly as worded and not all questions will necessarily have to be asked

Given that the focus or purpose of this research project is about the phenomenon of care and how that is demonstrated in secondary schools, I will now be asking you some specific questions about "care" and what it means to you and how you experience it (or not) as a student. This is a time for you to respond or say whatever you are comfortable with about each question. Keep in mind that whatever you say will remain confidential and I would encourage you to say whatever you want to say – feel free to be honest and open about your thoughts.

1. When you hear the term "care", what exactly comes to mind and/or how would you describe the term "care"? What does it mean to you?
2. Would you describe yourself as a "caring person"? Would other people describe you as someone who cares about others? What is it about you that makes you a caring person (or not)?

3. Why do you suppose that some people seem to care more and some people care less or don't care at all?
4. If I were to ask you to tell me about one person in your life (home, school, friend, family or?) who you genuinely "cares or cared for" you, who is that person and tell me why you feel cared for by him or her?
5. Do you generally feel that the people working at your school "care" about you? Is there a specific person/s at your school that you feel really cares about you perhaps more than other the others care about you (teacher, principal, janitor, secretary, counselor)?
   What makes you feel that this person/s really cares about you? How do they show this?
   If you don't feel that anyone at your school cares about you, explain why you think this, or how you know this?
6. From your perspective, would you describe your school, (name of school), as a caring place? (explain)
7. Do you generally feel that most teachers "care" for their students? (explain)
8. Do some teachers "care" more for their students than other teachers? (explain)
9. Do you ever feel that teachers "care" for some students more than they care for other students? If so - what type of student do you feel is 'cared for' more in such situations? Can you explain this or give me a specific example of when you may have observed this for yourself? (explain)
10. If you think that teachers seem to care for some students more than they do for others, do you have any sort of explanation for this? Explain.
11. Have you ever felt that teachers treat students differently based on their economic status? Can you give an example or explain this more? Why do you think this might be? Why do you think or suppose teachers tend to do this?
12. I asked this question earlier, but I'm going to have you discuss it with me again. Can you think of a teacher/s or other person/s at this school who genuinely cares/cared for you? How do you know this? What do they or did they do that would make you think this?
13. I'd like to ask you the opposite question now. Can you think of a teacher/s or other person/s who you feel does not / did not care for you? How do you know this? What do they or did they do that would make you think this?
14. How do you think teachers could show greater care towards you?
15. How do you think teachers could show greater care towards other students? Would it be the same way they care for you or differently?
16. If you were asked to give advice to a beginning teacher (student teacher) about the topic of care, how would you suggest that they demonstrate "care" to their students?
17. If most teachers were to say they "care" about their students, do you think the same number of students would feel they are cared for by their teachers? Why or why not? Do you have any insights or explanations as to why this might be?
18. How could schools change if they wanted to be more caring places?
19. I've asked quite a few questions about how you feel about your teachers. The last few questions I'm going to ask you have more about school itself. Could you give me a general sense of what you think about school and what students learn and such while there.

Ie. Do you feel that what you are taught in school is "good" stuff to learn or what types of things do you think are better and/or worse than others?
Ie. Do you think students should have more say about what they learn at school and/or more choice about what subjects they want to take and not take?

20. The present school curriculum requires that all students must take certain subjects and program requirements before they can graduate. Do you think these requirements are fair? Do these requirements meet the needs of all students or does it favour some over others? (explain)
21. Is there anything else that you would like to say or talk about in regards to anything we have talked about? Is there anything more about "care" as it pertains to teachers and/or schools that you would like to add to this interview?

Thanks for your participation in this open question part of the interview. I really enjoyed listening to your thoughts and insights about this topic. I appreciate your honesty and your answers have helped me to understand a bit more about care in secondary schools .

We are nearing the end of the interview, but I have just a few more very short questions that I would like to ask you. These questions are just so that I can get a little better understanding about you as both a person and as a student and how you see yourself at your school.

PART 3

Participant Identity Information

(Most of the following questions can be answered either by multiple choice or by scaling of 1-10, whichever the participant is most comfortable with.)

A. Which of the following statements describes you most accurately?

As a student at your secondary school, how do you generally feel about school?

a/ I really like school a lot

b/ School is ok

c/ I really don't like school

d/ I hate school

OR 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

(Hate school) (Really like school)

B. In regards to your overall performance as a student at secondary school including such things as your attendance, grades, work habits, which would be a more accurate description of you?

a/ I am a really good student

b/ I do ok at school

c/ I don't do very well

d/ I do very poorly at school

OR 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

(I do really badly) (I do really well)

C. In regards to teachers, generally speaking, how would you describe your relationship with teachers, both past and present?

a/ I always get along well with my teachers

b/ I get along ok with most of my teachers

c/ My relationships with teachers are 50/50 or some good –some bad

d/ I never seem to get along with teachers

OR 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

(very poor relationships) (very good relationships)

D. If I were to ask your teachers the same question that I just asked you, in general terms, how would they describe their relationship with you?

a/ S/he and I get along well

b/ S/he and I sort of get along

c/ S/he and I don't really get along

d/ S/he and I don't get along at all

OR 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

(very poor relationship) (very good relationships)

E. In regards to the other students in *most* of your classes at your school, how would you compare your overall performance to theirs?

a/ I do better than most of the students in my classes

b/ I do as well as most of the students in my classes

c/ I don't do as well as most of the students in my classes

d/ I do very poorly and am at or near the bottom compared to other students

OR 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

(I'm the worst student) (I'm the best student)

F. In regards to actually physically being in classes at your school, how do you generally feel?

a/ I feel comfortable and at ease – I feel like I "fit in" and "belong"

b/ I generally feel comfortable and at ease

c/ I sometimes feel uncomfortable and uneasy

d/ I always feel uncomfortable and uneasy – I feel like "I don't fit in"

OR 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

(Uncomfortable) (Very comfortable)

G. In comparison to the economic status of secondary schools, how would you compare the status of students at your school in comparison to other schools in British Columbia?

a/ The students here are mainly wealthy and are much better off than in other B.C. schools

b/ The students here are about the same as students in most other B.C. schools

c/ The students here are generally somewhat worse off than most other B.C. schools

d/ The students here are poor compared to most other B.C. schools

OR 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

(Poor) (Wealthy)

H. In regards to the other students who attend your school, which of these statements is most true about your family compared to the other students?

a/ My family is wealthy and better off than most other students here

b/ My family is pretty much equal to the other students at my school

c/ My family is worse off than many of the students at this school

d/ My family is poor compared to most of the other students at this school

OR 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

(Poor) (Wealthy)

I. In regards to economic status, which statement best describes what you think?

a/ Wealthy students generally do much better at school than less wealthy students

b/ Wealthy students do somewhat better at school than less wealthy students

c/ Wealthy students don't do any better at school than less wealthy students

d/ Wealthy students do worse at school than less wealthy students

Could you please add any insights you may have into why you answered this question the way you did? Ie. Why do you think this?

Closure

This completes this part of the interview, so if there is anything else you would like to comment or add to this discussion, please feel free to do so now. This information is very helpful to me in regards to understanding you and a bit more about your thoughts and experiences at this school. Thank-you.

I will be doing a short and final follow up interview with you sometime in the next few weeks at which time you will be able to read and review what you said (if you wish to). Either way, I'll be talking to you soon, but please feel free to contact me before that if you have any questions or concerns.