What happens when a teacher stops judging student work? : a case study of student responsibility for learning in a high school English class.

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WHAT HAPPENS WHEN A TEACHER STOPS JUDGING STUDENT WORK?

A CASE STUDY OF STUDENT RESPONSIBILITY FOR LEARNING IN A
HIGH SCHOOL ENGLISH CLASS

A Dissertation Presented
by
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Many people made significant contributions to my graduate work and to this dissertation. In particular, I wish to acknowledge the contributions of the following people:

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ABSTRACT

WHAT HAPPENS WHEN A TEACHER STOPS JUDGING STUDENT WORK?
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The purpose of this dissertation, a year-long qualitative
study involving action research, was to record and analyze the
behavior of both a teacher/researcher and her tenth grade
students when she eliminated judgmental language, grades, and punishment in a high school English class. Instead, she provided specific feedback, engaged students in dialogue concerning their work, and used verbal strategies which did not allow development of the usual classroom roles of "teacher as Rescuer and Persecutor," and "student as powerless Victim."

The study describes the initial debilitating anxiety the students experienced as they created their own rules,
examined qualities of excellence in writing and speaking, evaluated their own work, engaged in daily class discussion and performed a variety of cooperative learning tasks. The study further describes teacher responses to the students' behaviors, parental and administrative concerns, and the extensive time commitments involved. It concludes that most of the participating students did not know how to take responsibility for their learning, and that the teacher's primary role was to guide them through a process for learning to do so.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

**ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS** ........................................................................................................ iv

**ABSTRACT** ........................................................................................................................................ v

**LIST OF TABLES** ............................................................................................................................... x

**LIST OF FIGURES** .............................................................................................................................. xi

Chapter

I. **INTRODUCTION** ........................................................................................................................... 1

   Statement of Problem ......................................................................................................................... 1
   Purpose of the Study ............................................................................................................................. 3
   Major Research Questions ................................................................................................................ 5
   Definition of Terms ............................................................................................................................ 6
   Significance of the Study .................................................................................................................. 14

II. **RELATED LITERATURE** .................................................................................................................. 18

   Introduction to the Literature Review ............................................................................................ 18
   Theoretical Framework ..................................................................................................................... 21
   The Language of Irresponsibility ....................................................................................................... 26
   The Language of Responsibility ........................................................................................................ 30

III. **METHOD** ..................................................................................................................................... 36

   Introduction ........................................................................................................................................ 36
   Participants .......................................................................................................................................... 36
   Data Collection .................................................................................................................................... 44
   Data Reduction and Analysis ............................................................................................................ 50
   Management of Data Collection ......................................................................................................... 51
   Establishing Trustworthiness ............................................................................................................... 53
## VIII. RESULTS: THE THIRD AND FOURTH QUARTERS

- The Story of the Class ........................................................................ 215
- The Case Study Students .................................................................... 225
- The Teacher .......................................................................................... 250
- Salient Problems ................................................................................... 254
- Student Responsibility for Learning ...................................................... 261
- The Final Third Quarter Grades .............................................................. 266
- The Closing of the Class Story ................................................................. 267
- The Closing of the Case Study Students ................................................ 269

## IX. DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

- Structure of the Chapter ....................................................................... 289
- Student Responsibility for Learning ...................................................... 290
- Student Response to the Format ............................................................. 296
- Implications ........................................................................................... 306
- The Teacher's Response to the Format .................................................. 311
- The Teacher and Action Research ......................................................... 317

### APPENDICES

A. PILOT STUDY ...................................................................................... 322
B. DESCRIPTION OF MODIFIED HETEROGENEOUS GROUPING PROCEDURE .................................................................................. 324
C. INITIAL LETTER TO PARENTS ............................................................. 325
D. PARENT INFORMED CONSENT .......................................................... 327
E. STUDENT INFORMED CONSENT FORM .......................................... 329
F. INVESTIGATOR BIOGRAPHY ................................................................. 331
G. SELF-ASSESSMENT AND ACTION PLAN ........................................... 335
H. TEAM WORK ASSESSMENT SHEETS ............................................... 337
I. NO-LOSE PROBLEM SOLVING .............................................................. 338
J. STUDENT QUARTER GRADES .............................................................. 339
K. CASE STUDY STUDENT RESPONSIBILITY CHART ......................... 341

### BIBLIOGRAPHY.................................................................................. 343
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>4.1 The Students</td>
<td>58</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## LIST OF FIGURES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Figure</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2.1 Karpman Drama Triangle</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Statement of the Problem

Educators and parents agree that high school students do not take responsibility for their own learning. There is less unanimity, however, when people attempt to agree on strategies by which responsibility is effectively taught. As a consequence, students continue irresponsible learning behaviors.

The most common strategies used in an effort to teach responsibility include such diverse behaviors as explanations, reminders, threats, praise, punishment, lectures, embarrassment, natural consequences, and ignoring. The research literature indicates that these strategies may well accomplish the immediate goal of causing the student to turn in assignments. There is no indication, however, that over the longer term, these strategies teach students to become responsible for their learning.

My own experience is that using such strategies actually teaches students to become irresponsible because a concrete model of
responsible behavior is not provided, and students are denied the opportunity to acquire and practice the behaviors of responsibility. In addition, use of these strategies often develops negative student attitudes toward school and toward themselves. The twin problems, lack of student responsibility and the absence of teaching strategies which encourage responsible learning behaviors, remain a high priority for research.

The concept of student responsibility is a broad one, encompassing both social and learning behaviors. In either area, responsibility involves the ability to self-evaluate and self-regulate. It also includes the desire and ability to fulfill one's own needs in a way that respects the rights of others and even helps others as they work to meet their needs. In this study, I addressed the development of student behaviors which improve student responsibility for learning. The strategy which I used was to respond to student work by using only nonjudgmental language as feedback. This strategy, developed for counseling, has been shown to be effective in helping counseling clients develop responsibility for their behavior.

At present, the most common method for providing feedback on student work is for teachers to make comments which point out errors,
suggest methods of improvement, provide answers, and give praise. Then the teacher grades the work, all of the evaluation having come from teacher judgment. During my twenty-two years of teaching high school students, I have observed a major problem with this method. Students' reactions to their returned work fall into one of two categories, and in both the responsibility for learning ends with the returned paper. When students receive an acceptable grade, most believe they were just lucky, or that the work (or the teacher) was easy. When students receive an unacceptable grade, most react with blame; blaming the teacher whom they see as expecting too much or as not liking them, blaming the system which they believe expects too much from them, or blaming themselves whom they see as deficient. As long as individuals are blaming either the system or themselves, they are not taking responsibility for their own learning (Karpman, 1968; Sennett, 1980).

**Purpose of the Study**

In this case study, I was both researcher and participant in the observed class. A regularly assigned secondary English class served as
the setting for analysis. My purpose was to examine students' behaviors in relation to development of responsibility for their own learning when I, as teacher, eliminated judgmental feedback. In the place of judgmental statements in both my written feedback and my personal interaction with students, I employed specific nonjudgmental language as a strategy to help students develop responsibility for their own learning.

A second purpose was to describe the problems encountered by both students and teacher as this strategy of nonjudgmental language was employed. I first started to incorporate nonjudgmental language as a teaching strategy nineteen years ago while I was earning a master's degree in counseling. Through the subsequent years of experience with the strategy, I have come to know that when teachers do not immediately give their judgment of student work, the students experience great anxiety. This anxiety is commonly demonstrated through various negative behaviors and is very frequently negatively conveyed to parents, to other teachers, and to administrators. As a consequence of these factors, the teacher involved experiences a great deal of anxiety resulting in a potentially overwhelming desire to return
to the traditionally accepted role of teacher as judge of student work. A thorough and clear description of this aspect of teacher use of the strategy may serve to facilitate successful implementation.

Because this study is action research, I believe that in addition to providing useful information for teachers who wish to consider this approach to encouraging student responsibility, the study has value for teachers who wish to conduct research on student/teacher interaction in their own classrooms (Goswami & Stillman, 1987).

**Major Research Questions**

The questions used to guide the case study were as follows:

1. Over the course of a school year, do high school tenth graders in a modified heterogeneously grouped English class demonstrate an increasing responsibility for their own learning process when the teacher eliminates judgment on student work, and each
quarterly grade report is derived through ongoing student/teacher comparison of student work to course objectives?

2. What are the inherent problems in the use of the strategy and how do teacher and students respond to the strategy over the course of the study?

Definition of Terms

Student Work

For the purposes of this study, student work encompasses two aspects:

(a) all student writing—both classwork and homework—performed in accordance with the course syllabus. (b) oral presentations, class discussion and group participation work.

Responsible Behavior

Behavior involving (a) critically analyzing a situation and (b) taking consequent action which is in the best interest of self and others is
considered to be responsible. For this study, responsible behavior is carried on without the use of punishments and threats or the use of praise and rewards. Responsibility is evidenced by the following student behaviors:

1. attends class and is on time

2. brings class materials to class

3. completes assignments and turns them in on time

4. regularly maintains the data base materials by storing all work in personal folder

5. seeks out teacher or peer to clarify assignments or to obtain them when appropriate

6. responds to and interacts with the teacher in relation to the teacher's written comments on assignments

7. reworks assignments in relation to teacher feedback or self critical analysis

8. engages in comparison of personal progress to the course objectives at least twice each quarter

9. recognizes when help is needed and, without teacher intervention, seeks out teacher, peer, parent or appropriate other to provide this assistance
10. demonstrates sharing of responsibility within classroom group projects

11. edits written work as a result of reflection and self-critical analysis of this work

12. demonstrates growing awareness of successful strategies for achieving the course outcomes

13. avoids blaming people or events for non-accomplishment of course objectives

14. recognizes and freely expresses personal successes in meeting course objectives

15. recognizes and freely expresses instances of failure to achieve course objectives

16. engages in personal goal setting as part of the ongoing effort to achieve course objectives

17. revises personal goals as appropriate in the effort to achieve course objectives

18. asks to engage in additional work in order to meet personal goals or course objectives

19. demonstrates willingness to take risk through engaging in personal creative learning activities

20. evidences a growth in responsibility for personal learning by demonstrating an increasing use throughout the school year of these behaviors listed as #1 through #19.
Teacher Punishment

Actions deliberately used because they are intended to be aversive to the student are considered as punishment and include the following:

1. corporal punishments
2. detentions
3. additional assignments given as penalties
4. use of judgmental language as defined below
5. loss of privileges
6. reduction of quarterly report card grade
7. Suspension from class
8. any other commonly understood forms of punishment

Judgmental Language

That language which indicates the speaker is engaging in any of the following behaviors is considered to be judgmental: deciding that another's work or person is "good" or "bad," assuming a superior position of knowledge or authority as differentiated from assuming a position of consultant, making decisions for another as differentiated
from providing options from which the other is free to choose or not choose. Judgmental language is characterized by the following categories (Gordon, 1974):

1. **Ordering, Commanding, Directing** ("You have to write it this way or it's wrong.")

2. **Warning, Threatening** ("If your assignment is late one more time, I won't give you any credit for this work.")

3. **Moralizing, Preaching, Giving "Shoulds and Oughts"** ("You should make a work plan and stick to it." or "You ought to practice writing every day.")

4. **Advising, Offering Solutions or Suggestions** ("It would be better to do it this way." And then the teacher rewrites it.) This is to be differentiated from giving information.

5. **Lecturing, Giving Logical Arguments** ("You needed to spend more time on this assignment. Writing takes a lot of work.")

6. **Judging, Criticizing, Disagreeing, Blaming** ("You are so irresponsible." or "If you had been paying attention when I explained this...")

7. **Praising** (global rather than specific) ("You're such a good student." "This paper is great.")
Another form of judgmental communication is giving grades on assignments. Grades serve the purpose of several of the above--reassuring, praising, interpreting, stereotyping, criticizing, warning--all teacher judgements (Bostrom, Ulandis, and Rosenbaum, 1961).

Still another form of judgmental communication is contained in "tone" of voice. One can avoid each of the forms of judgmental language in a literal sense, and still convey judgment through a tone as in the
following example which, if literally interpreted only gives information: "I have told you and told you that this is not correct."

Nonjudgmental Language

Language which indicates the speaker is serving as helper or consultant as contrasted to that of "Rescuer" (Karpman, 1968) is considered to be nonjudgmental and includes the following categories:

1. **I-Message** (Gordon, 1974, 1989; Rogers, 1969, 1983) begins with "I" and states what I see, hear, feel, or think; usually followed by a request for clarification or a question: ("As I'm reading this part of your paper, I'm getting confused. I notice several incomplete sentences and I'm wondering if this could be creating confusion here?" or "I was immediately drawn into your paper by your narrative introduction.")

   I-Messages are also used to give information. ("I see what I think is the same problem here that you were having with the last writing. Could we conference?" or "I see you've used several short, quick sentences here to build an atmosphere of tension. That's just what the experts tell us to do."

   I-Messages are used to disagree with stated facts and viewpoints. ("I think
of that differently" or "My understanding is... or "I have a different way of doing that.")

I-Messages are used to recognize specific skills and behaviors and even to include one's personal reaction to it (I was really impressed by your thinking when you connected those two ideas from the novel and then tied them in with our world today!)

An I-Message does not take the form of "I think you...."

2. Questions are different from probing as listed under judgmental language. They are used to ask for clarification, to help students assess their writing, and to encourage them to support their thinking. They are used in making requests and may be part of an I-Message. A partial list of nonjudgmental questions is included here.

I don't find your thesis. Would you clarify?

I'm not following your thinking here. What is your point in this section? Can you say more about that?

How does this point relate to your previous point?

What do you know about this so far? (rather than teacher giving an explanation)

I find several spelling errors here. Can you locate them and correct them? Which section do you see as better writing? How did you decide on that?
How do you think your project is going? What are you planning to do next?

3. **Paraphrase** (Gordon, 1974, 1989; Rogers, 1969, 1983) is used to state one's understanding of what another is saying or feeling. ("Then you're saying in this paragraph that...." or "Researching your topic is taking a lot of your time, and it sounds like you're feeling quite frustrated with the whole project.")

**Paraphrases can be phrased as questions.** ("Are you getting discouraged with this work?" or "Are you saying that your first point is related to this last point?")

It is important to note here that these nonjudgmental statements do not prevent students from knowing what the teacher judgment is. Rather, these statements give students a specific model from which to learn how to judge their own work.

**Significance of the Study**

This action research case study provides information concerning the use of specific nonjudgmental language as feedback on student work.
and the process by which students work to develop responsibility for their learning. Strong evidence from the following related areas lends credence to such a study.

The positive results of counselor use of nonjudgmental language in helping clients change their behavior have long been recognized (Rogers, 1951; Erickson, 1964). Studies of teacher use of facilitative language have shown that students involved developed stronger self-images, maintained higher attendance rates, and increased their learning (Aspy, 1972; Aspy & Roebuck, 1974, 1977). More recently, studies of new strategies for teaching the writing process (which, do not specifically avoid teacher judgment, do employ fewer directional instructions and more questioning), have revealed highly positive results in helping students become more fluent, independent writers (Britton, 1970; Elbow, 1986; Atwell, 1987).

Because teachers have traditionally been the sole evaluators of students' work, students have come to depend on outside verification of their abilities. Twenty years in a high school classroom have demonstrated to me that students are insecure until a teacher tells them their work is right. As a general rule, I have found that the higher the achiever, the greater need for teacher approval of the work.
The practice of keeping students in continual dependence on an outside authority is in sharp opposition to what is known about the learning process. Because learning occurs by constructing knowledge rather than from being given knowledge, it has long been my working hypothesis that students will increase their responsibility for learning in direct proportion to their growing understanding of how to evaluate their own work.

Helping students become independent from the teacher is a major step in teaching responsibility, but it can create great student and teacher anxiety. Most students equate memorization with learning, have no idea how to find answers, and do not believe that the process of finding answers and developing ideas is learning. Most, perhaps even all, just want the "right" answers and believe the teacher's job is to give right answers.

Each year when I begin student group work, I observe and listen, and every year I notice the students' debilitating lack of self-confidence in their own learning ability. When forced to rely on one another without a teacher, most will go along with the proffered answers of whichever person is known to earn high grades, even in the face of answers which they admit make no sense.
Despite the many years of educational reforms and quality teacher
inservice programs within my own school district, I continue to
experience no improvement in student development of responsible
behavior. In fact, my experience is that irresponsible behavior is
increasing. To learn responsibility, students must experience the
process of analyzing their own work because only then do they learn
how to trust their own thinking, thereby becoming independent from
the teacher.

Many studies have demonstrated the efficacy of nonjudgmental
language in relation to social behavior, counseling, and the writing
process. The proposed study encompasses a much broader range of
learning in that it addresses student development of responsibility for
all learning which is recorded in written form as well as for oral
performances and interaction within the classroom.
CHAPTER II
RELATED LITERATURE

Introduction to the Literature Review

The literature is replete with studies of classroom communication--both verbal and nonverbal. In relation to classroom talk between students and teacher, two psychologists, in particular, (Rogers, 1969, 1983; Gordon, 1974, 1989; and one psychiatrist, Glasser, 1969, 1975, 1986, 1990) have long documented the positive results that occur for students when teachers convey empathy in their language and behavior. Others also have contributed to this literature. One major research project, The National Consortium for Humanizing Education, carried out a seventeen year study which included teachers and their students in forty-two states and seven foreign countries. The results indicated that when teachers use the language of understanding, caring, and genuineness, students learn more and behave better (Aspy, 1972).

In these studies, no differentiation was made for teacher language which specifically avoids judgment; even so, the deleterious effects on learning when judgment in the form of teacher grading is involved has
been shown in the literature as early as 1912 (Starch & Elliott) and 1913 (Starch & Elliott). John Holt (1983), working with young children, describes the fear teacher judgment produces and the consequent student behavior which prevents students from taking responsibility for their learning:

...Their (students') fear of failure, punishment, and disgrace severely reduces their ability both to perceive and to remember, and drives them away from the material being studied and into strategies for fooling teachers into thinking they know what they really don't know (p.140).

Although there appear to be no studies involving the specific use of teacher judgmental language and the development of student responsibility for learning, Holt's work, as well as that of Hart (1975) and Glasser (1990), clearly supports the proposition that when judgment forms the basis for classroom interactions, students devote most of their energies to figuring out what the teacher wants rather than to assessing their own work, and thereby becoming responsible for their own learning.

Because meeting the teacher's expectations becomes the students' objective for the lesson, they are unable to develop responsibility for their learning. Most students trying to meet the teacher's expectations
respond by becoming compliant. Most of those who do not comply become rebellious and do the assignments, if at all, under duress (Glasser, 1990; Powell, Farrar, & Cohen, 1985). According to Glasser (1990), less than 15% of students do quality work. It seems logical to conclude that some of the quality work is being done out of compliance; therefore, it would follow that less than 15% of students are taking responsibility for their own learning.

Stephen Karpman (1968), a San Francisco psychiatrist, provides a way of visualizing the teacher/student interaction—an interaction which inadvertently leads teachers and students into a power struggle existence and traps them there. Sennett (1980) explains that while engaged in a power struggle, people are not self regulating their behavior, but rather they are re-acting and therefore are not taking responsibility for their own behavior. While Karpman applies his model to society in general, the model has been applied within the nursing profession (Levin, 1972) and has strong chances for successful application to the teaching profession.
Theoretical Framework

The Karpman Drama Triangle

Making use of Karpman's model in the classroom could provide teachers with a process for recognizing and greatly reducing power struggles with students. Reducing power struggles frees students to take the responsibility for their own learning. An understanding of Karpman's model also clarifies the role that teacher judgment plays in establishing and carrying on power struggles. A presentation of the Karpman Drama Triangle as a theoretical framework provides a visual format with which to order and understand the dynamics of teacher judgment and student responsibility.

Karpman, recognizing that drama as an art form is based upon a power struggle, named his model—an inverted triangle—the Drama Triangle (figure 1). He identifies this power struggle as a game with three positions: "Rescuer," "Persecutor," and "Victim." A person takes one of the three positions (usually inadvertently), by saying or doing something which invites another to take a position in the Triangle; if the other responds by saying or doing something in reaction, then she or he
Figure 2.1 Karman Drama Triangle
is taking a position within the Triangle too. Now, they are both into a power struggle. If they continue to react to each other rather than to self-regulate their behavior, they will continue the game by taking the varying positions around the Triangle in reaction to each other. The inevitable result is a winner and a loser for each round.

Starting at the top right corner with the position of Rescuer, Karpman explains that when people rescue as opposed to help, they do more than their share of a task. When people develop a pattern of rescuing others, the response is not a positive one. The people being rescued most commonly react in one of two ways--either they come to feel less worthy than the Rescuer, thus helpless, so they take the position of Victim on the Drama Triangle and engage in behavior and language which indicates they are reacting from this position, or they develop anger and react in a way that indicates they have taken the Persecutor position. While locked into this power struggle, some people may maintain one particular position, whereas some people may switch positions in reaction to the other's position, and the "game" can continue indefinitely--even a life-time (Berne, 1964).

In applying Karpman's model to the classroom (Holmes, 1984), teachers and students consistently invite each other to engage in this
power struggle, and in both the areas of social behavior and learning behavior. In the latter, teachers from preschool to graduate school have established the power struggle atmosphere and continually invite students to react. This is all done inadvertently and usually with only the best of intentions, but in the process teachers take the students' responsibility for learning onto themselves.

In trying to help students learn, teachers frequently do more than half of the students' tasks and thereby become Rescuers. They explain the lesson that the students didn't study for homework; they identify and correct the errors in student writing; they tell students exactly how to do a task, over and over; they explain the solution to a problem yet another time; they allow students to make up forgotten work at the last hour. They unintentionally usurp the students' responsibility.

Then, if the people rescued don't eventually reciprocate (do their homework, get better grades, pay attention), the Rescuers end up feeling exploited or victimized, thus finding themselves in the position of Victim at the bottom point of the Triangle. Anger is a common reaction to feeling like a Victim. Consequently, the Victim usually, and quickly, changes to the third position; Persecutor.
When playing in this position, the teacher may administer any number of punishments, give failing grades, or lecture on the consequences of irresponsible behavior. While this is happening, the students take a turn in the Victim position. When students feel helpless and are in the Victim position, they do any of several things—none of which involves taking responsibility for their own learning process. They may attempt to follow the teacher's directions exactly (and their reason for doing so has nothing to do with learning and everything to do with making sure the product is acceptable to the teacher); they may engage in continual teacher checking to assure their correctness; they may insist on teacher verification of all their answers even when they have supported their reasoning; and many, unable to acquire teacher approval, give up in defeat.

Students don't like feeling helpless any more than teachers do, so they may move into the position of Persecutor and then the teacher assumes the Victim position, and thus the reactionary cycle continues. Students may even assume the Rescuer position if they feel sorry for the teacher; thus they comply out of pity for their teacher rather than out of insight into the learning. While this rotation of position
continues, the object of the game is to maintain position on the Triangle, and everyone loses the chance for real learning.

While the teacher and students are locked into this power struggle, the student(s) are unable to take responsibility for their own learning. They are either stuck in feeling victimized, or are acting in rebellion (Persecutor), or are acting in compliance (Rescuer)—all of which are reactions as opposed to actions. Even the teacher is mired in reaction rather than free to choose an action which would encourage students to take their own responsibility for the learning. Because responsibility involves self-analysis and self-regulation, rather than re-action, whenever people take a position on the Drama Triangle, there is no role model for how to become responsible.

**The Language of Irresponsibility**

The most common and traditionally accepted modes of communication in our society serve as the scripts for the three positions of the Karpman Drama Triangle. These include all of the language identified in Chapter I as judgmental. (See pp 10-11.)

The judgmental language used in the Persecutor position includes numbers (1) Ordering, (2) Warning, (3) Moralizing, (5) Lecturing,
(6) Judging, (8) Name-Calling, and (12) Humoring, Being Sarcastic. Each is effective in putting the other(s) into the Victim role, thus creating a power struggle which may manifest itself either overtly or covertly. In any power struggle, one is re-acting rather than taking action from within (Sennett, 1988).

Judgmental language used in the Rescuer position includes numbers (4) Advising and Offering Solutions, (7) Praising, and (10) Reassuring. Most people have difficulty seeing these as creating communication problems. To help others carry their own responsibility, teachers can avoid rescuing by not attempting to solve the problem for students (Britton, 1970; Hart, 1975; Whimbey, 1976, 1984; Whimbey & Whimbey, 1975), and by not jumping in during a problem and distracting with praise and reassurance, but rather, through using a different kind of communication, helping the students to solve the problem themselves.

While specific feedback in relation to a nonproblem-solving situation helps students learn their own strengths, research shows that general nonspecific praise may well foster irresponsible behavior. Several studies have yielded evidence suggesting that high levels of teacher praise are associated with decreased student independence (Brophy, 1981; Rowe, 1974; Stallings & Kaskowitz, 1974). The researchers
conclude that this type of praise may be creating students who are more dependent on doing what pleases the teacher than on experimenting with independent ideas. The fact that Gordon (1989) has provided an extended discussion of praise and his reasons for designating it as a "communication roadblock" indicates that praise is far from a simple concept.

Numbers (9) Interpreting and (11) Questioning may be used in either Persecutor or Rescuer position, primarily depending upon one's tone of voice and one's feelings at the time. Asking "why" concerning student behavior actually encourages excuse making (Glasser, 1975), and serves to divert the attention away from the real issue (Gordon, 1974), which is to make a plan for future effective behavior.

Grades as a Form of Judgment

The practice of teacher judgment in the form of grades encourages irresponsible behaviors. It has long been shown that those students who consistently receive low grades tend to avoid learning by
employing various methods such as engaging in acting out behavior or in withdrawing from learning situations (Child & Whiting, 1949; Glasser, 1990).

Even for those who do well in school, grades have many negative affects on the development of responsibility. Earning grades encourages students to view their worth through others' judgments rather than through their own self analysis. Thus grading fosters dependent and compliant behaviors. Grades for the better students are often a form of praise, and as such inadvertently encourage students to avoid risk taking behavior which often includes creative endeavors and individualistic thinking (Brophy, 1981; Gordon, 1989). As long ago as 1949 (Child & Whiting), researchers were learning that when teachers give grades, the better students work for the grade rather than for knowledge and skill development.

For all students, teacher-assigned grades serve to maintain a power struggle between teacher and students (Kirschenbaum, Napier, & Simon, 1971). In fact, whenever one person takes over the job of judging another's work, the potential for a power struggle is established (Karpman, 1968). Whenever people engage in a power struggle, responsible behavior becomes impossible (Sennett, 1988).
The Language of Responsibility

Teacher use of specific interpersonal skills has been shown to effect changes in student behavior. Aspy and Roebuck (1974) in their research summary of the work carried out by the National Consortium for Humanizing Education, report that at the secondary level student gain in self-concept, achievement, and attendance was inversely related to the classroom functioning variables of "Teacher criticizes or justifies authority.... Teacher gives directions or commands" (p. 197). Going on to discuss further studies from the NCHE, these authors cite one study involving six hundred teachers and ten thousand students from kindergarten through twelfth grade. The students whose teachers used facilitative language (language which expresses understanding, caring, and genuineness), were compared with students whose teachers were not trained in the facilitating skills. The students of the trained teachers were found to display the following behaviors:

1. miss fewer days of school during the year (four fewer days per child)

2. make greater gains on academic achievement measures, including both math and reading scores
3. be more spontaneous and use higher levels of thinking

4. increase their scores on IQ tests (from kindergarten through fifth grade)

5. make gains in creativity scores from September to May

6. show increased scores on self-esteem measures

7. commit fewer acts of vandalism to school property

8. present fewer disciplinary problems

Interestingly, student benefits seemed to be cumulative, in that students did better in the second year of the two year program. While these researchers looked at positive changes observed in students of teachers using specific interpersonal skills in the classroom, no specific attention to avoiding judgmental language was part of the program.

The language of nonjudgment includes what Rogers (1969) identifies as I-messages. Gordon (1989) calls I-messages "responsibility messages" (p.116), because, he explains, they leave the responsibility for making changes with the other. Although he is discussing social behavior, the use of the I-message as a responsibility message in relation to learning behavior is equally applicable (Peterson et al.,
1979). As an example, note the difference between these two statements which a teacher could use on students' written work:

You are making no sense here.

or

I'm very confused here.

In the first, the teacher has judged the writing and the students must accept this outside criticism (often, the teacher has even included a rewritten version, thus doing the work for the student). The result of this "correcting" is often student feelings of defensiveness and frequently of stupidity. In the second sentence, the students must first of all engage in some self-analysis; "What have I written here?" and, "Did the teacher misread it?" In the case of the I-message, the students are set up to analyze, make a decision, and act according to that decision.

One particular study compared the effects of I-messages with the effects of punishment. The results showed that both methods changed the students' behavior, but with students receiving punishment rather than I-messages, the desired behavior did not continue, whereas with the students disciplined with I-messages the desired behaviors continued indefinitely (Parke, 1969). The significance of this finding is certainly strong support for the efficacy of I-messages, and when
compared with the previously cited findings from studies on grading and the relationship of grades to student motivation, is stronger still.

The current and widespread premise that education is the act of covering material, that learning results from being told, and that intelligence is knowing answers (Cohen and Spillane, 1992) encourages irresponsible student learning behavior. When teachers give answers, do the explaining for the students, and respond to answers with "right" or "wrong," the teacher is taking the role of Rescuer, and the students are learning that knowledge comes from the teacher rather than from a process of building meaning within oneself (Piaget, 1973). The result is a situation in which most students have no confidence in their own ability to solve problems, and consequently, they do not dare take the responsibility for their own ideas.

Not only are students afraid to take responsibility for their own learning, but also they do not know how to do it. In helping students learn to take their own learning responsibility, the teacher's use of the paraphrase has been found to be particularly effective (Gordon, 1974; Hart, 1975; Sizer, 1984; Rogers 1969, 1983). Repeating what students have said is in effect holding up a mirror for them to see their own thinking. When a teacher mirrors exactly what students say—often
mistakes—the students frequently become aware of their own errors and make their own corrections (Feuerstein, 1979), thus adding one more experience to help them gain the self confidence to become independent learners.

Teacher use of appropriate questions (as defined on pp. 13-14) to lead students through a thinking process is another language technique which serves to teach students how to take learning responsibility. These questions can direct students toward acquiring information and can help guide students through a process of making meaning of the information. The use of these questions instead of the traditional explanations keeps the learning responsibility with the student. Sizer (1984) calls this method of teaching "coaching." Teaching in this manner provides a road map for students who are practicing learning processes, and it provides a method for the students to do the learning for themselves (Britton, 1970; Feuerstein, 1979; Piaget, 1973; Rogers, 1969, 1983; Whimbey & Whimbey, 1975).

Three major bodies of research literature strongly relate to this study: research on both teacher and counselor use of interpersonal skills, research on the learning process (including that research on the writing process), and research on grading. Although none of these deal
directly with the use of nonjudgmental language as an instructional strategy, all lend strong encouragement to the belief that nonjudgmental teacher behavior will promote student responsibility for learning.

Further, Karpman's work provides a theoretical framework which delineates some broad guidelines for teacher behavior in creating a nonjudgmental learning environment designed to encourage student responsibility.

Finally, although not reviewed within Chapter II, there is a case study qualitative research tradition for doing case studies in education. The primary resources which guided the development of methods for recording and analyzing the data as presented in the next chapter were Bogdan and Biklin (1986), Lincoln and Guba (1985), and Merriam (1988). Citations are included at appropriate places within the Chapter III discussion.
CHAPTER III

METHOD

Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to describe the methods used for gathering data and the process employed for data analysis. Specifically, the first section of this chapter describes the student participants, how they were selected, their school and classroom environment, the teacher, and the data collection methods. The plan for this first section was informed by a pilot investigation (Appendix A) carried out at the study site during the 1992-93 academic year. The second section of this chapter describes the data reduction and analysis process and procedures employed for establishing trustworthiness.

Participants

The School site

I used the four-year high school in which I was teaching. It is part of a school district consisting of two towns, one of which includes an island from which students are transported to the mainland daily. These towns are located just outside a northeastern coastal city and have a
combined population of 9,000. Families are employed in business, the skilled trades, the professions, and in lobstering and fishing.

The high school has a comprehensive four-year curriculum accredited by the New England Association of Schools and Colleges. The academic program consists of a system within which some subjects are numbered according to difficulty while others have no designations and are open to all students. For the most part, students make their own choices of courses within the range of requirements.

The student body numbers 505, of which 2% are nonwhite. The dropout rate during the past five years has remained at less than 1% per year, and of those who have graduated during the past six years, between 50% and 60% have gone on to four-year colleges, while a further 7% and 17% have gone to community colleges and vocational training.

Although this school district is essentially white, and the majority are middle to upper middle socioeconomic class, there is wide cultural diversity in the sending communities. In addition to the official district member towns, two rural towns pay tuition in order to enroll their high
school population in this district. Many families of these students earn their living primarily from subsistence farming, woodcutting, and welfare.

The Class

I used one of my own classes, a sophomore (grade ten) level 1-2 English class consisting of 19 students. The course of study for all classes was determined by the teachers in the English Department and was the same for all sophomores designated as level 1-2. A description of the process used to achieve modified heterogeneous sophomore English classes may be found in Appendix A. The course consisted of written and oral communication skills, vocabulary, grammar, reading of selected pieces of literature, and writing a research paper. All sophomore English classes met five days a week and continued for one school year.

The Students

The original 19 students consisted of nine females and ten males. First one male and then one female student transferred, leaving 17 students who completed the full academic year of the study. All of
them expressed their plans to go on to further study beyond high school. None of the students was repeating English 10.

During the first six weeks of the course, I gathered data concerning all of the students in the class. At the six-week mark I chose three students who seemed at that time to present the most interesting differences from one another, as well as two additional students for back-ups, as the subjects for the development of individual case studies. The determination of what constitutes "interesting differences" was made in relation to the students' approaches to their work and their responses to the nonjudgmental teaching strategy employed. For reasons which become evident in Chapter VI, I decided to use one of the two back-up students to become an additional case study, and data concerning him first appear in the section reporting events of the second quarter. I continued throughout the year to document the activities of the class in general terms, but progressively focused intensive data gathering on the case study students.

Within this framework, I chose one student who was a high achiever and who was compliant in response to the nonjudgmental strategy, a second student who was experiencing what I believed at that time to
be the greatest difficulty with achievement and with the teaching strategy, a third student who seemed at that time to be interesting for other reasons which became apparent during the first six weeks, and a fourth student who, during the latter part of the first quarter, developed severe difficulties with the teaching strategy. The original case study student whom I chose based on his difficulties with the strategy, seemed by the half year, to be experiencing those difficulties from causes other than problems with the teaching strategy. For that reason, during the third quarter, I concentrated my observations on the case study student chosen as a backup.

The Selection

In deciding which of my two sophomore classes would be the subject for this study, I met with the Guidance Director and together we planned a nonteaching block of time to follow one of my sophomore classes. The purpose was to allow time for immediate attention to recording notes and observations concerning the participants.

The students' placement in a sophomore class was based on the following scheduling conditions:
1. They had not previously applied for admission and been accepted into an honors English class, a special education class, or a level three learning difficulties class.

2. Every effort is made to fulfill each student's preselected choice of subjects.

3. Every effort is made to maintain an equal number of students in each tenth grade English class.

The next step was to notify each family by letter (Appendix C) and then to conference with each student and his or her family to explain the program and discuss concerns they raised. The principal and the Guidance Department were very supportive and advised me that in the event any family member objected to the proposed plan, I was to ask them to try the program for six weeks and then to reconsider. If anyone strongly objected to this plan, then that student would be changed to another English class. When a student and family agreed to participate, I asked them to sign the consent forms (Appendix D and Appendix E).

I submitted a mini-grant proposal (as I also did with the pilot study) to the school district's Incentive Grant Committee to cover the cost of my time involved in composing and sending letters to announce the
plan, making follow-up telephone calls to schedule conferences, and conducting a conference with each family during the summer. Although I had been awarded the grant money for the pilot study, I did not receive it for the study itself.

Length of Study

I carried on the data collection throughout the first three quarters of the school year. Based upon my past experiences in using the strategy of nonjudgmental language, I had observed a turning point to occur in March. My informal observations have shown that by this time, most of the students increase the frequency and consistency of their responsible behaviors. Accordingly, I terminated formal data collection at the end of the third quarter which was the third week of April. During the fourth quarter, I began the data analysis and continued to monitor the four case studies. At the end of the fourth quarter, I engaged in a closing interview with three of the case study students as well as all of the other class members.
Although action research is by its very nature particularly susceptible to researcher bias, it has long been promoted as the strongest means for classroom teachers to come to understand a particular situation (Carr & Kemmis, 1986). As my own experience is strongly grounded in counseling, I am further aware that my research observations—what I include, what I omit, and how I analyze the data—are but one reality for my classroom and for each of the case studies. Because the strategy I used with regard to student work is one which I have already used for almost two decades, I am particularly cognizant of the fact that I am strongly biased toward the positive effects of teacher use of nonjudgmental language. In my efforts toward creating credibility, I used several sources of data collection and several means of monitoring my own actions and decisions in data collection and data analysis. Further, I have included in Appendix F a description of my own teaching history as well as an examination of those personal areas of belief about teaching and student learning that might present particular risks of operating outside my awareness.
Data Collection

The sources of data were the following:

Individual Student Folders for Each Class Member

The folders contained

1. the course outcomes for each quarter,

2. all dated written work as defined in Chapter I and on which were my written feedback for each piece,

3. all edited and updated versions of student written work along with my written feedback,

4. any student written responses to me in relation to their work,

5. the Progress Report letters which each student wrote to parents at least once a quarter,

6. each weekly self-assessment sheet (Appendix G),

7. team work assessment sheets (Appendix H).

The folders were maintained for each student throughout the study.
Audiotapes

In an effort to desensitize the participants with regard to the audiotaping of classes, I audiotaped every class during the course of the study. Of the class audiotapes, those which I transcribed were the following:

1. That portion of each class during which I returned student written work has become a part of the permanent database. The purpose was to record student questions and concerns about their returned written work and my responses.

2. During each quarter, three class discussions were audiotaped and became part of the database. The purpose of these audiotapes was to record teacher-student interaction within the classroom. This provided another means of documenting teacher use of judgmental and nonjudgmental language.

3. No-lose problem solving sessions (Gordon, 1974), some held spontaneously and some planned. In both events, such recorded sessions became a part of the database. A description of no-lose problem solving may be found in Appendix I.

In addition to class audiotapes, the individual conferences during which each student in the class and I engaged in assessment of that student's work in the course was audiotaped. These taped sessions
were held during the last two weeks of each quarter. Any additional student/teacher conferences which took place for various reasons during the study were also taped.

During the second and third quarters, I taped additional conferences with each of the case study students. One conference was held during the fourth week of each quarter, and additional ones were held according to individual need.

All tapes were stored for future reference, and particular ones have been transcribed. Those tapes from each of the three quarters which were transcribed verbatim include three class discussions (a total of nine), all classroom recorded sections during which written work was being returned, any particularly relevant portions from the end of the quarter individual conferences, and four complete case study individual conferences midquarter of the second and third quarters (a total of six). All of the written transcripts became a part of the database.

Teacher's Rank Book

This contains a record of each student's attendance, lateness to class, punctuality of assignments, and consistency in bringing source materials to class.
Class Event Log

This log contains a brief description of each day's activities and periodic teacher observation of student behaviors during group and individual class work. It also contains a record of student questions, comments, and concerns relevant to the case study questions. Included within brackets are my own commentary and questions. When a student behavior was of particular interest, I included it in that student's individual event log (see description below). The first six weeks of observation notes in the Class Event Log were the primary source for determining the three original students for individual study. The class event log was maintained throughout the study.

Student Event Log

This log was kept during the first six weeks for each individual student. Entries were made for 3 to 5 students each day on a rotating basis and for any additional students as events required. This log contains highlights of student behaviors, weekly descriptive observations of the student at work in class, notations I made concerning teacher/student conferences, telephone conversations,
parent/teacher/student conferences, and any other data deemed to be noteworthy as the study continued.

These logs also were used in determining the initial three students for individual case studies. At that point—six weeks into the first school quarter—the student event log was subsequently kept only for the three individual case studies, as well as for two additional students, one of which was added as another case study.

**Teacher Reflective Log**

This log contains

1. **my reflective notations in relation to what was happening, my expectations, my reactions, and my developing ideas;**

2. **a record of developing hypotheses and questions useful to follow up and/or discuss with my committee;**

3. **a record of my frustrations and anxieties, actions I took in particular situations, and descriptions of what I observed to be outcomes of those actions.**
Peer Debriefer Log

To help in establishing trustworthiness, I had planned to employ a peer debriefer to read and discuss with me selected portions of the recorded data, to serve as devil's advocate as I analyzed the data and made decisions in the course of the study. The peer debriefer's job was to ask difficult questions about my application of the teaching strategy in class, the collection of data, the ongoing analysis of data, and the interplay of those with my expectations and beliefs. Because the chosen peer debriefer was unable to fully play the required role, beyond occasional class observations, a limited version of the debriefing work was carried out by my committee chairman. No log, however, was maintained for this work.

Method Log

This log was used to record all procedural, methodological and design decisions made in the course of the study as well as a record of all steps taken to maintain trustworthiness.
Data Reduction and Analysis

The data analysis occurred concurrently with the data collection (Bogdan & Biklan, 1986; Locke, Spirduso, & Silverman, 1993; Merriam, 1988). Analysis for both Question I and Question II involved ongoing examination of the data sources. Each of the selected audiotapes (as described on p. 45) was transcribed. These transcripts and the Logs (Class Event, Student Event, Peer Debrief, and Teacher Reflective) were examined on an ongoing basis in order to identify units of behavior which were coded and recorded in a Start List of Codes (Miles & Huberman, 1984). Initial identification and coding was derived from the theoretical framework of the Karpman Triangle and from experiences with the pilot study. Others emerged and became more clearly defined as the study proceeded.

Each unit was identified with the appropriate code written in the margin of the texts. These coded units were sorted into appropriate categories which were consistently examined and updated in order to discover emerging themes and patterns (Bogdan & Biklan, 1986; Merriam, 1988; Miles & Huberman, 1984).

The human element is contained within the descriptive accounts (Merriam, 1988), and these data sources provided rich detail with which
to understand the meaning of student behaviors. This is most clearly
evidenced within the case study accounts. Conference and fieldnote
data reveal the dynamics of personal pressures which underlie
seemingly irresponsible choices. A clear and complete record of all
students' work and class interactions proved vital to understanding
their responses to the teaching strategy.

Management of Data Collection

The following is a list of procedures used to manage data collection:

1. In order to circumvent loss of one of the
data sources, I made a copy of each
student's written assignment before re-
turning it to the student's folder. Both
event logs and the reflective log were
stored on computer disks with backup
copies stored at another location.

2. If a student and I did not initially come to
consensus on a grade, we first exhausted
all creative plans established in the guide-
lines of the class rules. If we remained in
disagreement, we asked a third party to
conference with us together and then to
assess and evaluate the work. We
had the prior agreement (as contained
within the parent and the student consent
form) that we would abide by the decision
of this impartial third party.
3. Because the pilot study class experienced a great deal of anxiety in relation to grading themselves and to being "guinea pigs," as they stated it, I anticipated that this discomfort would be the case again. When these feelings surfaced within the group, I engaged them in no-lose group problem-solving. I anticipated that my involvement of the students in this problem-solving might result in interesting changes in the study plan itself. All audiotapes of such incidents were included in the database.

4. Tape recording in a class often produces initial participant anxiety. In an effort to lessen this anxiety, I audiotaped all classes.

5. In order to take accurate and complete fieldnotes, I anticipated a need for a great amount of time; therefore, I chose the sophomore class which was followed by a free block of time. I also contracted to teach part time during the course of the study.

6. Parent anxiety can become a major issue when student anxiety is present. For this reason teacher-parent communication is very important. Simultaneously, most adolescent students prefer to exclude their parents. This combination of needs can create problems for the teacher who would remain faithful to the student while respecting the parents' needs. Based on my past experience, I planned to involve the student first in all problem solving situations and to contact parents only after consultation with the student. Even then, I attempted to have the parent contact be initiated by the student. In nearly every
instance, I made parent contact only when the student refused to do so and in my judgment parent communication was necessary.

**Establishing Trustworthiness**

Since this is a qualitative action research case study and one in which I am both the investigator and a participant, it is imperative to include procedures designed to increase the trustworthiness of the study. In order to accomplish this, I employed several procedures.

**Prolonged Engagement** (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) insures researcher time to establish rapport with the subjects as well as to discover changing patterns that emerge over the course of implementation of a strategy. This investigation was conducted over the course of 7 months (131 school days).

**Triangulation** is the use of multiple methods of data collection (Merriam, 1988) and enables the researcher to compare findings from one data source with findings from other data sources. I have data of several different kinds available to me. First of all, although the peer debriefer did not participate as originally planned, my committee chairman did fill
the role of confronting my perceptions. Second, there are the students’ understandings as voiced in class and in conferences and my own recorded interpretations. Third, and finally, there is the record of how I actually implemented the teaching strategy (both at whole class and at individual levels, as well as in oral and written modes) juxtaposed within the agenda specified in the original research plan.
CHAPTER IV

INTRODUCTION TO THE RESULTS

Review of the Purpose

As I introduced the students to a pedagogical agenda very different from that of their previous experiences, we carried out the English 10 curriculum for the period of one school year. The agenda, as described in Chapter II, included two major areas: (1) inviting the students to share in decision making as well as in evaluating their own work, and (2) using nonjudgmental language. The questions used to guide the study were as follows:

1. Over the course of a school year, do high school tenth graders in a modified heterogeneously grouped English class demonstrate an increasing responsibility for their own learning process when the teacher eliminates judgment on student work, and each quarterly grade report is derived through ongoing student/teacher comparison of student work to course objectives?
2. What are the inherent problems in the use of the strategy and how do teacher and students respond to the strategy over the course of the study?

The Curriculum

The sophomore curriculum included the reading and study of 4 major literary pieces—*Lord of the Flies*, *Our Town*, *Macbeth*, *The Adventures of Huck Finn*—as well as a short story unit and a poetry unit. Each of these readings included at least two writing assignments. Another major task of the tenth grade curriculum was a research project which culminated in the writing of a 6 - 8 page (typed) research paper. Additional requirements included communication skills, vocabulary, and grammar. Students were expected to engage in a minimum of one outside reading project during three of the four grading quarters. Each quarter I gave students a list of expected outcomes and explained that in their work to meet the outcomes, I encouraged them to edit their papers and retake tests as often as they chose. In both mid-quarter and end-quarter individual conferences, each student and I examined the student's progress and chose a number grade to symbolize the
student's work in meeting the outcomes. The end-of-quarter grade was recorded on each report card.

The Students

The 19 original students—9 females and 10 males—ranging in age from 15 to 17, comprised the class up until the six week mark when one male student left the school district. The remaining 18 students (see Table 4.1), worked together until the half-year point when one female student decided to change to another English class. All students were white, English speaking, and middle or lower middle class (see Chapter III, pp. 37-38 for social economic indicators); all students, as well as their parents, expressed the expectation that they would go on to some kind of further education upon high school graduation.

The Initial Meeting

The students and I first met during the spring preceding the students' sophomore year. "Step-up Day," as it is termed, is a day for students to attend their next year's classes, meet their teachers, learn
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*All names are pseudonyms.*
the course expectations, and be given their summer assignments which would be due the first day of school in the fall. Because our time was short, I did not inform them about the plans for the present study. That discussion was accomplished during the summer conferences.

During the initial meeting in the summer conferences, I described the class processes and informed the parents and students that this study was to be my dissertation. All parents and students expressed interest in the program, and all but one parent expressed enthusiasm. That mother stated her concern that without grades, her son might not be motivated to work. Without exception, all of the originally assigned students made the decision to participate.

**Organization of Results**

The first question for this study asks whether progress in student development of responsibility may be achieved through practice and familiarity with the teaching format, thus the passage of time is an important consideration. For this reason I have chosen to organize the results into chronological sections within the grading quarters of the school year.
The first quarter consisted of nine weeks and the others of 10 weeks each. Although intensive study of the entire class ended with the close of the third quarter, I did continue to monitor the class, as well as the three case study students chosen at the six weeks point of the course, and I included points of import from the last quarter as well as information from the final grading conferences.

Within each of the first three quarters, I have organized the discussion according to the two research questions, a decision which naturally led me to the participants and the problems. For this reason, I have used the following subtopics within each section: The Class, The Case Study Students, The Teacher, Salient Problems, and Student Responsibility. I also have included a short final subsection entitled, The Quarter's Final Grades, and present there any points of interest concerning the joint student/teacher decision about the grade placed on the official school record and the rank card.

The initial 16 days seemed to constitute a time of major adjustment for the students and as such became an orientation period for all of us. For this reason, before relating the events of the three quarters, it is appropriate to begin by introducing some of the major components of the classroom dynamics which became apparent as the class got under
way. All of the detail reported within the following chapters was
extracted from my daily class log, the audio tapes of each day's class,
and teacher–student conferences.
In the fall, the first day of school started with the collection of the summer assignment. All except one male student turned it in. Wanting to begin with a more personal touch than merely taking a roll call, I began by playing with matching student names to their faces and was quite unsuccessful for the most part. I asked them to help challenge me on this learning task by sitting at a different desk each day. They laughed and agreed.

Turning attention to the summer reading, I began with what would be our usual class working format whether we were in small groups or together as one large group sitting in the circle. I wrote on the board both an academic and a social skills objective for the day’s class work. I explained that for this work, they would pair up with the person next to them, and accomplish the task. Then I briefly defined the social skill of "I-messages," and gave examples.

As they worked together, I walked around and listened. The boy who didn’t turn in the summer assignment beckoned to me, and I
walked over to him and his partner. "I didn't read the book so I can't do that," he said pointing to the academic objective. I responded that I was very sorry he had not read the book, commented on how much I had enjoyed it, and, to convey the idea that I expected the boy's partner to discuss the topic anyway, asked his partner his ideas concerning the academic objective. The two boys started to discuss together, and I continued walking around to the other pairs.

Even as early as the end of the first class session, I was beginning to select my three case study students. As described in Chapter III, one of these case study students was to be chosen on the basis of experiencing the most difficulty with the program. On this first day of school, James, the boy without his summer assignment, became a possible candidate.

During the next several days, I introduced cooperative learning and large group discussion, explaining that when we worked in these groups, there would always be 2 objectives: (1) an academic objective, and (2) a social skills objective. To initiate the social skills concept, I introduced the one rule I include in each of my classes—"Show consideration to self and others"—by brainstorming what the behavior associated with the rule sounds like and looks like. This list of
behaviors, as well as the communication skills I introduced throughout the year, became the source of the social skills objectives. The academic objective would be taken from the assignment we were doing at a given time. We then continued with the study of the summer reading by dividing into two groups, each of which took one-half of the academic objective. I further explained the cooperative learning rule that once the group task began, each group could turn to me for only one question during that day's time. All other concerns were to be addressed and solved within the group.

During the next two days while they worked to complete the academic objective, I listened, made notes of misunderstandings, important points brought out in groups, and successful social skills used by individuals. At the end of each day's group work, I read examples of successful social skills behavior I had seen and heard during these first group experiences. I did not identify students by name because I wanted to avoid possible embarrassment. Some of the skills I heard and mentioned were the following:

1. Asking for ideas from other group members; "Mark, what do you think about that idea?"
2. Asking for consensus; "Does everyone agree we should include that in the notes?"

3. Responding to comments--"Ya" and "I thought that too."

As I read, I heard individuals identifying themselves by commenting, "That was me," and "What'da ya know, she heard that."

While they worked, I was able to observe which students brought materials, who initiated the discussion, who responded to others, who interrupted, who volunteered to research additional information, who immediately turned to me for help or who turned to their peers, who sat quietly looking for information on their own, who were talking together on an off-task topic, who brought them back into the group task, and who sat quietly waiting. By the end of day three, I still had not learned everyone's name, but I had learned a great deal about each of these people.

When the two groups had completed their task, the class formed one circle and the reporters from each group gave their group's information as a mini-lecture to the other group. I explained that they would find this information necessary to their further work and suggested that note-taking would ensure they had the information available.
Before beginning the group sharing of information, I encouraged listeners to ask questions whenever they wanted and invited everyone to feel free to add information. I explained that this was their discussion, no raising of hands was necessary—just discuss the topic "as if you were sitting around in your living room." (A few giggled at this.) I reminded them of the behaviors we had listed for "showing consideration to self and others," asking them to use those behaviors. I stressed that they should talk to one another and include me only to the extent that I was another member of the group.

During the sharing, I helped to organize the information they were sharing by using nonjudgmental language. I occasionally paraphrased, summarized, and asked questions. When I heard incorrect information, I responded with an I Statement such as, "I had a different understanding about that." Discussion between myself and the person would ensue, and in two instances, we both consulted the text to clarify the facts. On this first day's experience with open discussion, other than the group reporters, the students sat quietly and wrote in their notebooks.

The following day, I asked for closure on the large group discussion. Several people asked questions directed to me. I turned each question
over to the appropriate group and each was answered by a student. Then they took time, at my suggestion, to write additional notes. In walking around the room, I noted that some had paragraphs of notes while others had a sentence. I suggested all choose another person they did not know well, and compare their notes so that everyone could have many notes on the topic. I brought closure to this session by telling them these notes were important to their growing understanding of the novel as well as to their upcoming writing about the novel. I encouraged additional questions, reminding them to ask one another rather than me. They did so, and a few added more information to their notebook’s literature section.

On the last day of the first week, the students wrote their first self-assessment and action plan (Appendix G). (During the first quarter, the students wrote a self-assessment each Friday; then I wrote feedback on each, and returned them on Monday.) The major concern on this first assessment, as expressed by 9 students, was a desire to participate more in the class discussions:

I’ll get more involved in class discussions.

I’ll try to look right at the speaker so my mind doesn’t wander.
I'm going to participate more.

I would like to work on talking out in class and sharing my ideas.

I will try to do the class discussion more.

I would like to contribute more in class.

To voice my concern, opinions, and questions ....

I will speak more.

I'll ask questions if I am not sure of something.

At this point the class had grasped the concept that group participation was to be a valued skill.

The second most commonly mentioned concern, as brought up by three students, involved note-taking. Two commented as follows:

I plan to work on improving my note-taking.

I would like to be able to take better notes.

The third, a transfer student from an all-girls' parochial school, had found no reason to take notes. She wrote the following, "Since we did not really have any major lectures, discussions, or notes, I don't know
what areas I want to work on." A fourth student felt there had been very little work: "We have not had very much to do that I am able to reflect on."

These two students who believed there had been no significant information about which to take notes were giving out important warning signals which I recognized from my previous experience with the teaching format. This initial student reaction to information which is gathered and dispersed by students rather than by the teacher is to believe that nothing has been done. The honeymoon period was over.

**Resistance to the Nonjudgmental Language**

In class (day 5), students counted off to divide into groups of three for peer editing of their first writing assignment. The social skill objective, as written on the board, was to respond to the other students' papers by using nonjudgmental language and, particularly, the I-message.

Concern with how to talk without judging another's work ensued. Beth questioned how she could respond if she disliked another student's paper. As we talked, she said she had been confused and thought the
directions were for "eye-contact." Rita wanted to know "How can I
equip if no one tells me what's wrong with my paragraph?" I
assured the students that if they found errors, it would be helpful to
tell a person their observation in the form of a question such as, "Isn't
this word spelled differently?" or in the form of an I-message, "I
believe this word is spelled__"  

Mark was still uncomfortable, "I don't mean to be rude or anything,
but aren't we just wasting time if I can't tell anybody what to do to
make their paper better?" And several students questioned, "What do I
say if I can't give my opinion?" Perhaps the most difficult comment for
them to give up was, "That was good, a good paper." My suggestion to
"Describe the specific things you like in the paper." was met with, "He
knows what I mean by 'good.'"

The discussion continued. Based on my previous experience in
teaching nonjudgmental language, I had anticipated their concerns and
had a handout ready. Before class, I had created a list of
nonjudgmental comments from which they could choose appropriate
responses. (For nonjudgmental language, see Chapter 11, pp. 12-14.) I
waited until this point to give it to them. Only when they were asking
questions, were they ready to use the list. I explained that these comments were examples of what they would see and hear in my feedback to them.

**Students' First Decision**

When students had completed their first peer editing session, I suggested they have a final draft for the next day. Ruth spoke up immediately, "I don't think anyone is ready to complete it for tomorrow." I responded that I was glad she spoke up, and requested that since this was their class and their learning, I encouraged all the students to ask for what they needed. Ruth made the observation that, "We aren't used to making our own decisions, but I'll try to do that." Several students nodded in agreement, and we continued by making a unanimous decision that the paper would be due in two days rather than my original suggestion of one day. I later learned that this type of decision making by the students created potentially damaging circumstances for many. (Because the resulting situation is of such
import to the teaching format, it will be discussed in the subsection section dealing with salient problems which occurred in the first quarter.)

Teacher's Work

The first week had passed and the first writing assignment was due. So far I had arranged the classwork according to the following format:

1. The teacher had given no lectures from which students took notes.

2. The information students were to write down as notes, had come primarily from their own and their peers' reading, research and sharing.

3. Assignment deadlines had been decided through consensus from the class.

4. The teacher was responding to their questions by directing the questions back to the class and by asking more questions.

5. The teacher had engaged the class in a brainstorming activity to determine what characteristics create quality in paragraphs and essays.
During the week as the students worked in pairs, groups, and as a whole class, I had listened as they talked, and by using appropriate nonjudgmental language, had called attention to any inaccurate information presented, pointed out possible discrepancies in their information, asked questions, clarified information, and summarized. I encouraged student participation by asking direct questions of individuals and also by frequently requesting that a particular student clarify his or her understanding of a point, or to summarize a bit of information. I had skimmed their notes, often asking questions in an effort to direct thinking. Finally, I had provided only small amounts of information, none of it in the traditional lecture format.

With the advent of this first writing assignment, the whole class asked me to tell them what I expected on the paper. They did not trust that what they had listed would be the same as the teacher's standards. I suggested I make a copy for everyone of our "Characteristics for Quality Writing" (I had contributed two or three characteristics) brainstormed list. I commented that they could then use it to edit their writing. They agreed.

On the sixth day, I introduced the next project in our study of Lord of the Flies and gave a mini-lecture (no longer than 20 minutes) on
ways to recognize symbols in literature. They took notes. Then they began a literary symbols project by drawing out of a hat one of four topics I had chosen. Then, based upon matching their topics, the students formed groups. The next step involved the students in making a work plan, deciding when each group presentation would be due, and deciding when each individual writing assignment would be due.

Early Student Concerns

Students Not Learning Enough

The second week of school began with the first student request for transfer out of the class. Kara, who had written in her self-assessment that we hadn’t had "any major lectures, notes...," put in a request with the guidance department to change to "a more challenging class." I decided a parent-student-teacher conference was appropriate and asked Kara to stop after class so we could talk for a minute. She did not do so, and we were unsuccessful in arranging a conference for several days.

On day 7, the assistant principal greeted me with the information that Ruth had asked her if she could drop this English class. She was
concerned that others weren't taking the class as seriously as she and she was worried about what would happen.

**Students Expressing Insecurity In Group Work**

During the small group work process, students expressed many concerns. Ruth asked what to do "if some people in the group don't do their part?" Amy came up after the first day of the group project and expressed her concern that her group "didn't take the assignment seriously and didn't decide who would do what."

As the groups worked over a period of several days, the most commonly repeated question to me as I walked about listening to their process was, "Just what do you want in this project?" Each time I turned the solution-making back to the student and the group, frequently taking five to ten minutes to sit with a group and help the members brainstorm ways of addressing a particular concern or of solving a problem. The following excerpt was a typical example. The group consisted of three students, and just previous to this excerpt, they had asked me what I wanted on the work they were doing. I sat down with them:

76
Teacher: First of all, would someone explain your understanding of what you're doing in the group; what is your group academic objective? (It was written on the board, but I wanted it in their words.)

Student: Make a list of things Ralph does and says to show he fits the symbolic meaning of Number 1.

Teacher: Is that everyone's understanding? (The other two nodded.) There are several ways to gather this information. Can you think of a way to start?

Student: Just list what each of us remembers from the book?

I do not respond, but instead look questioningly at the other two. One responds:

Student: Ya, but how do we know we've gotten examples from the whole book like you said we had to?

Teacher: Anyone have any ideas on how to solve that?

Silence about 30 seconds

Student: Do we have to reread the whole book?

Silence again

Student: Well, we could just skim it, but that's still a lot of work.

Student: How many examples do we need?
Teacher: Well, your individual academic objective is to write one paragraph, so how many examples do you need to make your topic sentence believable?

Student: I don't know. How many do you want?

Teacher: If you were reading a topic sentence that said "Ralph displays the symbolic meaning of the number 1," how many examples would you, as reader, need to become convinced this was true?

Student: I don't know. My last year's teacher said at least one example for each topic sentence.

Teacher: Would one example convince you?

Silence for about 30 seconds

Student: Well I guess more would be better.

Teacher: And would it make your point even stronger to have examples from the beginning, the middle and the end of the novel?

Student: I guess so. Would one from each part be enough?

I again say nothing and turn to the other two.

Student: How about if we each take a part of the book tonight, and come into class tomorrow with a few examples from our section?
They all agreed to this plan, and again the next day asked me how many of their examples to use in their individual paragraphs. The students continued to struggle with their need to know what the teacher wanted.

The process for teaching the students how to work through these kinds of problems, as opposed to the teacher's doing it for them, I had learned, requires time and repeated opportunity for students to practice with teacher guidance and feedback. The student concerns with this process, and ultimately, some parent concerns, have such broad significance, I will include a complete discussion within the analysis of salient problems subsection.

The Class Contract

On the seventh day, the class started the no-lose problem solving process by beginning to create their contract. The first concern they discussed was a way to evaluate their papers. "Since we're not being graded, how will we know what we got?" Morry asked. Ted suggested "a point system of some kind." Beth and Ruth added that whatever they decided, it shouldn't be anything "too different." Ruth stressed
the need "to go gradually" into something new. Beth agreed, emphasizing this point as "very important." Faith mentioned the importance of fairness, and several echoed her concern. Ben suggested a type of point system which would add points instead of taking them away. Several students mentioned the importance of "getting credit for trying." Effort and fairness became the focal point of the discussion:

Well, if you spend a lot of time on an assignment, you should get a good grade on it.

If you do all the assignments, that shows you're trying, and you should get at least an A or a B.

... the more you do, the more you learn.

If you spend a lot of time on something, it isn't fair if you don't get a good grade on it.

I wanted to direct their considerations to the topic of quality, so I pointed out that they were discussing quantity and asked if quality were important. No one responded. The students continued to discuss quantity, returning to the idea of a point system to keep track of it.
A few minutes later, I decided to try again to direct them to the topic of quality, and I asked, "Should we include quality in our discussion?" Again no one registered this concept; the next speaker continued the group discussion by bringing up the importance of attitude.

The next day, the contract discussion continued. I started this session with a summary of ideas presented up to this point, and again brought up quality. One student responded by saying, "Then I think we should get into our contract that if there are weaknesses,...then you have to make a significant effort to improve." The students' preoccupation with effort, and fairness are of such import that I have addressed these issues within the subsection, Salient Problems.

Through continued discussion the students reached three decisions by the end of this second day's contract work. First of all they decided they could not make a contract, because they didn't yet know enough about what to put into one. Instead, they decided on a "pre-contract." Next, they agreed that the first item to be included was a provision for individual conferencing with the teacher, especially when written work was returned, because "this will help us know where to start." Third, they agreed that "To earn an 'A', students must turn in all major
assignments," and they defined major assignments as "things that cover days rather than one night." Ruth asked me to write a description of an "A" student from a teacher's perspective. Several others echoed her request and I agreed.

In addition to reaching consensus on the above items, they unanimously agreed to make changes gradually and to include concrete things in their contract. They also generated a list of ideas to consider for their next session:

1. Turn in all but one homework.
2. Turn in all but two homeworks.
3. Have a point system of some kind.
4. Make a scale for homework/everything.
5. Make a point system that adds up points for what you do.

Ted ended this second contract session with a suggestion that the next day's planned group work be put off one day in order to allow a whole class period for discussing the return of their first writing assignment. All agreed.
As I have found to be the usual case, there are students who do not express themselves in front of the class, and this seemed to be true for Bobby Ann. After class, she lingered to tell me she thought attitude was important. When I suggested she bring that point up in the next discussion, she laughed and said she felt uncomfortable bringing it up because she didn't want to be put down. She went on to explain that she had felt put down a few times, "mostly in other classes, but some in here too."

As Ted had requested, we scheduled the entire class of day 9 for discussion concerning the return of the first writing assignment, which was one paragraph. I allowed time for students to examine my feedback on their paper and then I walked around to each individual and asked what I could clarify. Ten students asked me a direct question about my feedback on their paper; most questions were in regard to use of support for the topic sentence. A few students made the decision to rewrite the paragraph and return the new draft on Monday. No one asked what the grade would be if the paper were graded, and no students placed a grade on their returned work.
Disillusionment

Eight school days into the program and two students wanted to transfer; three others, I believed, were having some kind of difficulty with the program (all females); two had turned in most of the work late; and one had turned in no assignments (these three all males). My class log indicates the following potentially problematic situations:

So far, Kara (the first student to request transfer), her mom, and I had not been able to find a common time at which to meet, and each day Kara's facial expression and body language conveyed only anger.

Beth, as well as Ruth, was adament about the need to make changes gradually, and I had observed that Beth frequently experienced misunderstandings similar to her thinking "eye contact" when I had been talking about "I-messages."

Bobby Ann was not participating in the decision making and being angry that her concerns were not brought out by others

Amy, a student who had not yet spoken in class, came in each day during the lunch break preceding the class and engaged me in conversation about both her
class related ideas and her personal interests. Each day she expressed strong discomfort with the taping equipment. I sensed she wanted to talk about something particular and that making a conference time for us to talk was important.

Garth, another quiet student who smiled a lot, was turning his assignments in late each time.

Sam, whose mother had been hesitant about his taking a nongraded class, was beginning to be late with his work. I had an additional concern about Sam. His facial expression was very serious and often I had observed a puzzled expression, yet whenever I asked him if I could clarify something, he responded with a staccato, "Everything's fine; fine, everything's fine." Usually this was accompanied with a sort of horizontal waving of his hand.

James, of the no summer assignment, had turned in none of the assignments.

Counting Ruth, the second student to request transfer to another English class, a little more than one-third of the class members were experiencing difficulties. From past experience I knew there were others who were keeping their feelings masked for now.

Knowing the discomfort level, I felt frustrated with what I saw as the students' need for instant gratification. I did not, however, feel
discouraged because I had anticipated this development based upon my previous years' experience with the process. By this time I did recognize a great need for one-on-one time with the students.

The Student and Teacher: Need For One-on-One Time

Finding the time to conference individually was a primary need. My schedule for this particular year of research and concurrent teaching, had been arranged so that all four of my classes met in the morning--thus leaving afternoons open to provide one-on-one student/teacher time. In addition, because I was employed on a part-time status, I had none of the regularly assigned teacher duties. Even with all these unusual advantages, the students and I experienced difficulties finding sufficient time in common to meet our needs for one-on-one conferencing, and I saw a growing need to meet individually with each student before the midterm conference which had been scheduled into the study. (I was also continuing my search for the three students I would eventually choose for my case studies.)
On the tenth day of school, during a 20 minute lunch break, Ruth and I arranged a meeting to discuss her request to transfer. She expressed several concerns:

I'm worried we'll go through all this and it'll be a waste.

My father uses i-messages, and I hate it.... I feel put-down...it's like saying, 'there, there, it'll be all right.'

Some of the kids aren't doing their work.

We need to go gradually. We jumped in with too much responsibility in the beginning.

She went on to tell me that her friend Beth had the same concerns.

I listened as she talked, paraphrasing and clarifying her comments. I told her that most students feel uncomfortable in the beginning. I suggested the three of us meet, and she agreed. Beth had been absent, so we decided to wait until she returned before scheduling time for us to talk together.

Her concerns had told me she was feeling overwhelmed and extremely anxious about the whole process. My experience told me I would need to keep in close contact with her in order to provide the
support she needed while developing enough knowledge and experience with both the program and me to dare trying to trust her own judgment.

On the same day, after school, I met with Amy whom I had sensed wanted to talk with me. Since the first day, Amy had come into the classroom at the beginning of her lunch and dropped off her books. Each time she would ask me a question about what she needed to bring for a book or what we would be doing in class. Frequently she would tell me something about her personal life and we would have a conversation. When I suggested we schedule a time to meet together, she responded that she needed to talk with me about her essay.

Before the bell to end school had stopped ringing, Amy came into the room with light dancing steps. She was smiling, and I had the impression she was feeling very happy. I left the topic up to her, and she started the conversation by talking about some personal issues she was presently having. As she spoke, her expression took on a look I had never seen in her face--deep anger.

We continued to talk casually. She told me about her pets--rabbits and fish--her three week summer camp experience which she loved, her art work, and some of her feelings about her parents separation. I
listened, responding by paraphrasing what I was hearing her feelings to be. She confirmed that these were her feelings. As we ended our conference, I asked if she wanted to schedule another meeting to discuss her essay. She waved her hand in the air and said, "Oh that. I've got that all figured out."

There were a number of other potential problems. First of all, I was worried about James and I relayed my feelings to him at the beginning of class on day 11. His initial response was to ask why, but then, almost immediately, he told me he was worried too. That afternoon, I found his first assignment, a paragraph, in my faculty mailbox. The next day, he asked if I had found his paragraph and told me he didn't think he could find six paragraphs for his present assignment which was to write an essay. We made an appointment to work on this together.

Simultaneously, I discovered an invisible student in the class. Garth was so quiet, I frequently did not even notice him. My concern was that he would disappear from my awareness, and to prevent this from happening, I needed time to talk with him one-on-one.

Several students had been absent for varying lengths of time. One had been out with mononucleosis for several days. Each needed to
meet with me to discuss the makeup, and there was not enough time between classes. With difficulty we did schedule time together after school.

Meanwhile, Beth, Ruth and I were still attempting to schedule a conference together, and on two occasions Beth experienced confusion about the time, thereby missing the conference. By now I recognized that Beth expressed confusion frequently. In addition she often was absent. Over the first 15 days she had sporadically missed 5 classes. I also noted that Ruth had asked for postponements on each assignment up to that point. I was puzzled because I had found her writing skills to be well developed. I wanted to know more about her need for time.

**The Teacher and the Drama Triangle**

The most difficult problem for me as the teacher was to stay out of the Karman Drama Triangle (Figure 2.1, p 22). I found my feelings carrying me toward the position of Persecutor in some instances and Rescuer in others. For example, when I learned Kara wanted to change English classes because she felt she wasn’t being challenged enough, I
felt angry. My initial reaction was a strong urge to tell her that sufficient work and learning was available if she "cared enough to look at it." I knew such sarcasm on my part would create an immediate power struggle—I would be positioning myself in the position of Persecutor as depicted on the Drama Triangle. I also knew I had to avoid the Rescuer role. Taking the action of providing a solution for her was tempting—an action which could have established a future power-struggle if she didn't like my solution. My taking the position of Rescuer would also have furthered her attitude that motivation comes from the teacher rather than from herself.

I did arrange a conference with Kara and her mother which took place during the third week of school. We discussed the situation. I learned something very important: the sophomore literature text was the same one she had used last year, and she believed this year would consist of the same reading assignments she already had done.

I told Kara and her mother that all English classes had the same curriculum and, in an effort to avoid the Drama Triangle altogether, invited them to work with me to establish alternative readings for Kara. Everyone agreed that during literature assignments Kara had studied the previous year, she would read the literature that our school
included in the Freshman curriculum. She and I would meet for discussion during our shared open class time whenever Kara requested a meeting—about once a week. We further agreed, upon Kara's suggestion, that whenever the class was beginning a grammar lesson which she already knew well, she would independently make a decision to work alone on an alternative lesson which she would choose at the time. This solution worked well for us during the first half of the year.

By day 16, I felt that the class as a whole was trying to use the decision making to get out of completing assignments on time, and I felt they were taking advantage of me. The occasion which brought this to my attention occurred when I had forgotten to write a due date on the board—an action Johanna had asked me to do. After class, Ruth asked if the essay final drafts were due "today or tomorrow?" I pointed to the board where I had written "due Tuesday" (meaning today). Johanna spoke up and said, "but you didn't write that up there until today, and you said yesterday you would write it then, and you didn't."

She was right, and I found myself trying to avoid. I had purposely tried to give the impression the due date had been on the board all along. I strongly wanted Ruth to be held to the deadline of today
because she had already asked for two postponements, and I was feeling irritated by what I interpreted as her lack of planning.

Simultaneously, I was aware that Faith was standing nearby, and she had recently made the comment in class that, "we should stick with our set dates once we've agreed." I felt trapped between the two. I was in the Triangle and in the role of Victim.

In examining how I put myself there, I realized, that in my efforts to encourage flexibility, I had allowed the students to make changes at times when I needed to insist they live with their decisions and use the knowledge gained from the experience to help in their succeeding decisions. Without realizing it, I had taken the role of Rescuer, and this action led directly to my feelings of being manipulated, thus being in Victim position.

From the initial 16 days, the major patterns have been established and problems have been defined. Succeeding chapters are chronologically arranged according to three grading quarters. Within each chapter, I begin with the subsection which tells the story of the class and subsequently move on to the previously listed subsections of the case studies, the teacher, the analysis of salient problems, student
responsibility, and quarter grades. For Quarter I, this information includes events from day 17 to the end of the first quarter (day 56).
CHAPTER VI

RESULTS: THE FIRST QUARTER

The Story of the Class

By day 17, the students had worked individually to read a novel, to write paragraphs as well as an essay, and to read and respond to an article on communication skills. They had worked in small groups to research, to plan a class presentation, to peer edit their work, and in each instance, to learn and practice interpersonal communication skills. They had worked together in the whole class group to present information, to discuss and question, to take notes, create a "pre-contract," and throughout all, to learn and practice interpersonal communication skills and creative problem solving skills. Upon their request, each time I had returned a paper to them, we took class time for questions and clarification, and there had been little concern expressed about grades on these assignments. The groups had started their presentations on the symbol topics each had picked from the hat.
Students Taking Notes

Today (day 17) the last group would present and lead a discussion on the symbols their group had presented. Each time students had presented information, I encouraged the others to take notes, and as this group presented, I noticed that, even though I had again suggested the need for taking notes, very few students were doing so. At a particular point, I mentioned that everyone would need a certain piece of information just brought up by the presenting group. Then everyone started opening notebooks and writing. I told them again (I had brought this up on several previous days), I was very concerned about the lack of notes being taken, and I again made mention that this important information would be needed when we studied other pieces of literature. (A week later, when I examined the notebooks, I found 6 students had taken notes on all presentations, 2 students had taken no notes, and the others had taken some notes.)

Students Participating in Class Discussions

As this last presentation ended, the room was quiet, without response to the speakers. I encouraged audience participation with questions and comments, and a slow start turned into a lively
discussion. A minute before the bell rang, I read the names of all those who participated; someone added the names of the presenting groups' members, and I heard Amy comment, "I finally talked."

When the bell rang, students continued talking, and Bobby Ann, still not bringing ideas up during class, stayed to talk further to me about her idea on Christian symbols. She associated the fire at the end of the novel with the fire "which will end the world." Mark, whom I knew, from last year's study hall to be an avid reader, stayed to comment with his uninhibited enthusiasm, "some of this (symbols) has to be coincidence. This guy didn't plan all this out!" I just smiled and said, "Interesting, isn't it."

**Students Feeling Anxiety About Their Grades**

The plan for the next day was to begin discussing a Poe short story, but before we even began, Ruth asked a question about how grading would be done. A little discussion followed which revealed several different visions of how grading would be accomplished. Ruth said, "I know we're not getting graded by you, but I thought we were going to grade our own papers." Morry's idea was, "It's no big deal because you basically know if you're doing good or bad." Johanna softly indicated
that she was feeling anxious about not knowing how she was doing. Simultaneous murmurings around the room indicated that many were sharing her anxiety about grades.

I was completely taken aback and thought, "Where did this topic come from? We've taken time for discussion during each returned assignment and nobody has asked questions about grades!" Meanwhile I was feeling strong pressure to begin the new assignment. Because we had taken the time for returned work, this class was falling behind my other sophomore class. I stood there, struggling with my frustration at being held back by students who hadn't been paying attention (my immediate interpretation), with my thwarted need to move on with the curriculum, and with my knowledge that what was going on here was of major importance.

They hadn't been asking questions; they hadn't been grading their papers; and they were now feeling anxiety. I put my initial concerns aside; discussion ensued; no one mentioned our having solved this problem previously; and we agreed, that students who wanted to grade their own paper could do so, that we would take class time for
questions when papers were returned, and anyone could follow up with a teacher conference. At the end of class, Mark commented, "We get off the topic in here."

Because our next few days had already been planned, I suggested we reschedule the Poe discussion for the following Wednesday. Everyone concurred, and I immediately wrote the new date into my plan book (to model this behavior) while suggesting everyone else do the same. The next day being Friday, the class worked on the self assessments, and then we discussed the outside reading assignment for which I handed out a list of choices.

**Students Evaluating Their First Major Writing**

Monday, October 4 (day 20) was an interesting day. I returned the first major writing assignment—the essays with my feedback on them. As we had done on previous occasions and decided anew, we devoted the entire class to my moving from individual to individual in order to clarify and answer questions. In the beginning as I returned the paper, and without conscious thought, I announced that had these papers been graded, some of them would have earned a failing grade. My comment slipped out before I had a chance to stop it, and in retrospect, I think
my intent was that I wanted the students to examine these papers more fully than what I had observed them do with the previous writings. Despite my good intentions, I had just violated a fundamental rule of the class—the teacher remains nonjudgmental and students are responsible for their own evaluations.

Just as I gave my judgment, I noticed Charlie moan and put his head down on his arms. Interestingly enough though, when I arrived at his seat, he had placed a grade of "C" on the paper. I had definitely seen this paper as an F, and I believe he may have initially done so himself. I scheduled an appointment for us to conference.

Sam had evaluated his work as "C-" and wanted to know if I agreed. I referred him to the list of characteristics for quality work, called his attention to the characteristic of including support for topic sentences, and then pointed out my comment written beside each paragraph—a question which in each case asked where the support was. He then noted, "I guess I didn't use any examples or quotes or anything." When I agreed, he asked if the paper would be a failure. I answered him in the affirmative to which he responded with what I thought was a most disappointed tone, "I thought so."
Ben's paper had several incomplete sentences. I had written on it that I would be glad to help him learn the punctuation if he would set up an appointment with me. He asked if a paper with incomplete sentences and incorrect punctuation could be an A or a B. I told him I didn’t see that as honor work because I thought attention to details was most important. He said he agreed and asked how he could make sure he did not have this type of error again. I suggested a proof reader--either a peer, or me if he could get the paper to me a few days in advance of the due date.

As I approached Ted, he said he had no questions, and I noticed he had put his paper in his notebook. I asked if I could clarify anything for him, to which he responded that he hadn't yet read my comments but he would and then get back to me. His paper consisted of three body paragraphs and the minimum requirement was for five body paragraphs.

Jon had put a "C" on his paper--a paper which contained no support of any kind for his topic sentences. After we examined the criteria sheet, he still stuck by his original evaluation. I told him I disagreed, and he asked me how I would evaluate it. Because I thought he was not seeing the importance of support for his points, I decided to
respond by giving him information, "The more support a person
provides, the stronger the argument." He looked down at his paper a
minute and then said, "I don't have any support." I didn't say anything,
and a moment of silence ensued. Then he said, "Is this paper an 'F'
then?" I said, "I think so." Then he asked if we could meet and he
could find out how to improve it so he could edit and return it. We
made an appointment.

Amy had written nothing on her paper, and urged me to tell her what
I thought the grade would be. I had been impressed with the skill level
as well as the original insight into her topic, and was surprised to find
her reluctant to evaluate what I saw as an obvious A+ paper. I turned
the question back to her, asking what she thought. She answered that
she didn't have "a clue."

I asked her what my feedback meant to her, pointing out one
sentence I wrote, "I'm fully convinced by the many specific examples
you include for each topic sentence." She responded she guessed that
meant I liked her paper. I asked if my comment gave her any
information about how to create a strong argument. She replied she
guessed the way was to use lots of examples. "Did you do that?"
asked. "Yes, but what would the grade be?" she continued, and we went on in this roundabout manner.

Finally I said, "It sounds like you're feeling very uncomfortable about rating your paper as an A." She laughed aloud, exclaiming, "yes!" The conversation ended. Here was a most skilled writer and thinker, perhaps the most skilled in this class, and she found declaration of her self assessment to be impossible; possibly she actually found self assessment impossible.

As I moved on, I found several students who recognized their work as being of high quality. Johanna, who had written an A on her paper, very quickly cited my comments concerning her support for her topic sentences as well as her accurate grammatical and punctuation usage as reasons for giving her paper this honor grade. Faith, Kara, and Rita all supported their honor evaluations of their work by citing specific comments I had made on their papers, and mentioning examples of things that must be successful because I "hadn't said anything." An example Rita gave was that her sentences must all be complete because I had not said there was a problem. Mark wrote an "A-" on his
paper, saying he "kept going back and forth between A- and B+." Then he wanted to know what I thought. I told him I agreed with his decision.

Bobby Ann expressed satisfaction with all but three paragraphs and told me her plan was to edit the paper and return it for more feedback. Ruth asked no questions, and scheduled a conference to evaluate her paper with me; Garth also requested to meet with me to discuss his essay. Samantha and Morry said they were "fine, no questions." Beth, having been absent so many times, was still working on her essay. James had not turned one in.

Although I had not planned to inform them of my opinion as far as a grade was concerned, I did so in some individual instances. I made this decision because I believe these particular students, for various reasons, were not ready to make the final evaluation for themselves. An option I considered was to wait until the following week's mid-quarter conferences in which we would evaluate their work together; however, I was concerned that if I said nothing, they would interpret nonresponse as agreement.

In each case, I gave my evaluation only after we had compared the paper to the characteristics of quality work. When the students had
held their first contract discussion, their statements indicated a strong belief that they interpreted time spent and amount done as the criteria for earning a good grade (see page 88). Perhaps by emphasizing the characteristics that create quality, I could gradually lead them to think in terms of quality characteristics rather than in terms of time spent and amount done.

My conclusion concerning their reactions to their returned work was that they felt relatively positive even in light of problem papers. I observed satisfaction in many and delight in three students. I saw no anger as a result of any evaluation. I did observe in some people what I believe to be disappointment. Several planned to edit and submit a new draft.

**Students Writing Their Self-Assessments**

Each Friday, the class had taken time to review the work done to that point and look through their folders to evaluate their progress. Each student then responded to topics on the Self-Assessment Sheet and created an "Action Plan." During each weekend, I wrote individual feedback and returned the assessments on Monday. I quickly realized the time involvement for both the students and myself was impossible;
we were devoting an entire class each week and thus falling even further behind with the specified curriculum. Although, with practice, we were able to shorten the class time to about 15 minutes and then the students would complete the sheet outside of class, I found my own weekend time spent reading and writing feedback totaled almost two hours. Then I would spend more time during the week for those who addressed my feedback and returned their assessments. At mid-quarter I suggested we cut these down to every two weeks, and at the beginning of quarter II, we cut them down to one a month.

I believe the self assessments were particularly helpful in two ways. First of all I came to a deeper understanding of what the students believed was an Action Plan; in other words, how they viewed the process of improving their work. The first several Action Plans consisted of such general statements as, "I plan to work harder." and "I will put in more effort." The vagueness of these statements reminded me of their ideas that effort means one spends a lot of time, and spending a lot of time means one should get a good grade. To help them take responsibility for working harder, I wanted to help them plan specific actions they would undertake.
With this purpose, my feedback consisted of such questions as "What specific things will you do to work harder or put in more effort?" Answering my question proved difficult for most. The first responses were still rather vague, "I'll spend more time on my writing." Then I would respond with "How much time and how often during the week?" and "When you have written something, who do you plan to give it to for feedback?" Helping them to write their plan in specific terms, I hoped, would help them toward an understanding of the specifics that create quality work, which in turn results in a good grade. The second benefit of this activity was that most of the students did begin to write more specific action plans, and, perhaps at least in part as a result of this activity, they began to talk about their writing in specific terms.

Students Writing Progress Reports to Their Parents

By October 6, we were at the true halfway point of the first quarter, and I asked the students to write their own progress reports to their parents—which I would read and then add some of my own comments. The students, of course, wrote them with the same vagueness and generality they were using in their self assessments, and many of those having difficulties glossed over the problems.
Charlie, who had consistently received the feedback that "I found no support" for what he said in his writing and that I was "deeply concerned because he was not editing any of his work," wrote the following to his mother:

I think I am doing alright in English. I have gotta all my work done with the exception of a little lateness...So pretty much overall I am doing pretty good.

Sam, in his progress report, listed what we had been doing and his likes and dislikes about the course. He did not include his progress at all. Jon included his success areas and omitted his less than successful areas, coming to the conclusion he was averaging about a "B."

I decided to write detailed letters to each parent and student together, and I had three reasons for doing so. First of all, I knew the parents were a little more anxious than usual because their children were participating in this study; therefore, I wanted to inform them of specifics concerning their child's work. My second reason was to clarify for some students just where they did stand in their progress. Charlie, Sam, Ted, Jon, and Kara wrote progress reports indicating they thought they were doing much better than they actually were, and I
wanted them to see my assessment before we met to decide together on a grade. My third reason was to provide each student with a model of how to be specific.

Again, I found time to be a major issue for me; the entire project took 12 hours. Through my review of student work, I learned invaluable information about each individual's skill level and accomplishments—information which I know made me a better teacher for these students. I could not, however, devote this much time again, and I made the decision that for subsequent quarters, I would merely add a few comments to those of each student.

The scheduled mid-quarter conferences consisted of our examining the students' and my progress report letters. The major difference in our assessments was that the students concentrated on quantity, telling their parents how much work they had done. My letter also mentioned the quantity and, in addition, I discussed the quality of the work and made mention of successful skill areas and in many cases, mentioned skills they needed to practice.
Everyone Bogged Down

The rescheduled day (day 22) for the Poe discussion arrived, but I almost aborted the possibility of having a discussion. Even though I had not planned to do so, I began the talking, and I did not stop. As I presented my agenda by giving notes, writing important information on the board, asking questions—instead of having given the students an academic objective and guiding them as they carried it out—I observed James drawing an elaborate portrait of another student, Kara and Rita writing notes to each other, Charlie examining the ceiling, Morry and Ted engaging in mini-conversations, and a few others traveling in their minds. By my calculations, only two people were actually with me.

I stopped. Almost immediately I realized I had been pushing, following my own pace because I felt pressure to move on with the curriculum. I was again into the Drama Triangle because I was doing more than one-half of the work. I started in the Rescue position and was moving into Victim position while simultaneously leaning toward Persecutor position. All of this was occurring as I observed so few students working with me. I had even opened my mouth to give a reprimand about not paying attention, when I caught myself. I
stopped, described what I was observing, and turned the decision making over to the students by asking them how they wanted to accomplish this work.

Suddenly everyone was engaged with me, and they started talking:
"I'm bored with the topic of symbols." "This is frustrating because there's not a right or wrong answer." "Can we do something else?"
Together we decided to complete this story and make a change by starting the study of grammar. Then we would return to the literature. This exchange was followed by many questions about the Poe story, both students and myself responding, and we carried on a literature conversation for 15 minutes.

The next few days were devoted to grammar work. Five students said they knew all the grammar: Morry, Kara, Rita, Jon, James, and Ted. Three said they knew none of the grammar: Johanna, Ruth, and Beth. The rest said they were somewhere between.

Day 27 and I returned their notebooks with my feedback and walked about the room to address concerns. When I asked Charlie if he had questions, he said, "No, I saw where you wrote 'disappointed' and I didn't read any more." Charlie was showing me a pattern of avoidance of anything unpleasant. James had been the only student who did not
turn in his notebook. I told him I did not receive his; he said nothing; and he left it when the bell rang. I had been noticing that lately James' attention had been off task, and during the past few days, he had been sporadically withdrawn. I wondered if his mood were related to what I had said in the progress report because I had written: "...were the grades to come out (now), he would not have earned a passing mark."

After the notebooks were returned, I wrote the academic objective for the whole class discussion on the board: "Together, list five to ten things you see as symbols within the story. Be sure to support your ideas with examples from the short story." (They had this assignment over the weekend, so I envisioned this to be a reading off of items from their home-work.) I asked Jon to start us out on our discussion of the short story read for today. He declined. I asked Amy and she declined. I asked another student and he too declined. Several people laughingly asked Garth to begin. He just smiled. I asked what was happening, and immediately Mark began with a comment about the story. The discussion continued with only a few people involved.

I attempted to relate the story to something I saw as relevant to them and a few more people joined in the conversation. I noticed Ted, Morry, and Charlie on the other side of the circle involved in their own
conversation. I asked them to join the discussion of the large group, whereupon Ted said he didn't see the connection between what I was saying and the story. Morry agreed and said the same thing he had said one other time, "We get off the topic in here." A little discussion about getting off the topic ensued. What I learned was that many believed when we talked about topics related to the story rather than just the story itself, we were off the topic.

I noticed several literature books remained uncovered which meant I would collect them from those students until they brought in a cover for their book. I wondered if the students would come back to get them if there were no assignment in them. I took books from Kara, Rita, Jon, and Charles.

Students Experiencing Confusion

During the October 22 (day 32) class meeting to update the "precontract," feelings of confusion erupted: Morry started immediately by requesting we have "definite due dates for assignments." Mark continued by instructing me, "Just be sure you give it (assignments) to us before the bell, like it turned out you usually--it's the end of the period." (My class log revealed that all
except one assignment had been given during the first 15 minutes of each class.) Ruth added her feelings, "...it just gets chaotic." Then, Beth made the observation, "It gets better when we do it in the beginning." Mark continued, "It's just like, when we have discussions, (he is referring to the class deciding on the day a paper is due), it gets vague 'cause this class goes from one topic to another and it gets, just gets vague."

I had expected confusion, but the extent to which it existed, stunned me. I listened to the class tapes and learned that indeed, I was carrying out the planned format. The interesting and important point, however, is that the students' perceptions were that the assignments were being given at the last minute and that very little was clear. Their reality was that everything was confusing.

As we continued our contract discussion, even more confusion evidenced itself, and with it came anger and blame—especially directed toward me. I asked them to look at the precontract still in the form they had thus far created (and I had printed and given to them at the time they first did it). I also asked them to examine the "Qualities of an 'A' Student From a Teacher's Perspective" which they had requested from me during our first contract work.
Very quickly it became evident that many students thought I had created the contract list. Mark read, "All major assignments must be turned in on the due day to earn an honor grade." and he exclaimed, "I don't think one missed assignment should keep you from getting an honor grade!" General agreement was strongly expressed.

James commented, "Your expectations are too high." No one spoke out to clarify that these expectations were their own. Beth addressed me, "and this point system is just getting us back to grades, and I thought..."

I attempted to clarify, telling them I had not created this list; that they had done so at the last contract meeting. James then referred to the "Qualities..." sheet, "You're saying the minimum requirement is everything done and everything passed in, but in my other classes...." I again clarified, reminding them that the Qualities List was merely the one they had requested I give them so that they would know my concept of "A" quality work; that the purpose of the present discussion was to create a guide that was acceptable to all of us.

The students did move on and come to agreement concerning several points for their "Guidelines Sheet" as they renamed it. If any students knew that they themselves had created the original, they did not
speak up, and both a visitor, who was present that day, and I came to
the conclusion that most of the class believed I had imposed the ideas
listed in the original contract.

The Case Study Students

Selecting the Students

Six weeks into the course was the appointed time for me to decide
on the three case studies. The decision, as delineated in Chapter III,
was to be based on the following criteria: one student who was
exhibiting compliant behavior and seemed to be experiencing no
problems with the program, a second student who was experiencing
what I believed to be the greatest amount of trouble with the program,
and a third whom I saw as "most interesting." The definition of what
constitutes most interesting was left open to be defined in relation to
the student chosen.

By this six week point, I saw several students whom I believed were
experiencing no difficulty with the teaching format: Morry, Mark,
Faith, Ben, Ted, and Amy. Because I saw Amy as the most compliant as
well as the most skilled out of this group, I chose her.
Amy: Case Study #1

Amy appeared to have no problems with the program. She had written in her progress report that the class was "fun" and she liked it because it was "unusual." She wrote that she had one concern, "My only concern is the grading...I don't know if I should try harder or if I'm doing well." As indicated in the previous section, she did appear to have some genuine difficulty with assuming responsibility for evaluating her own performance. I had found her work to be insightful and her writing to be skillful. In fact, her work throughout the year was most creative, and she evidenced advanced writing and thinking skills. At one point during the second quarter, she told me she didn't like to write about what we had discussed in class, but preferred to write about her own original ideas.

At 15, Amy--a tall, slender, brunette--displayed two different aspects to her personality. With me she was usually talkative and joking, while in class she was quiet, very seriously maintained eye contact, and was most reluctant to speak out. From the beginning, she came in each day and dropped off her books during the lunch break preceding our class. Each time she would engage me in a conversation. Her intitial invitations to converse consisted of simply asking what she
would need to bring for class. The second day of school she let me
know what she thought of the microphone, "I hate that thing." (This
hate relationship with the taping process would continue until the third
quarter.) On the third day of school, she offered information in relation
to the previous day's class work. When I suggested she bring her ideas
to the class, she immediately declined.

Despite Amy's advanced skill level, she had almost no ability to give
herself credit for anything. I recalled her total resistance to stating
aloud that her essay deserved an "A," or of even stating what was of
high quality in it. She was, I learned, also a skillful artist, and, although
she brought her artwork in to show to me on two occasions, her
comments about the art were all negative ones. For some reason,
maybe her smiling face, and easily flippant remarks, I had the
impression she really did see her work (writing and art) as good, but
needed the security of an authority figure to reassure her.

During one of our conferences, I asked her if she had applied to the
honors class, and she said "no, and don't mention that to my mother
whatever you do." I pressed her for more information, and she
explained that her mother expected high grades and pressured her if
she didn't get honor grades.
James: Case Study #2

Choosing the student who was experiencing the most difficulties was easy. Although I knew several students to be having difficulties with the teaching format, James was the only student who had not turned in the summer assignment, had turned in only one-half of the subsequent ones, and had expressed difficulty with my not giving the answers, "Don't bother to ask the teacher for the answer. She'll just ask you a question back." He had also commented to me, "We're not used to the way you say it (feedback on papers)." Lately he had been off task or withdrawn completely.

Blond, slight, on the short side, and quite talkative, James, in the beginning, had walked into class each day smiling and talking to his friends. In our summer conference, his mother had expressed great pride in his abilities, telling me he had been in the gifted program until grade 6 and that he still earned honor roll grades. She contrasted him to the younger son who had always had difficulties in school. I found James to be at ease, interacting comfortably with us both.

By day 9, and the first student self-assessment, James had turned in no work but he was an active participant in class discussions. He wrote that his missed assignments were "not applicable." I wrote a response
saying I was confused about this because I hadn't received any of the assignments. He didn't respond, and on day 11, when I had told him my concerns, and repeated what I had written on his self-assessment, he had finally expressed his own concern. That afternoon he had turned in an assignment. By day 15, even though we had worked together on his essay, he had not turned it in. He never did.

On October 6--day 22--he asked me for a list of the work he had not done, "just to show my mother I've done it," he offered. Because my concerns were growing, I told him I wanted to invite his parents to conference during the school-scheduled conference days, and he agreed. He now seemed cognizant of his progress situation because he wrote the following in his progress report:

So far I haven't gotten off to a very good start, because I never did a few of the assignments...I had problems starting them, so instead of seeking help and turning them in, I just gave up.

During the conference with James and his mother, I noticed that she discussed his history of getting good grades as if he did this for her, "He used to bring me home all A's, but I don't expect that anymore." Her tone sounded disappointed. She continued, "He's capable, but he's
lazy." James accused her of expecting him to be perfect. She conceded that she probably had placed too much stress on high grades, but that she didn't do that any more. Later, she said, "I've given up hoping to get A's from James."

Because I was unclear as to whether James' difficulties were in relation to the learning method or to a family dynamic, I became hesitant to choose him for the case study. I made the decision to do so because he was experiencing the greatest amount of distress, and I learned this distress was not evident in any of his other classes.

**Garth: Case Study #3**

The third student was to be the most "interesting." I had recognized my "invisible" student during the second week of classes, and after the first six weeks, I still saw Garth as invisible; the proverbial tall, dark, and handsome male, yet he disappeared from my awareness unless I made myself concentrate on him.

Garth was a year older than the others. He sat quietly maintaining eye contact with whoever was speaking and he seemed to be on task all the time. He did not ask questions nor respond to others, yet when I addressed questions about the literature to him, he responded with
insight, speaking slowly, hesitently, often modifying his statements as he talked—the way one does when thinking aloud.

His assignments were habitually late, but I found from his writing that he showed a strong ability to see connections and draw interesting conclusions. In his progress report he had written:

I have had several problems in English. I do not speak out loud in class, and even though I get my assignments done on time, I can't remember to pass in my assignments.

When we talked about his work, he responded to me by paraphrasing everything I said. I wanted to learn how this obviously capable boy could become invisible to me.

The Teacher

Teacher Assessing Academic Progress

The first quarter came to a close as we continued the curriculum by studying poetry and emphasizing the symbolism and theme. On October 28 (day 36), the class took a test on symbolism by reading a short story and writing what they saw for symbolism and theme. Again I
gave nonjudgmental feedback and during our grading conferences, I talked with each student about the test. The test showed me that every student had a concept of how authors use symbols in literature. I was satisfied with the progress in understanding.

**Teacher Feeling Anxiety**

The last week of the quarter arrived, and tensions seemed high—both mine and the students’. We were holding the grading conferences outside of class—still juggling time to meet together. The students were giving their individual oral presentations on their outside reading; everyone had waited until the last week even though I had asked them to schedule with me throughout the quarter. During the November 2 class, I heard several students saying "shut-up" to one another.

By the 3rd, I was feeling as if I were drowning in details. The uncovered books I had taken back were still piled under my desk. Some students had forgotten their conference time and had therefore missed it, which meant our trying to find even more time. I knew we were still behind my other sophomore class, and this weighed on me.

This particular day I had asked students to bring the books they had just finished into class so I could collect them, and when I started to
do so, no one had them. I said I was disappointed about this, and I could hear the tension in my voice. Rita quipped, "We had them yesterday." To which Beth responded, "Good Job, Rita." I made a decision to bring up sarcasm with Beth during our grading conference, and for now I asked the class if I had said I would collect them yesterday. There seemed to be general vagueness about this with the exception of Rita who was positive she was right. I apologized for being short with them, and asked for commitment to bring the books the next day.

Tensions continued, and on November 4, one day before the close of the quarter, I observed many side conversations during the presentations. I brought up my observation and that I had been hearing a number of put-downs during the week. I reiterated my strong belief that a classroom must be safe from judgments. They told me their behavior was "no big deal," that they had to be able to tell each other when they didn't want to hear from that person. When I suggested there were other ways of accomplishing this, they repeated, "no big deal." Besides feeling overextended, I was feeling like a failure in relation to conveying the importance of communication skills.
Adding even further to my negative mind set was my observation that my other sophomore class was not evidencing any of the negative behaviors I was observing in this class. The only format difference was the grading procedure. Was the tension in here created from the nongrading format? Was it that I was less relaxed in this class? I was feeling tension from spending such a great amount of time in class on returned papers, and while I saw this as an enormously productive experience, my tension grew in proportion to how far behind the other class we became. At this point I felt more like an adversary than a supporting guide. I was in the Drama Triangle.

The next day, with a severe headache, I moved myself into a jockeying position which allowed me to go back and forth between Rescuer and Persecutor. I changed the lesson plan the students had decided on, announced we would be doing grammar, and pushed on. The students protested, "I thought we were doing more presentations today." I did not share my concerns because I was already frustrated with how much class time we had devoted to problem solving rather than to the curriculum. Besides, I was busy developing a power struggle.
Salient Problems

Administrator Expressing Concern

On October 20 (day 30) a completely unexpected event had taken place; one derived from my previous years' work with the teaching format of this study. My principal of four years called me into his office and asked me if I were following the English 10 curriculum. When I assured him that I had always followed the established curriculum, he expressed his lack of confidence in me concerning this matter, stating in his follow-up letter to me "...a need to have confidence that you are delivering the curriculum as designed by the English department..." and requesting that I "submit portfolios from each of five key curricular components: Huck Finn, MacBeth, the Wilder play, Lord of the Flies, and the term paper."

He informed me that over a four year period, seven parents had contacted him with serious concerns--a fact, he added, which entitled me to hold the highest record of complaints among all the English teachers. The only part of this last piece of information that surprised me was that there had been only seven complaints; I had always been in touch with the fact that this method of teaching often led to
parental concerns. I was, however, completely shocked that my principal was putting credence to these perceptions. My teaching evaluations, from this principal as well as from the previous three, had been consistently outstanding.

Two factors now greatly added to my anxieties. For the first time in my twenty-one years as a teacher, I was experiencing lack of confidence from my administrator, and secondly, I was concerned that my part-time status might have placed me in a vulnerable position for dismissal.

I realized that, although my principal had a clear picture of my use of cooperative learning, I had not described my teaching format to him. I had done so with each of my previous principals, but had perhaps developed over-confidence at this point in my teaching career, and as a result I had overlooked a crucial ingredient in the process of changing my classroom from the public's expectations of pedagogical format.

Presently, in our country, a great deal of public anxiety about the school systems exists. In my own district's schools, the reaction to this anxiety has taken the form of greater parental involvement. The district has a highly involved volunteer program made up primarily of parents, and a Parent Advisory Board, consisting of parents, teachers,
and administrators, which meets once a month to discuss parental
concerns as well as to open communication between educators and
parents. In March I joined the Parent Advisory Board, and have taken
steps to schedule a presentation of information from this study at one
of the 1994/95 meetings.

Students Feeling Confusion

During the first quarter, a free floating anxiety permeated
everything. I had expected initial confusion with the teaching format;
however, I was surprised by the power with which it took over. In the
beginning, I had started creating the atmosphere for shared
responsibility by giving the students limited choices. This format
included my offering a choice of two possible dates for completed
assignments. Before they made the final decision, I had encouraged
them to think about their plans in all their subjects and then to speak
up offering reasons that one date might be more appropriate than
another. The class would subsequently make the decision to choose one
date or the other—a process which usually took three to four minutes.
Once the due date was decided, I oriented the class by saying, "Then
everyone is in agreement that the assignment is due on______."
would see nodding and hear sounds of agreement and took this as consensus. Until the October 22 contract session in which I learned many believed there had been no definite due dates for assignments, I did not know the extent of their confusion. The fact that most students believed I had imposed the items on the pre-contract they had themselves brainstormed in the beginning was a major insight for me.

During the end-of-the-quarter grading conferences, I took the opportunity to learn more concerning individual confusion. Ruth, who had been so adamant in the beginning that we take everything slowly, assessed the confusion in the following way:

...but like the whole curriculum of the class; I just noticed that it improved a lot and now it's pretty good.

What were you unclear about?

I don't know. I'm, not really sure. I know that the whole thing wasn't clicking or right or whatever. Maybe I just didn't feel comfortable with it yet.

Morry, who had been the first student to request that assignments be given at the beginning of class, talked about his confusion concerning editing:
I was a little unclear of what was expected or needed. I thought we were supposed to just make mental notes of this (teacher feedback)...
and use those in my other writings.

Beth was still confused and repeated that she needed specific due dates for assignments. I asked her if there had been assignments for which no due dates had been established. She stopped, thought for a minute, frowning, and said, "Why did I think that? Oh well, no, I guess there weren't." Sam had a particularly difficult time with confusion throughout the first quarter, and he perhaps summed it up for everyone when he said, "My conclusion for this quarter: it was very rough and it was kind of not what I'm used to, obviously."

The Class Discussion Format Contributing to Confusion

A potential problem was created by the class discussion format. Because the students exchanged ideas and the teacher summed them up and presented them back to the class, several were frustrated by not having the "right answer." James, on the contract discussion day
had stayed after class to explain to me that in other classes the
teacher "makes it easier." When I asked him how the teacher did this,
he explained:

Well, first of all we're in rows, and the teacher
stands up in front of the class. People like raise
their hands, and she calls on someone. When
someone asks a question, the teacher answers
it. In here if you ask a question, everyone
gives their ideas and it takes ten minutes.

During the grading conference, he continued the same opinion,
"Everyone just gives their ideas, and you don't tell us the right
answer." Sam too expressed confusion about not knowing how to tell
whose ideas about the literature were right, "There has to a right
answer. All those ideas can't be right."

In addition to experiencing the discussion format as more difficult
and confusing, some students saw it as a waste of time. Rita
commented, "Sometimes I think we just waste time. If you'd just tell
us the right answer, we could get a lot more accomplished." Bobby Ann,
still not talking to the class, but readily confiding in me, was even more
emphatic, "We waste a lot of time, and the contract discussions are a
total waste because all they're (the other students) trying to do is fix it so they can get an easy 'A'."

**Contented Students Saying Nothing**

Those students experiencing the most difficulties with the discussion format were also the most vocal about their difficulties. Those students who were satisfied with the class discussion did not state this fact. A potential problem existed in that a public perception that the majority were experiencing confusion and frustration could easily have developed.

During the conferences I asked each student to elaborate on their thoughts about the class discussions. I learned that many were finding the discussions to be a productive learning experience. Ted, who had spoken up on one occasion to ask me for the connection between what I was saying and the literature topic we had started with, said that class discussion was his best area. He loved it. Charlie, referring to symbols discussions, expressed being dumbfounded by what he heard, "I don't know where they get all those things as symbols. I just read it." Ben told me, "I'm just not a participator... I really do like a discussion class though because I get to find out what others think."
Kara said she was working on paying attention more and keeping track of the agenda, that she hadn't ever had to pay attention to others in a class until now. Ruth confided that about the third week she started having trouble with people. "Wondering what people were thinking about what I was saying." Later in our talking, she said she saw her work helped others:

> And I see my work like reflected in the class, too into other people...and then that helped other people to understand a little bit more about the book, and overall it helped them comprehend the meaning of symbols, I mean.

Amy said she was helped by hearing what everyone else thought. Garth told me he liked it even though he didn't talk much himself, "I like hearing everyone's ideas. It makes it more interesting."

If I had not discussed the matter with all the students, I might have incorrectly concluded that the majority found the format nonproductive. Those students who were satisfied did not voice their satisfaction in class, did not, to my knowledge, tell their parents, nor did their parents write letters of satisfaction to the school.
administrators (one parent offered to write such a letter, but did not do so), nor did any student tell me positive aspects except at those times I asked.

The problem arises from the perceived reality. Because the negatives were vocalized so freely and the positives were unspoken, the community perception can easily become a negative one.

**Students Depending on the Teacher**

During the October 22 contract session, the students' initial reaction to their confusion had been anger and blame, and then they expected me to solve the problem. At first, turning the problem solving over to them only resulted in their telling me how other teachers solve these problems for them. Ted explained that I should write the whole week's assignments on the board like his science teacher did, and Beth, explaining how her math teacher organized the process, requested I do it that way. Several students informed me that other teachers remind them when work is due and that I should do this also. I asked them several times how they could solve these problems before they grasped that they could indeed solve them for themselves. The first item they put into the Guidelines was that homework would be given at the
beginning of class. The second item was that a corner of the board would be saved for their assignments, and when I declined their request that I write the assignments there, they agreed to have a student do it, and Beth volunteered.

Expectations that the teacher give the "right answer" and solve every problem abounded, and of course, were most prominent in their self-evaluations. For most of the students, actually stating a grade for themselves was, at best, a difficult task, and for many an impossible task. The inevitable question was "What do you think?" The person for whom stating a grade-- or even recognizing positive aspects in her work-- seemed completely impossible was Amy, one of my case study students. At the beginning of our conference, I asked her what she thought about her work; her response was, "You were really pleased with everything." A few minutes later, I asked her what was good about her work. She said, "I don't know. It's just like picking out certain things and relating them. You like the detail." Again she placed the evaluation on me.

In the conferences, after the student and I had examined each assignment, listed the strengths and weaknesses shown, and listed the progress made, I then asked the student what grade would best
symbolize the work we had just reviewed. The most common response was, "I don't know. What do you think?"

Students Interpreting Quantity of Work as Basis of Evaluation

Although I include this issue as a problem, and initially believed it to be one, it is important to note that my attitude has shifted to believing it is better understood as a developmental issue. Because it has strong potential for becoming problematic, however, I have included it within this section.

The students' concern with effort became evident from the very beginning. On day seven during the first class contract discussion (page, 88), they defined trying as "time spent" and "amount done." -- some even saw effort as planning to do the work even if they did not do it. A strong concern with fairness was expressed in that effort should be rewarded with good grades, and for most, grades were seen as a reward for trying or a punishment for not trying.

The end of the quarter conferences were particularly enlightening in relation to this theme. I opened with the question, "How do you see your work this quarter?"
Of the few students who stated an honor grade in the beginning of the conference, or who said they had done well, each used the criterion of having turned in all the work:

Well I did all the assignments, so I figure that's at least a B. (Morry)

Just one assignment that I passed in late... so I mean that was just one so hopefully I'll get a B or something. (Ben)

I've been doing well. I've worked hard to get everything in on time...When you give me things and they have little marks on them, I usually edit them. And I did do the Lord of the Flies thing about three times. (Johanna)

I just don't do it (writing) like when you assign something. I start it early. That gives me some quality hopefully...probably in the B range or so because I mean I haven't missed any assignments. (Rita)

Coupled with the concept that having done the work meant having earned an honor grade, many expressed the concept that having tried, even without examples of success occurring, also meant having earned an honor grade. I had heard this idea during our contract work, and for several it was the central point of their end-of-quarter personal
evaluation. Jon and I discussed the significance of his work on the quarter's major essay, an essay on which I had written next to each paragraph, "What is your support for this point?" He had met with me to discuss the paper, planned to edit and return it, but did not do so:

I don't think you can count that paper because, I mean, I tried. We conferenced and you knew I planned to rewrite. That proves I tried, so I wouldn't give myself below a C.

Even when I asked Jon to show just one writing assignment for which he had fulfilled the writing outcomes as listed on the class handout, he responded, "I did all the work, and that shows I was trying, so I should get at least a C."

Beth had not done all of the assignments, but, after we had looked over her work, concluded, "...I don't think I'd give myself a C 'cause I think I really did try my very best and that's not really average...so maybe a B."

Ted, too saw effort as what would determine his grade. He had turned in all but one assignment, and on each I had asked him what his support for his points was. He had edited none of the work. Still, he
concluded he had earned about a B because he had done almost all the work, and that showed he had "put in the effort."

From their comments, I learned that trying meant doing all or most of the work, and it meant spending time on the work: Morry said his mother told him, "'try to work hard on editing,' so", he continued, "I put in a lot of time on that." Beth explained her complete frustration at times in the past when she had spent a lot of time on an assignment and then received only an "iffy grade," while another student "wouldn't spend any time, just do it the night before and get an 'A.'"

Another pattern was students' interpreting a grade as reward or punishment. Many actually used the word "deserve" when talking about the grade, and frequently connected deserve to effort, as Beth did. She had "put in a lot of extra time, so I really did try. I don't think I deserve a C. I think I deserve better than a C."

Chris used the word "punishment" in discussing his grade. He learned that he had not done four assignments, and he said, "I don't want to fail too badly, 'cause I want to be able to bring it up. That's why I'd like to have a D or something...I still need to be punished, not punished, but marked down...because it'll remind me next time to write it."
James, by the end of the quarter, was still experiencing the greatest difficulties of all. He had turned in 50% of the assignments, and on many of them, I had asked him questions which he had not addressed. In coming to his final evaluation, he mentioned what he believed he deserved:

I don't really think I deserve an F, but maybe fairly close to that. Cause I mean I at least attempted to do everything. And I did try and I didn't just say no, I'm not gonna do this and whatever. I at least attempted in doing the stuff.

By "attempting to do everything," he meant taking the time to conference with me, and with me and his mother. He believed he had spent time; therefore he did not deserve to fail.

Teacher Needing One-On-One Time With Students

Finding the time to meet with and work with students was a major problem. In Chapter 1 (pp. 7-8), I list student behaviors which would evidence responsibility for learning. Among those behaviors I include the following:
"seek out teacher...to respond to and interact with the teacher in relation to the teacher's written comments on assignments, engage in comparison of personal progress to the course objectives, recognize when help is needed... seek out appropriate assistance, engage in personal goal setting, revise personal goals as appropriate, engage in additional work to meet course and personal goals, engage in personal creative learning activities.

Because the students were in a process of learning how to do these actions, both they and I found a need to meet together often. They had even added a place within the self assessment to request a conference. We experienced continual frustration in finding the common time because the regular school day's schedule did not lend itself to such a need.

The mid-quarter and end-quarter conferences for assessing and evaluating student work, even though built into the study plan, proved difficult to schedule on the one hand, and difficult to spend sufficient time to carry out successfully on the other hand. During the last two weeks of the quarter, we conducted the end-quarter conferences, and what had been scheduled as 30 minutes grew for almost all the students into a minimum of 60 minutes. One of the major reasons the
conferences ran so long was that they not only dealt with my helping students recognize their strengths, weaknesses, and areas of improvement, but also in my helping the students assess and renew their action plans.

Garth had been having a problem turning in his work on time, and our grading conference is an interesting example of creating an action plan.

He talked about his organization problems:

Because when I do things, I usually like didn't know where I put them or I forgot about them or something like that. I didn't handle them very well.

I asked him if he thought this were an organization problem, and as he continued, he revealed a history of organization problems:

Probably because I've always had problems with my organization. I'm not a very organized person. I try sometimes...I've always lost assignments...it's not just school things...if I'm reading a book and I'll put it down, then I won't be able to find it for three days...I even misplace my wallet.

I encourage him to talk about how this makes him feel:

What does it make me feel like? (pause) Well, it makes me feel really frustrated because I can never like, I feel like I'm always, I've always got something that I've got to worry
about, like, oh, I'm forgetting something...
whenever I have a free moment, I'll be
thinking do I have something I have to be
doing right now?

Teacher: So even when you're free, you really don't feel
free.

Even if I'm on my own time, I'm always
worrying that I have something I should be
doing.

Our exploring of the problem consumed the rest of our time, and we
scheduled another meeting. He agreed to bring a plan with him and we
would examine it. We met again a couple of days later and I asked him
what plan he had made:

Basically I wanted to work on definitely...
writing down all my assignments in a
specific place...and when I complete them
put them in a specific place immediately,
not to say, 'well, I'll put it there later.'
And not to remove it until I passed it in.
And to remember to pass them in.

Teacher: Where would you put the assignments?

Well, I was thinking, probably not, I was
thinking maybe not in my notebook. Having
a place where I put all my homework assign-
ments for every class, almost like a home-
work section, but not like, like I'd have maybe
couple different folders for it. And I would
like put, say I had English period 4. And that
would be like the 4th folder down. Then I'd
put all my assignments in that that I had done. And like say I have, oh, French period five, that would be my fifth folder ...and I carry that with my everywhere.

Teacher: Where would you keep the folder?

Where would I keep it? Um, I would, I was thinking, I was gonna carry it with me... (He continues thinking aloud). Maybe I would put it on my desk and a specific place on my desk. Well maybe inside like a bureau drawer...

We continued the plan becoming as specific as possible. The conferencing with Garth was as helpful to me as it was to Garth. I was becoming able to see this student.

As I conferenced with the students, and listened as they talked about their work, I learned as much about what I needed to know to become a more effective teacher as they did about what they needed to know to become a stronger learner. Working with students in this manner requires a great many chunks of common time, and finding the time to work together, however valuable, continued to be one of the greatest problems we encountered.
A large part of taking responsibility for one's own learning is dependent upon developing an ability to recognize one's own strengths, and weaknesses, as well as one's growth over time. Another characteristic of responsible behavior which I include in Chapter I is the following:

students evidence growth in responsibility for personal learning by demonstrating an increasing use throughout the year...growing awareness of successful strategies... avoids blaming people or events for nonaccomplishment, recognizes and freely expresses personal successes, instances of failure to achieve course objectives, and engages in personal goal setting.

On their end-of-quarter self-assessments, I had asked the students to list their strengths. Several students were able to identify strengths they were evidencing. Some of these were in the form of improvements which they recognized they had made. Ted said, "I was having trouble with giving specific examples in my writing, and I think I'm doing better with that." Johanna observed that she had a strength in
"using specifics to back up my thoughts and adding to class discussion."

(which she saw as difficult because), "I'm kind of shy sometimes."

Kara said she'd learned a lot about how to brainstorm her ideas with webbing or a chart before beginning to write. She elaborated that before this year, she would just begin writing. Morry expressed his success with his writing of a particular paper, "I'm really pleased with the quotes I used for support." He also mentioned his observation that in the beginning of the year, I had commented on his papers that I lost his argument, and now he was connecting ideas more in his writing.

Even, Sam, who was experiencing major confusion most of the time, recognized that, "...a major problem I had was with the specific examples. I'm doing better now."

Another area which was evident within the self assessments was a desire to participate more in class. By the end of the quarter, everyone had participated voluntarily at least once, and more than half of the class was participating voluntarily on a regular basis. The process of developing responsibility for learning was to be a slow, difficult, uncertain process, at best experienced with only partial internalization.
The person experiencing the greatest difficulty in recognizing her strengths was Amy. Since the return of the first major writing, when I had led her through an examination of her successful essay and was unsuccessful in having her state the (obvious to me) conclusion that the paper was "A" quality, I had observed no growth in her willingness to state her strengths as she recognized them. In the grading conference, she finally concluded, almost aloud, that she had been successful. Helping her to this point was not easy. I kept trying to lead her into positive aspects and she kept mentioning negative ones. When I told her that finding details and relating them were two important thinking skills, she laughingly attributed her ability in using them to, "I think...I'm partially insane."

Our grading conference continued with Amy talking about various subjects and I had the impression she was trying to avoid having to draw a conclusion stating the obvious (to me), that she had earned an "A" for the first quarter's work. She talked about her outside reading, mentioning she had noticed the book began and ended with a statement about primroses and talked on nonstop about the author's symbolic meaning in doing this (an astute observation for a sophomore, I thought). I tried again, asking her what she thought the quality of her
work was, and she finally said it. In a whisper, I heard her say, "I think
I did, well--I think I did good."

Our discussion continued with her making a decision about the
actual grade she would give herself. She spoke almost in staccato:

So that means I just come up with a grade
right now. (pause) I hate. This is stress.

Teacher: You've already patted yourself on the back a
little. Now you can do it completely.

(pause) Okay, I want an A.

Teacher: Okay. Now I'm going to put the pressure on
you even more. What number A? I have to
put a number on the rank card.

A number. A number. Let's not be too nice.
How about a 95?

Teacher: I agree completely.

At this point she stood up, holding her hand out toward me, palm up:

Yes! Yes! Give me five! Oh. So that's almost
towards an "A-." So I'm not being too com-
pletely good but it is being quite good. It's
better than average.

And she still saw the grade as coming from the teacher because she
then thanked me for the grade.
Charles's problem was avoidance, and he took full responsibility for it, "I don't know; I just put it off 'cause I didn't understand it." He asked for help indirectly:

I should push myself, but I kind of need someone to push me in a way? You know what I mean? Kind of remind me about things? See I have trouble, I have trouble like remembering things. I write it down sometimes, I just forget to look and stuff.

He mentioned how his coach pushed him "without yelling" and that he liked that. I asked how I could help him without actually taking care of him. Then he decided that on major assignments, I should ask him to show me something he has done and not just accept his saying he's working on it. I agreed to do this during quarter 1.

Beth expressed her concern about her frustration level with both herself and other students and talked about her goal of working on "being more patient with myself...I do stop to think more often and think about alternative ways to do things where I won't get so frustrated." We talked more about the ways she was accomplishing this task.
Ben's editing needs had been mainly in the area of structure, and I had several times suggested we meet to discuss punctuation and other grammar issues. He had not accepted my offers, and during the mid quarter conference took responsibility for having made a decision concerning his studies. He told me that since he was taking an honors biology class, he had decided to devote most of his time to that class. He said this meant devoting less time to English. During the grading conference, he told me about his action plan to be working on organization of his time, "Planning it out. That's the one thing that's given me a lot of time that I've not had before is planning when to do things. Like long term assignments, do a little here, a little there. That's really what's helped me the most I think."

The Final First Quarter Grades

All except two students and I came to agreement on the grade for the report card. The grades for each quarter are listed in Appendix J. Jon and I and James and I disagreed vehemently. Jon, after meeting three times, angrily agreed to take a "D" rather than consult another English teacher as agreed in our contract that he could choose
to do. James, with 50% of the work turned in, insisted he did not "deserve an F," also refused to consult with another teacher, and withdrew from discussion. At the end of our last conference, he sat noncommunicatively, scratching hard, bold lines across a sheet of paper. He would not speak to me. On November 9, the day before my deadline for putting on the grades, James told me he had decided to take a failing grade rather than see a mediator.
CHAPTER VII

RESULTS: THE SECOND QUARTER

The Story of the Class

November 8, the first day of the second quarter, started out on a positive note. I drew a management model (an inverted pyramid) on the board and very briefly identified it by telling the students the idea was to have the workers be in charge and the manager be a consultant. Ruth immediately saw the connection to the work we were doing, "I think we're doing a good job of turning the pyramid around."

Students Showing Concern About the Curriculum

I gave the class copies of The Outcomes for the second quarter, and we talked about them, James made the request that we not study symbols for the rest of the year. I told him we would be doing less with symbolism, but that it was a part of the sophomore curriculum. Jon spoke up, "My friends in other English classes aren't doing as much as we do with symbols. I asked them." At this point, Mark wanted to
know if the curriculum were "written down somewhere." I assured him it was and he could have a copy if he liked. No one asked for a copy.

**Students Not Doing Assignments**

We studied grammar for three days, and after a long weekend for Veteran's Day, I gave the new literature assignment, *Our Town*. I introduced the play by telling them very briefly that the author had been interested in the small daily events that make up our lives, and had seen these small events as the real substance of life. I gave a sheet of five items contained in Act I and asked them, as they read the act, to write out their ideas concerning what they saw to be the purpose of each item. I explained I would collect them on Friday so that I could write feedback to them for the first discussion scheduled for Monday's class, and during the discussion, we would use these five items as the guide.

During the week in class we watched a film of *Lord of the Flies*, while outside of class the students were to read and write. Friday (Day 7) they were to turn in the assignment. Four people did so: Amy, Mark, Ben and Bobby Ann. When I asked for the others, the most common response was, "I didn't know what you wanted." I pushed the film
viewing back a few minutes and asked the students to write an action plan stating how they would do the assignment over the weekend, and I collected their plans.

The following Monday as I arrived at school, Johanna and Samantha both immediately started telling me they still couldn't do the homework assignment. "I didn't know what to write," Johanna informed me. My response was to remind them, "I'm your consultant, and when you're stuck, I may be able to help you. I sure wish you had asked me last week when the problem first came up." I told them we would be discussing the topic in class today, and after that, if they still had concerns, I would be glad to meet with them. After the class, Johanna came up privately to tell me she had waited to read the play until the night before and then had not understood how to do the sheet. "I always wait 'til the night before," she said. I responded that maybe now she was required to do more difficult work in school, her past plans would no longer work. She just smiled and said, "maybe."
Students Discussing the Literature

Because the class discussions were for several students a major source of confusion, I have included many excerpts from the discussions within this quarter II section.

We started a class discussion (day 8) using the five items of Friday's assignment as the guide. Several students had offered ideas, and I encouraged interaction by saying, "We have three ideas, and I repeated them. I like to hear you responding to each other as you talk, so that nobody has said something that just hangs in the air."

Another student gave a new idea and I asked her to respond to the previous speaker before adding her own idea, and she did so. The discussion continued: Beth gave an idea and Ted responded, "I agree with that. That's why...." When Ted finished, Jon continued, "That's just like in Lord of the Flies..." They were in a conversation. It was moving spontaneously and those involved were enthusiastic.

The discussion moved on to the topic of the author's having created an entire play by using mundane daily events. I commented that I thought it interesting that this writer was saying these ordinary events are the substance and beauty of life, and yet the history courses I had taken all dealt with only the major events such as wars and voyages;
that I had learned very little about the daily lives of the people. In an
effort to help them personalize the point of the play, I asked them
what they thought were the important events of life.

Several people spoke offering different ideas about what the
important events of life were for them and adding what they thought
history courses should teach. Beth said "...I'm more interested in what
people do in their day-to-day lives and how it differs from what it's
like now, than what happened on this day and who won what territory
and like that." Mark commented he thought, "It's important to know
about other people and I think it's more important to know about dates
and facts." This conversation had been going on about three minutes
when Jon said he was lost:

I'm kind of lost myself, because I have no clue
what we were just talking about. I mean I do
know what we were talking about, but what
does it have to do with the play?

Beth responded:

Don't ask because I don't want to get started
again. I don't have a clue as to why we were
having that discussion.
Everyone started talking at once, and I asked to hear one person at a time. Ted responded, "I think the whole play's about specific little isolated events that don't have much to do with..." Jon cut him off, "I was just saying that it's a play and not history." Faith continued:

What the play is about is lots of little things that make up people's lives. It's about events that make up real life and it's the little things that become a part of day-to-day. Eating breakfast...

The room quieted down and became silent. I asked Jon if he were clearer about the point of our previous discussion and he said he was clear about why we were talking about events of every day life, but "I don't understand why we're talking about history." I explained the connection to the fourth question which asked for ideas concerning the purpose of the play, and explained we were in the process of exploring those ideas. The bell rang, and I asked Beth to see me a minute so I could check her understanding of why our discussion concerned the topics it did. She said she understood now and dashed away.

November 23 (day 9) and I gave them my suggestion for the next amount of reading to be done in Our Town as well as a due date; everyone agreed, and then I engaged them in a quick, fun group
activity which resulted in their finding a grammar partner by random choice. I gave them a practice sheet to do in partners, and they scattered about the room, most lying out on the carpet. I walked around, listening. Everyone was actively involved in the task, and I was hearing a great deal of understanding. I had also come to see that James and Jon knew all the grammar.

The next day we continued our discussion of *Our Town* with Act II. Because the play's theme concerns the purpose of life and what creates meaning in life, our conversation included ideas from religion and more discussion about the little things in life, topics which I would later learn were very upsetting to Sam and Johanna. Everyone, with the exception of Jon, maintained eye contact with one another, and almost everyone spoke. Jon stared at his desk and out the window into the hall.

Monday (day 11), was a continuation of the literature discussion, still using the five item sheet as our guide and students writing notes under each item. The social skills objective was "Draw others into the conversation." Eleven people were active participants. Today, I sat next to James, and I noticed he took no notes.

The next day, November 30, we continued, and I noticed eight people had not brought their play books to class. When I asked Sam for his
ideas on one of the items, he responded he hadn't finished the play so
he could not say anything.

Students, Parents and Teacher Expressing Anxiety

Because Jon had been upset by his grade, and had expressed to me
that his parents were upset with me, I had arranged a meeting for all
of us. On November 30, his father called to cancel, and he and I talked
for a few minutes. He was quite angry, and told me he wanted to
transfer Jon to a "real English class." He elaborated that
"organizational skills and communication skills were good," but he
wanted Jon "where he'll get the same English all the other kids get." He
was in a hurry, but we planned to meet Tuesday, December 7 to talk
further. Here was the same theme my principal had presented to me in
October. This theme is of such importance to the entire teaching
format that I include a complete discussion of it within the subsection
dealing with Salient Problems.

December 1 (day 13), Sam, who had told me the first quarter was
rough and not what he was used to, informed me he might "need to
change classes at the half year point because, "things just go, ffft,
right over my head." Later in the day, his guidance counselor told me
Sam had requested to change to "a real English class" because this one was a philosophy and religion class, and what he needed was grammar and vocabulary which was what English was supposed to be. He had also expressed great concern that the other English classes had started their research papers and this class had not. Here was another piece of the perception I was not teaching the English Department Curriculum.

The next day, Sam and I conferenced, and I learned a great deal about his reaction to the discussion format and his opinions of the class. He stressed his need for "learning things to help him on the SAT's" and other "useful" things. On December 5, the principal received a letter (dated November 30), from Sam's dad requesting that he be moved to a "traditional English class" because "Sam needs a very concretely structured class..."

Sam did not transfer to another class, and because his story and what I learned from working with him, as well as what he learned, are of central significance to the study, I adopted him as another case study and report on him in detail within that subsection.

Meanwhile, I noticed Jon and James who had been best friends, were no longer sitting next to each other; in fact they were avoiding each other. I had tried to contact James' mother because he was doing
nothing in class and his moods were swinging from friendly one day to angry and noncommunicative the next. I had also observed his manner of attire was unkempt in comparison to the way he had been dressing until then. In addition, I had seen him in the halls and at lunch with a completely different group of students—students whom I knew to be uninvolved academically. I was beginning to worry that drugs could be a factor in James' problems.

I had concerns about other students too. My log reveals that:

I was trying to meet with Ruth who was still experiencing what she called, "overload," and she was not doing the work. On December 18 she was so stressed she threw her notebook across the room and bolted out the door. We made five appointments before she actually kept one.

I was keeping regular weekly appointments with Kara to discuss the additional literature she had agreed to do, and often feeling like I was wasting my time—a fact I discuss in the subsection entitled, The Teacher.

I was meeting with Beth frequently because she continued to be absent about two days each week. She also continued to experience confusion often.

I had worked with Charles on grammar and he had experienced success on the test. I remembered he had said he didn't know where the
others got their ideas for symbols and I knew he had not yet grasped the concept of symbols. Periodically we discussed symbolism together because in class, he looked attentive, but I had the impression he was not making sense out of the discussions.

I was also giving Ted a little extra attention in an effort to provide motivation for him to become involved in something challenging. Although he was an active class participator, he did little in the way of writing, turning in the bare minimum and not editing any of his work. I had seen his achievement tests and across the board his achievement was at the 99th percentile.

On January 7, the guidance department informed me Beth's mother had been in to request that Beth be transferred to a "structured English class."

By the end of the first week of school, I had been concerned about six students. By the half way point, I had concerns about eight, and three parents, at least, had concerns about me.

Students Demonstrating Learning

Although I had concerns, I had observed learning taking place, and so had the students. December 2 (day 14), the class took the first grammar test, and everyone (except Beth, who was absent), earned
above the 70% amount required for a passing mark by the school system. In my teaching career, this was the first time an entire class passed a grammar exam. In their progress reports which the students wrote on December 10, most of them cited this event as a major learning, some mentioning percentage of answers right, but many did not mention their grade. Typical of their comments were the following:

An example of how (well I've done) is on my grammar test. I did much better than I had expected. I only missed 4 or 5. (Faith)

I took a grammar test and I showed 98%-99% understanding. (Bobby Ann)

I have improved a lot on my grammar.

I started off very badly, but with a lot of persistence, I was able to bring my understanding up enough to get 80% of the questions correct. (Garth)

...I went from knowing almost none of it to knowing almost all of it. (Johanna)

I excelled in grammar, a weak point of mine before this class. (Morry)

Jon and James had each demonstrated 95% comprehension on their tests, and included this information in their progress reports.
Students Writing Their Progress Reports

The students had shown no need to grade their work this particular quarter, and only one person, Jon, had requested to meet and discuss why he believed one of his papers was an "A." Consequently I had little idea of how the students were assessing their progress.

The halfway point of the second quarter was the time for students to evaluate their progress. Two months from their first experience with writing their own progress reports, and five weeks from our quarter 1 grading conferences, I found the students wrote more detail and cited more specific points about their work than they had done when they wrote their first reports.

One of the first observations I made was that most students who cited a grade on their grammar tests did so in terms of percent of understanding demonstrated on tests rather than in terms of a grade. Perhaps this was an indication of a beginning to their understanding that a test grade indicates percentage of what they understood rather than merely of how hard they worked.

In the area of writing, several mentioned the quality of their work in contrast to the quantity, and some noted their skills:
...I've made a conscious effort to use examples and more descriptive writing. (Mark)

...the quality (of my writing) was very good. (Samantha)

I have started to increase my ability to engage in informal writing by writing a detailed informal piece on Our Town. (Bobby Ann)

I have very good ideas about the play. (Faith)

With my writings I have made a conscious effort to include more specific examples. (Morry)

A few included other improvements they had made:

...improved my weaknesses in sharing my thoughts and opinions during class discussions and staying on task while others are being helped...starting my assignments when they're given. (Rita)

I have volunteered to talk in class. (Amy)

My writing seems to be improving, by Mrs. Holmes standards, not in general. (Sam)

James, still having the greatest difficulty, continued to evaluate his progress as more successful than it was. He wrote that he was "doing alot better" and cited his 95% on the grammar test. He overlooked the several assignments he had not done, stating, "I've handed in almost all of the assignments given..."
Both Sam and Charles had experienced great difficulty in writing their first progress reports. With the second one, they demonstrated greater understanding of how to evaluate themselves. Sam, who in his first progress report, had written about what the class had done for work, this time wrote that he had problems handing things in on time, that he didn't like the class discussions, and his writing was improving by my standards. Charles, who had expressed complete confusion in his first progress report, wrote in this one that he had been completing almost all the assignments on time and had been going for help. He cited his grammar specifically as an area in which he had improved.

Three students continued to equate trying and quantity of work with success and a high grade. Kara, who at the year's beginning had been worried that she was not learning anything, cited specific actions she had taken, however continued to be preoccupied with effort and quantity, making no comment about the quality of her work:

I have been completing almost all my assignments on time and have been going for help during my studies. I think I am putting a very good effort this quarter...my work in English...has been extensive.
Jon's progress report showed that he continued to equate success with effort and to overlook or downplay his weaknesses, thus continuing to conclude he was doing much better than he actually was.

He wrote that he had made up the work he had not turned in at the beginning of the quarter, and that he had done the writing assignments. He concluded he had done "very well." He mentioned meeting with me and gaining a "better understanding of her expectations of me," and went on to state, "I am trying to accomplish these expectations to the best of my ability." He drew the conclusion he was earning a grade of "B" because "I have missed assignments and turned in late assignments." I concluded he meant he would have earned an "A" if everything had been accomplished and on time. He included no specifics which would relate to the quality of his work.

Beth continued to be confused and to perseverate on effort. She wrote, "I think I'm confused as to what Mrs. Holmes expects," and she went on to explain that last quarter "I was trying my best," but that she had been disappointed to learn I had thought she "deserved" a 'B-' or a 'C,'" while she had thought "more along the lines of 'A-.'" Then she wrote:
I'm supposed to write and tell you about what I see as my strengths and weaknesses, and give specifics. This is hard to do when I'm not quite sure myself. On the whole, I am still trying very hard in Mrs. Holmes's class.

She did not include what she was doing that demonstrated "trying very hard." Beth did see her grammar as improving, but attributed the improvement to magic, "Miraculously, my grammar has improved this quarter." She concluded that she did not believe she was "benefiting much from this class, but I'm still trying to use this program to my advantage."

**Students Demonstrating Growth in Class Discussion Skills**

The fact that Jon announced in the middle of a class discussion (November 22) that he had lost the point of the discussion, demonstrated an act of taking responsibility for his own learning. Others were beginning to take similar risks, and the discussion of December 17 marked a turning point for two people and perhaps for others as well. The students were discussing the possible themes of the short story, "The Open Boat." I include much of the material which preceded the student's outburst because it presents a class discussion
as it actually happened, and I believe it’s inclusion helps to clarify the frustration that two students expressed. The following excerpt begins as I had just responded to a student’s comment and asked another student to talk:

Teacher: What you’re saying leads right into what Garth wrote about theme (I knew this because I had glanced over the recent journal entries in which I asked them to write their ideas), so he’s set you up, Garth.

Garth: Well, I just thought, uh, the theme of the story was that nature is something that you can’t control. It’s more powerful than anyone...it can crush you and that’s what happens to the oiler....(Garth explained the oilers’ drowning, and I responded to him.)

Teacher: Ok, let’s keep on moving with these ideas, and you may want to jot something down that somebody said so you can think about it for yourself. Do you want Garth to repeat anything he said so you can write it down?

pause while students write, and Ben continued:

I thought it had to do with nature, you know when you’re dealing with a force that powerful, you shouldn’t take it lightly...(the oiler) is jumping in before he thinks.
A student asked Ben a question and Ben responded. I asked Rita and Kara to be in our conversation rather than their private one. Beth continued:

I didn't think it was so much about nature as about the people.

pause, and I asked her to "say more about that."

I don't know, well, even though nature was the main catalyst, I thought it was more about people. I think the way that they handled themselves and I noticed that when, like when they were arguing about whether to go into the shore, I don't know, it seemed that when they were arguing, everything, the violence seemed to be worse. The waves seemed to be higher...

I respond, leading a bit:

Teacher: Are you saying that when they were more of a unit, things seemed to be easier for them to handle?

Beth: Right, and I think, I don't know, they didn't really go into great detail about the characters, you didn't find out a lot about them. I think they're sort of models.

When Beth finished talking, I summed up the two major ideas presented: nature and people. I asked the students to jot down
anything they wanted to write for notes. Then, for their continued thinking, I asked if there was something in the combined ideas.

Beth responded, Ben commented, Mark added his ideas about the power of nature, and I paraphrased Mark:

Teacher: Um, so that - pause - to survive, we've got to take nature into consideration you're saying.

Mark: Right, but not because, not think we can overcome it, like not thinking the levees will keep the river in because sooner or later the river is going to overflow, not making the engine better and the boat will go faster and the boat will get there easier. If it wants, nature can tip it over anyways.

Johanna entered the discussion:

Ya, but I don't understand how that ties in-

Beth interrupted her and continued. As Beth talked, Mark tried to interrupt, but she kept talking. Then I gave a brief summary and Beth responded:

Right...I don't think they took nature for granted...being in the boat made them fully realize...
Mark added his idea again:

   You shouldn't try to control nature. You should work with it.

Beth tried to respond, but I had allowed Johanna enough time to try to get back into the conversation, so I asked that we hear what she had been trying to say, and she commented:

   I don't understand how controlling ties in with the story because I don't think they were trying to control anything.

At this point, Sam exploded:

   Ya, that's where I start to lose it right here. I mean (Johanna is saying, "me too."). it seems like it's totally irrelevant after it gets this far.

I asked him to say more, and he continued:

   This is like in the other discussions, the "why are we here stuff." It just seems to lose its meaning after a couple of minutes.

In reaction to his outburst, there suddenly were lots of comments being made, mostly directed to the closest person, and some laughter. I paraphrased what Sam had said:

Teacher: So what you're saying is that you would like to hear just one thing. You don't want to go into other ideas because then it gets confusing.
Sam: Well, I don't mind like a character study or something (yesterday we had talked about each of the characters), but when they start battling nature and all this other stuff and the human spirit, the whole story just seems to lose its point. It just seems like its an excuse to talk about - it just seems dumb, I mean.

Teacher: So it seems dumb to you to get too many ideas out here.

Sam: Ya, yes. If you get too many things out here, people just aren't going to comprehend it. They're just going to accept it as some stupid thing they heard - just like - its - I don't know - it's - like what I said before.

Teacher: Ok, now how do you feel about taking down five or six different possibilities of what the theme could possibly be about?

Sam: Well, I don't mind that, but the - essentially I mean - it seems like we get more out of doing a character study on the people, not why they're there and trying to beat the force of nature. I don't think they had any of that in their mind, I don't think.

Teacher: Ok, that's fine, and Johanna, I'm hearing you say the same thing. Some of you don't see a theme that these men were trying to overcome nature. You're saying that you see them as trying to survive through it.

Beth, Mark, Faith, and Johanna all started talking and I asked if it were okay for us to have different ideas, and a general response of yes was
given. I reminded them that our point was to understand what another
was saying, not that we had to agree with it. Sam continued and I
presented a possible plan:

Sam: Also, when it starts going off on this stuff it
doesn't seem like its useful.

Teacher: Is it okay for you, when something seems
irrelevant, to bring it up, say it seems
irrelevant and ask to move on?

There was general agreement around the room. The discussion
continued for the next two or three minutes and the bell rang.

Sam and Johanna stayed and Sam asked me a question which led into
a major insight for him:

I don't understand the way that works because
I don't understand how you can have that many
themes and still have the down-to-earth theme.
Why wouldn't the down-to-earth, most basic
theme be the theme?

I responded by asking him what he saw as the most down-to-earth
basic theme? He explained his thinking; I agreed with him, and told him
I thought there were other messages there as well, explaining that I
had read the story about eight times, and each time I usually realized something I had not seen before.

The three of us continued to talk about the times Sam and Johanna had felt frustrated by the class discussions. Our discussion became an examination of the different ways various people in the class thought. Johanna described herself as a "mathematical thinker," and Sam called himself a "black and white thinker." Both expressed their belief that most of the people in the class were "philosophical thinkers." I reassured them they did not have to see what others saw, only listen to different ideas and be able to support their own. Sam concluded he might stay in the class, "if we can keep it from turning into the Socrates Fan Club."

The Case Study Students

By November 13, James' mother had received his first quarter rank card, and she called me. She relayed to me that he had told her he got confused about when assignments were due because I gave them when

175
the bell was ringing, that the due day wasn't clear because I never said when it was, and that the only assignments he had not done were, the "optional ones." She quickly added that she didn't believe any of this.

I think the reason she did not believe him was that I had stayed in close contact with James and his mother by telephone. During the first quarter we had talked together four times, and she knew what was happening almost on a bi-weekly basis.

She was worried, however, that James would give up. She said that in the past, when he had failed, he just quit. She mentioned that this was the only subject in which he was experiencing problems.

By November 22, (day 8 of the second quarter), James had done only one of the five assignments. I made appointments with him and he did not attend them. When I questioned him, he said he had to concentrate on Biology. By November 29, he was bringing nothing to class with him.

On December 5, I called James' mother and left a message for her and James that I would like to talk with them. The next day in class, I asked him if he had received my message, and he said smilingly, "Yes. Don't call any more." When I asked why, he replied, "Just don't." His manner was not angry. I had the sense he was saying "I don't want my mother on my case."
That evening, I did call again, and talked with his mother bringing her up to date on James’ English progress. She did not know he had turned in only one assignment, nor did she know he had earned 95% on his grammar test.

The next day, James presented his Our Town paper to me with a great flourish. It was typed and I told him I was impressed with its professional appearance. Later during class, when the students started their progress reports, James wanted to know why they did not get progress reports like in regular classes." Mark answered, “Because this isn't a regular class.”

After class, James stopped to talk, and some of the points he made were the same ones, he had brought up during the first quarter:

You know, I'm not having a problem in other classes. Maybe the problem is the way this class is set up. In other classes the teacher stands in front and teaches.

Teacher: What do you mean when you say 'teaches'?

The teacher basically does all the talking. In here the whole class does it, one big conversation, doesn't seem like there's any order... you don't get a definite answer, more like just opinions.
Teacher: Does it help when I sum up what has been said?

Not really. These are only summing up opinions. You don’t know if they’re right or wrong. If you ask the person who wrote the book, you’ll get the right answer, so there must be a right answer.

Teacher: So you feel frustrated because you want to know what the right answer is.

Well, basically, yes. Other than the grammar, there’s nothing in here that has right or wrong answers. This is hard.

I explained that what I wanted students to do was to think about the opinions being given, that I was not interested in the right answer, but in their opinion and their support for that opinion. His response was that this was “very confusing.”

His confusion evidenced itself in relation to the assignments too. He was not following the written sheets I gave students for each assignment. A few days later, I talked with him about a paper he had turned in:

Teacher: I’m concerned because your paper did not fit the directions for what was to be done.

I thought it was, like, to write about that like how it has to do with life.
Teacher: I didn't see anything on the directions that said that.

Well, I didn't have the directions. I just did it.

He had been in class and had received a copy of the directions.

On December 17, he turned in his progress report, and his self assessment revealed he was still evaluating himself as much more successful than he actually was. He was totally ignoring the undone work. As the class came in that day, I sought him out and asked him to meet with me so that we could discuss his progress report. He said he had to work on his biology, that he was too busy. I wanted to impress on him the importance of our making a conference time, and I made the mistake of jumping into the problem I wanted to discuss rather than sticking to the topic of finding a convenient time:

Teacher: I'm concerned because I saw that you had written on your progress report that you were doing better this quarter.

I am doing a lot better.

Teacher: Oh, you did some beautiful work (I unintentionally judged with "beautiful").

I handed in almost all my assignments. I at least handed them in instead of not even handing them in. I mean, they're late, but other than that, I mean I handed them in.
Teacher: We need to make some comparisons, because I have several zeroes.

You should have all the assignments that you've told us.

Teacher: That's why I want to get together so

Maybe like two or three I think

Teacher: Maybe I don't have something down that should be there, and you'll have it in your folder... I do agree with you that you're doing better than last quarter.

Apparently you're not telling my parents that. It's gotta be because they think I'm doing worse this quarter.

Teacher: Well, I'm concerned about those zeroes. I'm real concerned about that. So let's compare notes and see if I've got the right thing.

At this point, James walked away. I called after him, and he kept going, saying, "I'm going to guidance."

The following Monday and Tuesday, he was not in class. On Wednesday, December 22, the guidance counselor came in to tell me that James has been in her office for two days and refused to return to class. He informed her he would take two English classes next year. I mailed a progress report in which I indicated which assignments were
James was in class the first day after the break, January 3, and he spoke in a friendly tone when I greeted him. Later in class, I asked the students to write a journal entry on one of the themes in the short story, "The Open Boat." James wrote, "I don't feel like writing in this damn journal about theme." I noticed his physical appearance had deteriorated even more. His hair, now almost shoulder length, was unkept, his complexion blotchy, and his jeans too filled with holes to be considered stylish.

On Wednesday morning as I was leaving my home, James' mother called. She apologized for calling me at this moment, but said she was very upset. She described "a big go-round" she and James had the day before and told me not to expect him to be very civil in class. She repeated that this is only the second time he has ever had a problem with a teacher and that the other teacher had not liked James. I did not think she believed I disliked James, but she was very worried and was searching for answers. James may have believed I did not like him.
I decided to describe to her my observations of his changes and hope she would see the connection to the possibility of his using drugs. When I described his way of dressing, she said, "I think he's trying to be popular." I had the impression she had not made the connection, but I later learned she had.

During the next few days, James skipped one class and refused to talk to me the other days. Each of these days, he came in, sat in his chair, arms folded, eyes staring down. Frequently he did not move for the entire period.

I had arranged a family conference for the following Monday, January 10. That morning the assistant principal informed me James' parents had canceled the meeting because "there were some family problems over the weekend involving James." James was no longer living at home.

At this time, I learned there were other problems in James' education and in his life. His Latin teacher had reported him as periodically out of class and the assistant principal also was worried about the group of students James had adopted as his new friends. His guidance counselor had noted several teacher referrals for rudeness.
On January 11th, he was not in the library where we had scheduled the class to be for that week. A short while later, he joined us, and I whispered in his ear, "I'm glad you decided to come today." He nodded.

The next day he asked for an appointment to get his missed work, and during the meeting, he apologized for "being a jerk" when he was angry. I told him I was not against him, that I wanted to be of help to him, and he said he knew that.

The next Tuesday he announced he would not be present for his mid-term exam on the 21st because he was taking his driving test. I asked him if he had made arrangements through the guidance department to reschedule his exams and he did not respond. When I later checked with the guidance department, they informed me he must take his exam as scheduled, a decision his parents supported.

The day of the mid-term was the day we had rescheduled the family conference. He did not appear for his mid-term exam, but attended the conference wearing dark sun glasses. The meeting included, James, his parents, the assistant principal, the guidance counselor, the Latin teacher, and myself. James' mother asked him why he was wearing sun glasses, "Are you trying to hide something?" She then directly
asked him why he had changed friends and was he taking drugs. James denied any use of drugs.

An interesting event arose which pointed out the differences between this study's teaching format and that of the Latin teacher's. The Latin teacher said James had skipped several classes, but that he could still make up the work and pass. Then the guidance counselor asked if that were possible in English, whereupon James' mother answered, "No, James knows he had a deadline in English. That's the way the class is run, and he's missed it. He also knew he could have done any of the work up until that time."

James had failed English for the first half of the year, and was obviously experiencing personal difficulties. During the family meeting, we reached no resolution and made no plan for the second half of the year.

Sam experiencing great difficulty with the teaching format

I added Sam as a case study for several reason, the most important being that about midway through the first quarter, he began to experience great difficulty with the teaching format, continually displaying severe organizational problems. During the second quarter,
he decided to transfer, changed his mind, pushed himself way beyond his comfort level, and, by the end of the year, had made enormous growth in many of his skills.

During the initial summer meeting, Sam's mother was the only parent who had been hesitant about his taking the class. She said she thought he was too grade conscious, but Sam's viewpoint was that perhaps without a grade, he would edit his work more often, which he explained he had not done when there was a grade on a paper. Despite his mother's reservations, he decided to enter the class.

His mother was a teacher aide assigned to three special education students who were in my sophomore basic skills class. Consequently, she and I worked together every day. On September 14, she had told me, "You have him eating out of your hand. He loves looking up those (symbolic meanings of) numbers."

Sam, tall, with brown hair and eyes, gave me the impression of a nervous person trying to look cool. His most common facial expression was a frown, yet whenever I asked him if he were confused, he reassured me all was well, responding in one rapid run-on sentence. His pronouncements were always accompanied by some kind of a stiff hand and arm movement.
Despite my impression that he was uncomfortable, he was very verbal. During his groups' presentation on September 28, he talked a great deal and debated with a student in the class as to the symbolic meaning of one of his topics. I was impressed not so much by what he said as by the fact that he displayed the confidence to take on this debate.

By October 9, I noticed that lateness was a problem for Sam—four assignments had been turned in late. In his writing, he showed no concept of where to begin and end paragraphs, and he did not include examples to support his ideas. When we talked about his work, he told me he had always had a problem with paragraphs.

Two weeks later, Sam's mother mentioned to me that he was sick of doing symbols. She explained he had loved it with the novel, but he found carrying it on to the short stories was "boring." I noticed that in class, he was not participating as frequently.

During the first quarter grading conference, I learned many interesting things about Sam's viewpoints on the class and his own learning. In response to my saying we would look at quantity, quality and the Outcomes Sheet, Sam started the conference with the following conclusion:
"Okay, um, well in my case this is probably not much of a class for me because 1, I need something structured, like you know I have to, you know, I sorta have to keep everything in order and straight, which I can't do sometimes.

He went on to talk about the assignments:

It always seemed so confusing to me. I was trying to get down this and that and everything, and then whenever the assignment came around I usually, if, for the late ones or not turned in or whatever, I just could never find out exactly where they are...and, and I think I could have done a lot better than I did, but just the fact that, it just, every time I was gonna like do it, everything seemed so confusing to me, I just couldn't follow those.

I asked him what the confusion was, and he explained:

I could never pick it (the assignment) out from everything else, you know, 'cause it seemed like before we started writing up there (on the board), it seemed like every-thing was in a blur to me, you know?

As he talked on, he said he usually did get the assignment done, and he concluded he thought the problem was having to hand the paper into a box rather than having the teacher collect the work.
We continued by talking about his grammar. He said he had a problem with that because "Sometimes there's too many choices and I just have to guess." Throughout our two sessions, he repeated his confusion over and over: "I was gonna like do it. Everything seemed so confusing to me...everything was a blur to me...."

His confusion was experienced outside of the classroom as well.

Hearing his description of why he had not edited his formal essay helps to picture the confusion Sam felt in his life. He described the computer room his family was relocating, and as he talked, he barely stopped for a breath:

It was a mess, wires everywhere and it was a mess. And my mother had moved it so it was against, we have a triangular room..it's a weird one. There's a skylight there but what she did, she moved the computer up against the wall coming down like this, and I, I got so frustrated I just pounded the desk and dumped everything. I couldn't do it because I tried, you know, I was trying to get the computer, all these plugs had to be unwound and everything.

Sam also indicated a belief that control came from forces and people outside of himself, and furthermore, that he was powerless to
undertake any action to change things. This outlook is evident in the excerpt just previously cited and again when he explained why he did not include examples in one of his papers and turn it in again:

Like I could have used, there were some examples I could have used, you know, could have picked out some stuff but I was rushed...I had no clue, really, what you wanted...I didn't know if you wanted it back or not. You never asked for it again I don't think.

In the first of our two sessions, near the close of it, he did bring up what he saw to be his improvements and his strengths, and for the first time, indicated that he was responsible for the action he had taken at the time, and that he planned to take action to change something in the future:

I found out the major problem I had was with the specific examples. That's where I was having trouble. So I tried to improve on that...I make good points...like you said I can make a good point, you know, but I didn't take enough time to dig up the information (to support it) which is what I'm going to try to improve for the whole second quarter.
By the time we had devoted almost two hours to two separate sessions, I felt pressured for time. We neared the end of the second session and were faced with the possibility of a third before deciding on a grade to write on the rank card. Every time I had brought up the topic, he avoided by changing the subject. I tried one last time, and then I jumped in with my own idea rather than waiting for him to reach a decision:

Teacher: What do you think your grade is?

No clue, I mean I really just cannot make a, I really could not make a guess.

Teacher: Well, we found you did all but two assignments, we've listed the areas you plan to practice for next quarter...what is your conclusion?

I, I, I've got, what I've just said is pretty much my conclusion, you know. My conclusion for this quarter it was very rough and it was kind of not what I'm used to, obviously...

He continued in one long breath and somehow, when he paused to take his next breath, he was talking about his art class. Out of my frustration, I jumped in, "What's your thinking about a "C-"? He agreed.
The second quarter started and 13 days into it, on December 1, Sam informed me he might need to change to a different English class at the half year, "if I'm not doing any better." His greatest concerns were that we were not doing the things other English classes were doing; he wanted to learn useful things, and the teaching format wasn't "along my way of thinking." We arranged a meeting to discuss his concerns, and talk about, as I phrased it to him, "the way you can take action to help yourself get what you need from the class."

Later, when I talked with his guidance counselor, he speculated to me that perhaps Sam was not ready for this type of English class, maybe he needed "a year or two." The perception that some students may not be ready for this type of teaching format is an important consideration and one which I address within Chapter V.

When I broached the topic with Sam's mother, I told her I thought he was beginning to learn to use specifics which I believed would help him begin to deal with the confusion he felt when faced with abstract ideas. She said she would discuss the class with Sam, but "He's always been a black and white person." She also told me he had been shocked that "You gave him such a low grade, the lowest grade he's ever gotten in English."
The next week, Sam's father's letter arrived, (as discussed on page 168) and the following week was the class discussion in which Sam took charge and spoke up for what he needed (as discussed on page 168). In light of the growth I had observed in Sam, the needs Sam had expressed for "something useful," and my own need to express myself concerning the teaching format, I responded to Sam's father in a letter, one paragraph of which I include:

I know Sam has experienced frustration with an approach to learning which is new to him. This method is designed to teach a process which not only engages students in finding meaning in literature, but also engages students in a thinking process which has direct application to the world of work. I see Sam gaining a budding understanding that learning involves brainstorming a list of various possibilities, weighing the merits of each idea, making choices, and supporting those choices. In the traditional approach, the teacher most frequently tells the students the meaning, and while this method most definitely eliminates ambiguity and its resulting frustrations, the students are not afforded the opportunity to practice the learning process for themselves.
Sam had made a tentative decision to stay in the class after the December 17 class discussion, and on January 7, his father called the guidance department and told them he supported Sam's decision.

When we met on January 25 for the second quarter grading conference, Sam expressed his positive feelings about his role in the class discussions:

This quarter now that I finally got to voice in some of my thoughts, now that, you know, I was able to tell when I thought it was too stupid...now that we can have some control over it, I think I got better at it, at that skill area."

One success at taking control for himself had created a more positive attitude toward class discussions, but this success had not yet affected his view of control in other areas of his life. He still saw himself as a victim of events. Arriving at our conference without his folder of work, he had no idea where it was and explained he had forgotten because our meeting time had been changed. When we discussed his not having turned in a set of practice research cards, he responded that he could not get the cards done because, "it was too crowded for me to work in the library." (The entire library had been reserved for two classes.)
I noticed that in addition to expressing his helplessness in the face of outside forces, he also created smokescreens—statements meant to divert attention away from him and toward others. He made one such comment when he was telling me why he did not have his research cards, "Besides, everybody else just got frustrated and copied each other's cards, and I didn't do that." Another comment was in relation to his vocabulary tests which had been troublesome for him, "Seems like a lot of people are having trouble with vocabulary this year."

I had a major insight. Up until this point, I had found myself becoming frustrated in our conversations by what I had termed his changing the subject. As a result, our conferences, particularly the first quarter grading conference, went on interminably. I listened to the past tapes, and found I had been drawn into each of his changes of subject. His tactic, albeit that it may not have been consciously carried out, worked. Each time we had started to discuss the new topic he had offered. And each time I felt thwarted in my efforts toward completing his work evaluation, and this feeling in turn created impatience in me. Because I had been able to listen intently enough to hear exactly what he and I were both doing, I was subsequently able to take control, redirect our conversation at the appropriate times, and thereby save
myself from developing negative feelings toward Sam. I felt humbled, because I had just experienced the same learning Sam had experienced in the class discussions.

During the rest of our conference, he took credit for some of his decisions, even when they had resulted in poor work, recognized improvements he had made in some areas, and commented on an area he wanted to improve. In speaking of the vocabulary on which he had done poorly, he commented, "Sometimes I was prepared, sometimes I wasn't." Of his writing, he recognized his improvement in using examples, and also explained what he saw as a problem with writing too much and not getting to his point.

In deciding on the actual grade for the report card, I again offered my thinking when leading him to make his own conclusion was unsuccessful. He readily agreed to my idea of "C+.

Amy

Amy continued to turn in her work, to be quietly attentive in class, to drop in at her lunch, leave her books, and talk for a few minutes, mostly about social topics. On November 30, she volunteered to talk in
class for the second time this year. She even talked twice on her own that day, and a third time when I asked her opinion of something.

About the middle of the quarter, Amy started openly avoiding me. On December 7, she laughingly refused a second request to conference for our mid-quarter assessment. As she declined, she skipped backwards out the door while singing, "I'm dropping you, Mrs. Holmes. Don't cry, but I'm dropping you." She turned and continued skipping down the hall to the cafeteria.

Ten days later, I had an idea. Maybe it was the microphone and the taping that was bothering her. She had mentioned it on many occasions. On December 17, I asked her if she would meet with me if I did not use the taping equipment, and she agreed. I had for some time sensed she wanted to talk to me about something private. If this were true, perhaps she was afraid she would discuss it and it would be taped.

Because of the holiday break, Amy and I did not meet until January 13. When she came in, she immediately noticed the tape recorder and checked to be certain it was turned off. When I asked her about her work, she readily listed her strengths as finding details and building from them, and writing original ideas about the literature. She saw her
weakness as speaking in class discussions, and told me she preferred to
volunteer and that when I called on her, she felt embarrassed. Because
we could find only a 20 minute block in which to meet, we did not
complete our assessment. The next time we both could meet was not
until ten days later, and therefore the mid-quarter assessment merged
with the end-of-the quarter evaluation. This time Amy had no difficulty
in evaluating herself as having earned an "A+.

During this quarter, Amy's work was consistently of high quality, she
had not indicated any problems, and she had shown increased self-
confidence both in class and in her self evaluations. If she had issues
she wanted to discuss without the microphone, I never learned of
them, nor did I experience the sense after this time that she wanted to
talk privately. In fact, the microphone was not again expressed as a
discomfort, nor was it mentioned again until the last day of school. The
first half of the year had been a tremendous success for Amy; however,
the second half was very different.

Garth

I continued to be impressed whenever Garth spoke in class, but he
spoke only when I asked him to do so. His writing also continued to
reveal strong relational thinking and strong ability to draw conclusions, but he continued to turn in only part of the assignments.

By December 3, I noticed he had not turned in the writing on the five items from the play, Our Town, and I asked for a conference. When we met on December 7, he explained he did not know what to write because in his thinking, the first three items were connected to such a degree, he did not know how to address them separately. As he talked, I was deeply impressed with his ideas, and I assured him there was no problem in addressing the items together. I asked him to see me early in any future situations for which he had blocks or questions, reminding him I was the free consultant.

I believe Garth was procrastinating because he was overwhelmed with the amount of information he had, and he did not know where to start. Added to his dilemma was, I saw, a need to make the job perfect. Rather than begin writing about the first three items, and edit it later, he had stalled because he could not make a plan before he started.

He talked about his plan for organizing his time and his frustration with his disorganization:
What I'm doing differently is I'm just making sure that when I put something away so I know where it is. Before I'd just shove it away because I didn't want to think about it, but now I want to think about it...I've always been very very disorganized. It drives me nuts because I keep losing things, so, not just English, but all of my classes...it's one of my major problems. It ties into everything else. When I'm this disorganized I tend to forget everything: when things are due, what the instructions are...it's been a big problem for me for quite some time.

He continued by explaining that another part of his plan to help organize himself was to write 20 minutes each night rather than to try and accomplish a finished product in one sitting. As he talked, I paraphrased him and he wrote his action plan.

By December 17, Garth still had not done the paper. I called it to his attention, and he said he would definitely have it by the end of the week. He did not ask me for assistance, nor did he turn in the writing.

On January 31, we met for the end-of-the-quarter conference, and I discovered he was still invisible to me. Despite our having conferenced and discussed the major writing assignment which he did not do, I was completely unaware until I prepared for this meeting that he had done
none of the other writings either. I wondered if he knew, and I asked him to talk about his work:

I've slumped. What I've done, I've done well, but I haven't done much. When I'm thinking, I'm not doing. This is my worst problem.

He explained again that things piled up and he became overwhelmed, that this happened to him all the time and in all his classes. When I asked him if he wanted his work to be perfect when he did it, he said, "Oh, yes," and described the situations of disliking what he had written and then spending the rest of his time thinking about how to change it.

He said he liked the time limit during the midterm: "I told myself, okay, I've got 40 minutes to write this and that's all I've got." He had been successful. We talked about the idea of a time limit and how it might help him get past the need to be perfect. He thought it would help.

Garth had given no excuses, blamed no outside forces or people, and concluded he had failed the quarter. I suggested a family conference to create a work plan for the second quarter, and he agreed.
Lightening up

Because, during the close of the first quarter, we had built up a great deal of tension, I started the quarter on a light note by bringing up territorialism, joking a little about it, sharing some of the studies done with people and territorialism. The students asked lots of questions and were very involved. Then I asked them to change their seats and sit with people they did not know well. They immediately moved around and had fun with the activity. My purpose was twofold: I wanted to encourage them to interact with others who were not necessarily their friends, and I needed to lighten the atmosphere. I knew from experience that when I get too focused on the goal, I forget to be fun, and students withdraw.

Working to Stay out of the Drama Triangle

On November 19, when only four students turned in the Our Town assignment, I was disappointed, and on the weekend, as I read the action plans, which were actually reasons they had not done the assignment, I became angry. Then I had to curb my feeling because it
was coming out in my responses to their plans. I also felt angry because during the entire week, no one had asked me for help. I reminded myself that the students were in a process of learning to take responsibility just as much as they were in a process of learning the academic material. This helped me to get out of the Triangle and make a plan.

Before the class arrived the following Monday (day 8), I wrote the one class rule on the board, "Show Consideration for Yourself and Others." When everyone was settled, I asked them to think of ways in which they were doing this and I gave examples: "Doing assignments is a way you show consideration for yourself, because then you're taking good care of yourself. Another thing to think about is your outside reading. Have you chosen your book, or maybe even started it?" I reminded them I was their consultant, "Businesses pay big bucks for consultants and here's your free consultant." I tried to make the mood light and simultaneously encourage them to think of ways to help themselves succeed and then to write a plan.
Reconsidering the Teacher as Rescuer

In my Personal Log for December and January, I recorded my thinking about the teaching format of this study. It is appropriate in light of the second research question, part of which asks how the teacher responds to the strategy over the course of the study, that I include here some of my mid-year observations:

I am seeing more and more examples of how different the expectations of this teaching format are from those of other teachers. When I was looking for a set of texts to assign to my class, the teacher on whose shelf they were stored asked me to leave a few copies in her room as she liked to keep extras for the students who forgot to bring their books to class. The teaching format of this study calls for students to bring their books or live with whatever the natural consequences are as they occur on a given day: one day the assignment might be individual work, in which case the student could not do the work; on another day, the assignment might be group work, and the student might be able to share.

Three other recent examples brought the differences to light again. One student asked me to make a list of all the things the class should have in the notebooks so the students could get them in order before I collected them. When I explained I thought I would be denying them the important learning experience of
organizing their information, several students said they thought my way "was uncaring."

Another student asked me to write out the assignments he had missed and "put the paper in my notebook like "my other teachers do."

On another occasion, I was lamenting to a colleague in my department that a particular student did none of the writing assignments, and her response was to tell me, "The only way I got any work out of him was to force him to do it. You have to go get him and make him do the work for you."

I am getting the impression stronger and stronger each year that in the prevalent educational paradigm, at least in my school, it is the teacher's responsibility to make the students do the work. In this study's paradigm, it is the teacher's responsibility to reach out to the students and to guide them into and through successful experiences. It is also a major teacher responsibility to allow students to experience the oftentimes uncomfortable and even painful natural consequences of their unwise decisions, and to support and guide them through that process too. I have found that this latter part of teacher responsibility is not immediately acceptable to most people.

Continued Need for One-On-One

Although I was feeling less pressure to meet with everyone than I had during the first quarter, I did have students with whom I felt a
need to stay in close contact. In addition to those described earlier, Johanna insisted she believed she couldn't learn grammar because she never had. After three aborted attempts to study together, we did meet and do so on November 30.

During 6th period every Wednesday, Kara and I were still meeting as planned during quarter 1, to discuss her outside reading. I felt she was not invested in this work. Each week she had reasons why she had not done what she had planned. I sensed anger in her, and I was feeling resentful that I was giving valuable time which she did not appreciate. To work my way out of my own negative feelings, I frequently engaged Kara in light conversation, hoping that by our getting to know each other, we would work more effectively together.

Assessing Student Work

As I read and wrote my feedback on the Our Town papers, I started to realize that my thinking about these students was in very different terms from my thoughts concerning the students in my other sophomore class. In the other class, I was seeing the students on a continuum from degrees of incapable to degrees of capable. In this
class, I was concentrating on the types of errors each student was making, and I was looking for patterns of mistakes. I found that as I thought in terms of subject matter knowledge and learning skills, I became increasingly aware of the individual needs of each student.

Addressing Student Concern with "Mrs. Holmes's Expectations"

Many students expressed their belief that my expectations for their writing were very different from those of their previous teachers, and I was puzzled by this. Jon had told me his freshman English teacher had liked his writing and he had not used lots of examples. James had relayed the same message to me:

"...so far what I've noticed about the class is you base just about everything on specific examples...and that's just a little bit different than what we've been used to."

Beth mentioned several times in her progress report that she was working to learn my expectations. Sam had described his writing as improved by my standards, but not in general. Others had expressed similar outlooks. I entertained many possible reasons for the perception that my expectations were different from those of other
One explanation seemed the most plausible, and if true, is a direct result of the nonjudgmental teaching strategy.

This outcome is well illustrated by an exchange that occurred during the mid-year grading conferences. Samantha and I were discussing her patterns of strengths and weaknesses and she made some comments which I found particularly illuminating. She started by saying the following:

In my other classes we wrote compositions and things like that, but they weren't as intricate as these are, you know, detailed. It didn't really matter if you used that many examples.

She paused a moment, and then continued with a new idea on the subject:

Maybe it did, but my other teachers didn't react to it. They just put a grade on it, so I didn't really learn the things about my writing that I do now.

The fact that the nonjudgmental feedback is very specific, and given in this manner with the purpose of teaching students what to look for in their writing, may have led them to see my expectations as different, but it also has helped them to see the importance of supporting their
statements, because I have found that all the students have improved in their ability to use support.

Salient Problems

This study reveals the massive amounts of confusion and frustration experienced by several students, particularly in relation to the class discussion format. Brooks and Brooks (1993) ask the question, "Why doesn't more thinking and re-thinking occur in school?" (p. 15). Based on this study, I have several thoughts for consideration in relation to their question.

First of all, this study revealed that when the student experienced confusion and anxiety, the parents became upset and asked that their child be transferred to a "real English class where he'll get the same English all the other kids get," in one instance, "to a traditional class," in another, and "to a structured class" in the third. Not one of the parents contacted me to discuss their concerns, not even Sam's mother with whom I worked.

The situation of angry parents raises another issue in relation to the question raised by Brooks and Brooks. In each angry parent situation
of this study, the parents had accepted their child's perceptions of the class and had not consulted the teacher. This situation raises serious concerns about public perceptions and thus about teachers taking active roles in public relations and creating ways to accomplish continual communication with parents.

In regard to public relations, for both the teacher and the school, public perception is very important. I had maintained communication with James' family and they were supportive of the program. Jon's parents, who had requested Jon be transferred, were unable to conference in person with me, but we had an extended telephone conversation in which I further explained the format, what Jon was accomplishing, and what he could do to learn more. Jon did not transfer, and I did not hear from his parents again. Although I do not take this fact as indication of their support for the program, I do believe our talk created a more fully developed perception of the program.

Another aspect for consideration is the administrator's viewpoint. After Jon's father called, I discussed his concerns with my administrator and related what I saw as a possible insight into the perception that I was not following the sophomore curriculum. I relayed all the
father had said, and my administrator confided that these comments expressed the concerns he had heard. He again stressed the importance that the community perception be that the curriculum is constant for all sophomores in English 1-2.

Still another concern was raised when I discussed the teaching format of the present study with both the guidance department and the alternative learning center. The counselors and teachers in each department conveyed their belief that teachers trying to help students to process information would experience more and more difficulty because as the school district raised the graduation requirements, there has been a growing emphasis among students and parents on placing importance only on "what they have to know;" that is, what they have to know to get on the honor roll and, ultimately, what they have to know to earn a high score on the Scholastic Achievement Tests.

This observation is supported in research cited by Brooks and Brooks (1993), research showing that novice learners choose only enough information to "achieve correct, mandated performance ...(they) resist learning anything that is not part of the algorithms they depend on for success" (p. 48). In addition to the students whose parents had written, I was reminded of Bobby Ann's telling me her conclusions about
the time we spent on the contract: "It just seemed like wasted time because, basically, you know, we don't get graded on it."

Many salient problems become evident when considering the present teaching format. My own experience is that each problem leads back to one of the biggest problems I encountered. Using this teaching format effectively requires that the teacher devote a great deal of time to communication with all participants--students, parents, administrators, and the greater community.

Student Responsibility for Learning

As a group, during the second quarter, the students demonstrated less responsible behavior in relation to some areas of the definition in Chapter II. In such actions as bringing materials to class, turning in assignments, and editing them when needed, I found much less of this behavior than was evident during the first quarter (even the uncovered books which I had taken back remained unclaimed). In relation to their
awareness of how they were progressing and where they stood with their skills development, I observed little overall responsibility as defined in Chapter II.

The one area in which as a group, they had demonstrated a large degree of responsible behavior was in class discussion. All students had participated regularly, and they were demonstrating many of the desired social skills. I had observed a pattern beginning to develop of students responding to one another and of bringing one another into the discussion. I had also observed students supporting their ideas by citing specific evidence from their literature, even stating a page number and reading their evidence to the class.

Individually I noted several people who had taken responsibility for their own learning. Charles was leaving his study hall occasionally to work with me on learning grammar, and he occasionally supported his ideas in his writing. Kara had continued to meet with me even though she had not always done all the work. Garth had accepted full responsibility for his quarter failure. Samantha evaluated her work for the second quarter to be six points lower than her work of the first quarter, saying, "It's my own fault. I see a pattern of lateness and two assignments I didn't do." Jon, Ted, Sam, and Johanna had each spoken
out during a class discussion to ask for clarity of the discussion. Without exception, all the students knew of at least one strength they demonstrated in their writing and in their contributions to class discussions.

There were students whom I continued to encourage to take on a greater challenge, but I had not observed them doing so. Ted continued to do the minimum. During the first quarter conferencing, Rita had discussed doing a research project on a particular career, but had not taken any steps to accomplish it. Bobby Ann continued to be unhappy with the class contract discussions and with what she termed "wasting time," but would not speak about it in class.

The Final Second Quarter Grades

With one exception, each of the students and I came to agreement on a grade for this quarter, and 11 people evaluated their work as less successful than that of the first quarter (Appendix J). The one exception to agreement was Beth who avoided determining her grade. We met and discussed the quarter's work, and she was completely
aware she had done almost none of the work. I made three appointments for her to inform me of her final decision, all of which she was unable to keep. I waited until the end of the third quarter before putting the failing grade on her rank card. I heard nothing from her, and since she had transferred, I had no further contact with her.
CHAPTER VIII

RESULTS: THE THIRD AND FOURTH QUARTERS

The Story of the Class

During the third quarter, the students started their research papers, much of which was an individual pursuit. In addition they studied the play, Macbeth which they accomplished in the same format we had been practicing all year, small group tasks and large group discussion. My past experience with the teaching format of this study shows that the third quarter marks a turning point in student ability to take charge of classroom events and to rely less on the teacher. Whereas during the second quarter, two people brought up a personal problem they experienced in class discussions, this quarter two people brought up an issue they had with class responsibility.

Students Beginning Their Research

The second half of the year started with the students beginning their research papers, and we spent a week of classes in the library, as well as one or two days each of two successive weeks. During this time,
students searched for resources, ordered those not available, and
started reading and taking notes for their research paper.

I walked around the library, offering my help and stopping to
observe and to listen as individuals and small informal groups worked.
A few people had difficulties. Sam particularly experienced many
problems, and each time I offered to work with him, he had a reason
that he could not work. Charles sat down each day at a table and
thumbed through the same notebook of resources. I offered my help to
which he declined. I suggested the computers might help, and he
declined that idea as well. James sat with a girl from another class and
helped her with her math. When I asked him about his research, he
assured me he was "all set." Jon spent the entire first week looking up
one topic and then decided to change to another topic. I told him,
based on my previous experience with time, I would not advise doing
so, but he held firm to his decision. Ted could not decide what topic he
wanted.

Students Taking Charge of Class

The second week, the class started to read the new literature work,
Macbeth. A few people commented that doing two things at once
would be confusing. To deal with the confusion, the class planned
certain days for research and others for reading and discussion.

February 9 had been planned for research and when the students
arrived, several did not have work with them. Others commented they
had not known this was to be a research day. Several asked to return
to their lockers for work materials. I asked them (with an edge in my
voice), to work with what they had, and told them if they had nothing,
they just lost out on this "valuable time." Ted asked me to make an
outline of the week based on their plan. He also requested that I
include in the plan what to bring to class each day. I asked them how
they could take care of that for themselves, and Rita spoke up, anger in
her tone, "Let's just get to work." Then Kara too addressed the class:

> We planned the whole week. We knew what
to bring today. We waste too much time
arguing over what's already been decided.

The class became very quiet. Each person took out something to do and
went to work.

Later that day when Kara and I met for our work, she was very
worried that she had not used I statements and that she had been too
forceful. I told her I liked what she had said because it was their class,
and that meant students' speaking up. She explained she was disgusted with excuses and people not having work done, but at the same time she was now concerned with possible class reactions to what she had said. I shared with her that Bobby Ann had expressed concern "that more people needed to take the class seriously," but had not felt comfortable to say that to the class. Kara said her observations were that "the girls were serious about learning and the boys were less serious."

The next week, the students again divided their time between working on their research and reading the play. I did not observe an increase in the number of students who were actively working during the research days, but no one asked to get forgotten materials. Ruth, who had volunteered to replace Beth in writing the assignments on the board, had written the week's schedule on the board.

After vacation the class devoted more time to group work and class discussions on Macbeth. On March 4 the class had decided to have a discussion based on the small group work they had planned and carried out the previous day, which had been to make a list of important events in a particular scene. I told them I would sit outside the circle to observe and take notes on their interaction. Mark had a different
idea of what he wanted me to do, "You can stay in the circle; just don't talk." I agreed, wrote the academic and social skills objectives on the board, and took my seat. Ruth started the class:

Shall we go around and read our lists?

General response of no

Okay, I'll start. (Ruth) I have...

I had that too, and we also had....(Mark)

Should we all add that to the list? (Johanna)

General agreement to do so

Let's just list everything first, and then edit the list later. (Kara)

General agreement and Ruth summarized the points mentioned.

Shall we go in chronological order? (Rita)

General agreement

I have a question. What relationship does the drunken porter have to the play? (Ruth)

Comic relief (Mark)

When tragedy happens in a play, the audience needs comedy next. (Faith)
(A note of importance is that I had given this information in introducing the reading section.)

We had a question, too. Did Lady Macbeth or Macbeth convince Duncan's sons to leave? (Mark)

Everyone looked around, and then started leafing through their play books. Mark read aloud the section in which the sons left. No one answered him and there was a pause of about one minute. Morry broke the silence by saying, "I'd like to backtrack here a minute." He asked a question about something from the last class discussion. Ted responded to Morry. Ruth added a comment, and Mark commented that all they had just said connected to one of the themes they had identified earlier. Everyone spontaneously wrote notes for about two minutes.

Ruth directed the conversation back to Mark's question about the sons, "Does anyone have any ideas on Mark's question about Duncan's sons?" Faith answered and read a section which supported her idea. Everyone wrote notes. Ted asked for a summary of what they had listed so far, and Samantha read her list. Ruth suggested they now go around the room so that everyone would have the chance to add something. They all agreed. Five people said they had nothing to say: James, Jon, Charlie, Garth, and Sam. Everyone else was involved in the
discussion, and at one point, Ben gave an elaborate explanation (the longest he had spoken) of why he believed Macbeth had stabbed the guards.

Garth asked for clarification of what Ben was saying, and Ted clarified with a summary. Ruth asked Ben a question. Johanna asked the whole class a question in relation to Ben's explanation. Both Kara and Ruth gave their ideas in response. The class time was over and Rita suggested they read the next five pages and continue on Monday. Everyone agreed.

I had followed Mark's instructions. I had not talked. I had listened and observed as the students made a discussion plan and then exchanged ideas, supported their ideas, asked one another questions, searched within the reading for answers, asked one another for clarification of answers, responded to one another, returned to overlooked student questions, made connections between previously learned information and new information, summed up information, checked for agreement from the whole class before moving on, and last of all, agreed to give themselves a reading assignment for the next class discussion. The students had taken responsibility for their own learning during this day.
Students Not taking Charge

The follow-up to the March 5, *Macbeth* discussion in which the students had successfully carried on work leading toward the class objective without my intervention, was a fiasco. No one offered ideas; students shuffled papers and moved about in their chairs. I asked Charles to start, to which he responded he didn't know where to start. I suggested he read the first thing on his list, and he said he hadn't taken any notes. I turned to the general class, and asked if someone would summarize up to where we had left off; no one responded. The room became completely silent for about two minutes. Mark asked if anyone had read the five pages they had assigned themselves. Nine people said they had read it, and each of them made a comment about what they saw happening on those pages. No one responded to another, no questions were asked, and no discussion developed. The students who had not read the assignment sat quietly.

After class, Bobby Ann, who had sat throughout class, head down, doodling in her notebook, made an appointment to discuss her frustration with the class. Kara stopped to request that her mother be included in our upcoming conference, and I could see she was angry. I had also observed anger in Rita's facial expression. No one had brought
up to the class their feelings about the fact that one-half of the students had not done the assignment, but I could feel frustration in some others as well.

Students Expressing Their Views On the Teaching Strategy

On March 11, a local newspaper reporter visited the class and asked the students to talk about their reaction to the teaching format. Four students were absent, but the comments of the others reveal important aspects of their personal experience with the teaching format:

It's better in the way you get to critique your own work. (Ruth)

The first quarter was much harder. Now it's easier. (Ted, and several others in different words)

The pressure from the first quarter is gone. (Kara)

It's very frustrating. Someone may get away with a better grade and not deserve it. (Sam)

It's more worry because you don't know how much the undone work counts. (Charlie)
It helps to decide the grade with the teacher (Faith)

The less formal atmosphere makes you feel better about yourself. (Ruth)

The stress of a grade is off because you get feedback and can rewrite. (Bobby Ann)

When you rewrite, you recognize your strengths. (Rita)

You're compared to yourself and not others. (Amy)

There's no visual proof I'm doing bad. (Sam)

Work you didn't do comes back at us at the end of the quarter because we have to evaluate and look at it. The other way, you don't do it, it's over. (Ruth)

It is interesting to observe one contrast between the comments made by the female students and those made by the male students. Each of the females noted a specific way in which the format helped them whereas each of the males commented about a concern they experienced with the format. Taking this a step further, one can note that the males' concerns centered around not having a grade, an attitude which could indicate a male emphasis on the goal. The females, on the other hand, mentioned the specific ways the format
helped them improve in their ability to do the work, an attitude which could indicate female emphasis on process.

The Case Study Students

James

James continued to turn in almost no work, to evidence roller coaster emotions, and for the most part to avoid me. In class, he usually sat, arms folded, and stared straight ahead. Sometimes he drew on a notepad. When the students were in small groups, he interacted with the other group members, but did not do assignments which the group depended on to complete their objective. In the library, when the class was doing the research, he visited with friends from another class, and refused help.

He refused to conference about his work, and both his mother and I agreed to allow him space and just to let him know we were available whenever he might want to talk with either of us. Twice during the quarter, he asked me for assignments, but he did not do them. He
continued to show anger as his usual mood, and once when I saw him in
the hall and spoke casually, asking how everything was going, he
snapped, "Just lay off."

He did agree to conference at the end of quarter. When I asked him
what he thought about a grade for the report card, he replied he didn't
care. A long pause followed, and he asked how much work he had done.
I listed what I had written down and he added one. There was a long
pause, and I sensed his discomfort at making the obvious conclusion he
had done a little less than one-third of the assignments.

I took the opportunity to momentarily change the subject and
perhaps make a dent in his armor. We talked about his other subjects
and I learned he had flunked two other subjects. While we talked, I
encouraged him to reach out to people in the school who cared about
him. He said he'd been "invited to some stupid Student Assistance Team
meeting. You gave them my name." (After our mid-year parent
conference, I had submitted him as a troubled student, and had heard
nothing since.)

He accused me of telling them he was a "substance abuser."

Interestingly enough, he did not sound angry. I responded to his
accusation:
Teacher: No, James, I told them you weren't doing English and were withdrawn. They may have thought this indicated drug use. I've been very concerned about you and I haven't been able to reach you.

Your job is to teach me English and if I don't learn it, it's not your fault. It's my fault.

We talked on, touched on the topic of his going to summer school, and I offered my help when the time came for him to make a decision. We agreed to a "50" on the rank card.

James was not hostile and not friendly. He spoke in a monotone, and I felt anger just below his outward appearance of depression. Although he told me my job was to teach, I sensed by his willingness to talk about the Student Assistance Team, that he was not unhappy about my having referred him. He also spoke as if he were taking the responsibility for having failed English.

Amy

Amy remained quietly present in class; in fact, at the beginning of the quarter, she was unusually quiet. I did not realize she was in
trouble until March 3, six weeks into the third quarter, but even then, I was not worried because she had consistently demonstrated strong abilities.

Amy continued to participate very little in class discussions and to report to me each time she was in a small group that her group members were not doing their job. On February 8 she repeated her usual action by coming to me when the bell rang. She told me her two group members had not performed their jobs, and, "I'll just have to do the work on my own like I usually do." Again I took a minute or two to invite her to brainstorm ways she could help solve the problem. As with the others who had expressed frustration with their peers, she too was reluctant to say anything to them.

By March, she was still reaching out to me rather than to her group members. She and Faith were partners on a one-day assignment. A few minutes into the work, she called me over to ask if her interpretation of a *Macbeth* passage were accurate. Because we had been working with the rule of only one group question for each session, groups had developed a pattern of saving their questions until the very end of class. When I asked if this would be the one group question, I learned she had not checked with her partner before calling me over.
On another occasion, I asked the class to divide into groups of three or four, as they decided, and to choose their own group members. Amy sat at her seat and made no move to ask others or to join a group herself. When I asked if everyone were in a group, she said nothing. While the groups had been forming, I had heard someone invite her, but I had heard no response. I believe Amy resisted group work because she wanted me to know which work was her own, and thus working in groups became a threat to individual recognition from the teacher.

On March 3, I realized I had no recorded work from Amy. Up until this time, we had discussed her research topic several times because she had expressed difficulties finding resources. I had seen several myself in bookstores and had referred her to them. She had not obtained them, and she had asked to be excused from discussing her topic in class because she was afraid others would make fun of her because her topic was prayer. She did, however, participate in the individual class reporting on research topics.

The day the second set of notecards was due, I asked her about her first set which had not been turned in, concluding, from our previous conversations, she would be turning in both sets together. She looked at me, and said nothing. After a short silence, she very quietly said, "I
don't know," and she turned away. Class started, and I did not speak with her until the following day.

I tried to schedule a conference with her, telling her I had seen none of her research work. Her response was to stare at me for a minute and very calmly say, "What do you mean?" I told her I was worried. She said she had too much work to do in all her classes, and explained she had four research assignments and one of them required she go into the hospital and interview people because there was no literature available. When she finished her explanation, she asked, "Does this mean I have a "C"? I responded I didn't know, but that four zero entries was "scary." Then she wanted to know if she were failing, and I said I didn't know.

Later, in the cafeteria, we talked a few minutes more and she said she felt "stressed out," "on overload," and then, in a tone of most uncharacteristic seriousness, "I'm only fifteen and I can't do all this work."

On March 14, she turned in a rough draft of the first five paragraphs, and it was completely wrong, not even on the topic she had indicated she would research. I was puzzled because Amy's past work had clearly indicated her readiness to accomplish the research task, and to
accomplish it to a more successful extent than any other student in the class. We conferenced and she started again. She also told me her mother must not learn of her failing grade.

A week later, I called her at home to inquire about her progress. She said she had made no progress because, she had been unable to get to a library, "I don't have transportation and I don't have a study hall. Anyway, I don't know where to start." Then she again stated she definitely didn't want her mother to know she was failing.

By March 25, only ten days remained in the third quarter, and Amy had accomplished none of the research. After my phone call to her, we made an appointment to work together, and she did not keep it. In class, her participation in discussion had increased, and she had expressed delight in reading Macbeth. Her writing and tests on the literature, had been consistently successful and of high quality. She had refused to write a progress report, telling me again her mother must not know she was failing.

That she had decided she was failing was interesting in itself because the class had several times discussed the English Department's policy that the research steps were to be considered as 20% of the
third quarter's work, and the final paper was to be considered as 20% of the fourth quarter's work. The only work Amy had not done was the 20% part.

Also of interest was the fact that she had attributed her stress level to four research projects, because when I talked with her other teachers, they informed me the work was not research in the sense of the English Department paper. They described short reports and believed Amy totally capable of handling the work with high success.

When I put the whole picture together—a pending parent divorce, Amy's mercurial temperament which had become evident only during the third quarter, a mother whom Amy had all year insisted expected high grades, Amy's insistence she was failing the quarter and her mother was not to know, her demonstration of complete helplessness in relation to the research project, her pattern of need for an authority figure's attention and approval—all led me to believe Amy's actions were not without a purpose. I decided to call her mother and try to enlist her help without telling Amy. I was breaking an agreement I had made with each student that I would not contact a parent before notifying the student of my plans.
Amy's mother expressed her appreciation that I had called her. She had known nothing of Amy's problems with the research, and had been unable to learn from Amy why I had called her the previous week. She wanted to know if Amy were failing the quarter, and I explained that Amy had to evaluate her own work. I also told her my assessment of Amy's skills and my concern that something other than the research was the real problem. Her mother readily agreed my conclusion was plausible and related several events she believed could be contributing to what she termed "a need for attention." We agreed not to tell Amy I had called, but instead her mother would ask her how the research project was going, thereby trying to open communication.

The next morning, a Saturday, at 9:30, Amy called me at home. Her voice was very low and she asked me what her grade was. I asked her to assess it and we discussed each assignment. "Is there any chance of salvaging it?" she asked. I didn't respond.

She explained that her mother had asked her about her research and she had told her of her problems. Amy said her mother then told her if she had an "F," she'd be grounded, and that an "F" would affect her class standing and she wouldn't get into a good college. I asked her to make a plan for accomplishing the work, to set herself a schedule, and
after she had done some of the work, to arrange a meeting for the 
three of us to examine what she had accomplished. Amy agreed, saying 
she thought the plan "a great idea."

I told her the work would not have an effect on this quarter because 
the third quarter would close in one more week, and that her plan 
would benefit her fourth quarter. She asked if she could pass the year 
if she failed third quarter, and I told her that usually students passed 
for the year when they had failed only one quarter. She ended the 
phone conversation still saying she was failing the quarter, yet her 
tone of voice sounded upbeat.

The end-of-quarter grading conference arrived, and from the 
beginning, Amy took the lead in a campaign to persuade me she had not 
failed. It was obvious she saw the evaluation of her work as coming 
from the authority, and she had to present a case to prevent herself 
from that failing grade. She started talking the minute she entered the 
room, and she consistently presented herself as the victim of 
circumstances:

Now about my grade--I really don't think 
I should fail. I went through my work 
and I had done the cards. You just didn't
collect them though. And I did the rough draft of the first five paragraphs, and you didn’t like it.

I said nothing and she continued.

I found out that the English Department policy is the research part counts only 20% of our work for the whole quarter, so I have at least an 80.

I responded we had to examine the other part of her work.

I’ve got that all here. I couldn’t do the second rough draft (still speaking of the research) because you told me to start over again.

We continued by examining her work on Macbeth, and in each of her remarks about a paper, she noted what my reaction had been for that paper, "You liked this one." and "Oh yes, this one was good. You loved it." When I asked her what was good about it, she read my comments from the paper. I heard no indication she had internalized an understanding that she had displayed certain strengths in her writing. We came to agreement that her work was best represented with a grade of "C." I had waited to hear her describe the work in terms of her accomplishments and her strengths, as well as her decisions and their results. She engaged in none of these actions which would have indicated she was taking responsibility for her own learning.
The third quarter started with the parent conference Garth and I had planned at the close of the second quarter. I had talked with his dad on the telephone, explained my concerns, and made an appointment at that time. Garth's mother came to the conference and I opened the meeting by explaining the purpose of our getting together was to learn how we could be of help to Garth.

Garth had a clear idea of what he wanted because he and I had examined his situation so thoroughly. He immediately explained that he liked short deadlines (as he and I had discussed in relation to the mid-term exam writing limit of 40 minutes), and that a given long time, he tended to "procrastinate, and then I have another paper due, and then another, and then none of them are finished." He talked about how overwhelmed this situation made him feel and that, as a consequence, he then did nothing.

The three of us talked of how we could help him and agreed that when a paper was assigned, Garth would that night make a list of ideas and give it to me the next day. I would in turn give him feedback on the ideas. From this action, he would have an immediate place to start. He discussed class participation saying sometimes he didn't ask a
question because "I don't know what I don't know." He continued, giving us a clear picture of his problems and his ideas of how his mother and I could help him.

I noticed his mother did not bring up his failing grade of the previous quarter, nor did she reprimand him for past actions, nor did she give him advice about how to solve his problem. As Garth explained his difficulties and his plan, she paraphrased what he said and occasionally offered an idea of something she or I might do. Her suggestions were always in the form of a question. I wondered if this were the reason I had consistently seen no defensiveness in Garth, but a complete willingness to accept his actions as his own and to engage in making plans for more successful future actions. (I had also noticed throughout my interactions with Garth, that he paraphrased what I said and checked with me to be sure he had understood my meaning.) When the meeting ended, Garth had revised the action plans he and I had made on December 14 and on January 31, and added ways he thought his family and I could help him.

Garth chose for his research topic to discuss the ways in which violence on television affects children. My class log notes reveal that on every day planned for research, Garth had his material with him and
pursued his search for resources and, later, his reading and writing on his topic. Through March 4 when he and I conferenced for his mid-quarter assessment, he not only had turned in all assignments, but also had turned them in on time.

During the March 4 conference, he took charge more than in our past meetings. He opened the discussion by saying he had done "very well on the research, and the Macbeth was good, but could have been better." I noticed he did not evidence any of his usual hesitancy which I had seen as characteristic of one who is thinking aloud. This time, I drew the conclusion, Garth had already thought through his progress and knew what he had accomplished.

Ten days later, on March 14, Garth did not turn in the rough draft of his first five paragraphs. I mentioned my disappointment at not being able to read what he had found, and decided to wait and see if he would take charge. By March 20, he had said nothing, and he had still turned in nothing. I asked him for an appointment. He assured me he did not need one and would have the required ten paragraphs in rough draft form by the due day which was the following Friday. He did not have it.
I was unsuccessful in scheduling a conference to work on the paragraphs with Garth, and, with his knowledge, I contacted his mother who thanked me and said she would address the situation with him.

Meanwhile Garth's class participation had improved. Up until this point, he had only spoken when asked a direct question by another person. During the Macbeth discussions, he had twice volunteered to talk. His work on the play, tests and writings, was of high quality and showed complete understanding.

On April 8 we met to evaluate his third quarter work. He had not brought his folder of work or his self-assessment with him, but, as in the mid-quarter meeting, he started with confidence:

I think I did pretty well. Except for missing those two paragraph assignments which I didn't turn in, I did the rest of the research steps.

He launched into a discussion of his research, and the major part of our conference became a research working session. He described his difficulties in finding all he wanted and his plan to go to the University library, his problems in using his own wording and in organizing the information. We listed various ways he might choose to organize the
material, and he requested we meet again to work further on the organization. Then we started the evaluation work.

We examined his strengths and noted his progress in organization as evidenced in his writing and his planning. He had not noted the specifics of his strengths, and we listed them together.

He expressed surprise to learn he had not turned in one of the homework assignments, and as we talked, I realized he had read the article and remembered it thoroughly. He also found he had turned in only one-half of a short writing on the play, another fact which he had forgotten.

Then he drew his conclusion as to a representative grade, "I came in thinking '85' (B-), but without those other assignments, I think '80' (C). I responded that I thought more along the lines of a "C+" saying I saw growth in his skills and I indicated the list we had made. I pointed out that his first quarter had been "80," and I would like the record to indicate improvement. He laughed, and said "Well, of course I'll take the higher grade."

I could not draw a conclusion as to whether Garth recognized his growth. When he had drawn his conclusion of a grade, he had
mentioned only the work he had done and that which he had not done.

I had brought up the topic of strengths and of growth in skills.

Sam

Sam had a very difficult third quarter both in accomplishing his individual work and in becoming involved in class discussions. On January 26, each student started the searches for resources on the individually chosen topics. This class and one other were together in the library.

Sam had decided to find out what was available on the topic of mind control, and after about 20 minutes informed me there were no resources. I asked him if he had checked all five of the computer bases in the library. He explained he could not get to one because all the others were using them, whereupon I suggested he stand in line as others were doing. He declined saying he would be wasting time. Instead, he decided to change his topic to multiple personalities.

By Tuesday, February 1 (three school days and a weekend later), Sam informed me he could not find resources on his topic. He said last week he had found two articles in a collection contained in the library, but that today they were missing. I asked him to talk with the librarian.
He did not, and a few minutes later, he told me there were no other articles on multiple personalities in the collection. I again suggested he do a computer search. Instead he consulted one of the microfiche indices.

I observed him for four minutes. His frown told me he was having difficulties, so I went over to him and offered help. He said there were no resources in that index either. I again suggested the computers, and again he placed the control outside of himself, saying he could not get a turn because they were all being used. I almost forced him to take a chair next to Samantha who was at that moment using one of the computers, and I said, "Your turn is next."

Then he told me he did not know how to use the computers (The class had spent the previous week working in cooperative groups to learn each computer and Sam had been absent one of the days, but had turned in a successfully completed assignment which met the individual objective). I asked him if he had learned this particular computer with his group, and he said, "They only explained it. I didn't have a chance to use it."

Sam was definitely feeling completely helpless and placing all the control outside of himself. I made one further suggestion, requesting
he ask Samantha to explain what she was doing as she used the computer. He gave a reason he could not do so, and at that point Mark asked him if he wanted some help. I left the two of them and worked with others.

At the end of class, Sam, with major frowning, said he had found only three resources. Several times during class he had made the statement he would never have his completed resource list by the due date which was Friday, February 4, and he informed me of this again. I responded that he, like many others, would probably have to spend time outside of class to complete the search. Still frowning he left the library.

At lunch when his mother and I met to discuss our shared special education students, I mentioned Sam's frustration, to which she replied he was just like her, "We're afraid of computers. We know so little about them."

On Thursday, Sam came to see me before school started to tell me he would not "be able to be in class" because he had an Enterprise (a business club) meeting. We had the following conversation:
Teacher: Thanks, Sam. I know you were worried about getting your list done by tomorrow. What plans have you made to have it finished?

Well, I didn't know this meeting, that I had to go to this meeting. Last time it was early morning.

Teacher: Yes, they're scheduled for all different times. You have the list of times.

Ya, but no one told us.

I just looked at him saying nothing, and he continued:

The library's closed all day.

Teacher: True, and you can get a research pass from the librarian and use it anytime today.

I can't get my cards done. There's no way.

Teacher: Sam, hear me. The librarian will give you a pass and you can use it anytime today.

I don't know how to use the machines.

Teacher: The librarian is there to help you.

I'll never get 20 by tomorrow anyway.

Sam's helplessness was his defense, and I was experiencing no success in helping him to realize he was not at the mercy of these
events, but rather that he had the power to make choices as to how he would handle these events; indeed, that he was even then making choices, but that the choices he was making were hurting him.

Meanwhile, his mother, believing she was helping him, was actually promoting his helplessness. Rather than asking Sam to schedule a meeting with the librarian, she asked the librarian to schedule time after school to help Sam with the computers. The librarian scheduled time that very day, and asked Sam to start by working on a particular computer. His response was that he did not need to learn that one. He was finished with it. She insisted and helped him brainstorm keywords that would lead him to additional resources (He had only three).

Fifteen minutes later, Sam had left the computer, and was sitting at a library table doing his geometry. When the librarian asked him to work with her on the other computers, he declined, telling her he had to work on his math. The next morning, the due day for the resource list, he told me he had 12 resources and had not had time to find more.

A short while later, he made an appointment with me, and we met on February 15. Sam's actual words, I believe, help one to comprehend the extent to which he saw himself as helpless in the face of events.
beyond his control. I started the conversation by asking him why we
were meeting and then I listened:

Well, I just wanted to tell you why I've been moving pretty slowly with this
research. You see, the thing was, was, um ah, first of all my topic is really limited. I
couldn't really get enough, you know, so I had to like compare it and I had to switch
it around a little...not to mention that when I was doing that business thing, it made me
miss a lot of time in there...sometimes, like that time I just plain forgot my stuff, uh I
could not have gotten in there because we decided to do the research on Friday and it
was Wednesday when we decided and I was only here, no I was here for Wednesday, and
the next day I missed the whole day of school...

Teacher: You mean you hadn't gotten any resources
during the first week we spent in the library?

Oh, well, I was looking for stuff that was, that
was, I was too busy looking for stuff.

I then described to him what the librarian had told me about his
appointment with her to which he responded with the many reasons he
had to do the math. Then I confronted him with two disparate points I
was hearing from him:
Teacher: I’m hearing you say you haven’t had time to get everything done and yet I’m hearing that you chose to work only 15 minutes the day you had an appointment with the librarian.

I felt at that point, uh, I can go in there and make that up anytime, but that geometry was due right then. I had to get it done.

Teacher: Yes, and we make choices all the time. I’m aware that you made choices, and I don’t know if you know you made those choices.

I know I made the choice because I did it, and um, I can make up that time easy. I mean I already know how to use two of the machines. I just couldn’t find anything on it, so that kind of discouraged me so...

I saw no evidence that Sam did see he made choices. He just continued with his stream of reasons he could not do the work.

Sam, I believe, played a life position of Victim on the Drama Triangle, and his parents played the position of Rescuers (His dad had Rescued him when he wrote the letter requesting Sam be transferred rather than asking Sam to arrange a student-parent-teacher meeting). Based on his experiences, Sam’s expectation (and probably his parents’) was that the teacher also be a Rescuer. When I did not Rescue him, his
mother enlisted the librarian to do it. When the librarian's expectations were that Sam learn the computers and do the work himself, he became the victim of his math assignment. He did not complete his list of resources; I do not believe he learned to use the computers; and his subsequent behavior indicated he continued to view all of these events as out of his control.

The third role in the Drama Triangle is Persecutor, and I sometimes had difficulty in staying out of that position with Sam. On one occasion as he began a list of reasons he had been unable to complete an assignment, I snapped at him, "Don't give me excuses. I want results." I accomplished nothing from this outburst, except perhaps making him feel even more like a Victim.

What would have helped him would have been one-on-one time in which I had shown him a model for making a plan to do the work. In this way he would have begun to experience taking charge. I had followed such a procedure during the February 15 conference, as well as on several other occasions.

In the class discussions about Macbeth, Sam participated very little, and on March 19 as the class was discussing ways to vary their study of the play, Sam made the following statements:
People pick up on things in different ways. And for the people who pick up on things and they start shootin back and forth, I can't understand what's going on. One person is sayin' he's jealous and one person's saying he isn't jealous. I think there's too much going on at once.

Although Sam had not mentioned discomfort with class discussions since December 17, he was again presenting a similar dilemma. He heard more than one idea and he did not know which to believe.

In the quarter grading conference, Sam expressed feelings of being overwhelmed. He said he hated Shakespeare and understood none of Macbeth. He said we had too much work to do this quarter and he continued his list of reasons he was unable to complete everything. He concluded his grade was less than the 84 he had earned for the second quarter, and decided an 88 represented his achievement. I agreed with his evaluation.

During the first half of the year, I had thought of the possibility that Sam might have auditory processing problems, and then had dismissed the idea in light of his explanation that his confusion was caused from a belief that there had to be a "correct" theme to a story. He had shown
no further class discussion confusion until his March 19 comments. I consulted his mother to learn if he had experienced ear infections as a child. She said no, but that his second grade teacher had inquired about ear infections, and she believed the topic had been raised at another grade level, but she could not remember when. Based on their experience, neither his mother, nor Sam believed there were indicators of a hearing or a processing problem.

**The Teacher**

**Teacher as Persecutor on the Drama Triangle**

This quarter was the most difficult one for me to stay out of the Drama Triangle, and I was not completely successful in doing so. On one occasion, I resorted to making an unfavorable comparison of the study class to my other sophomore class, telling them the other class brought their materials with them each day they had planned research time, and that if the other class could "take good care of themselves," so could this class. Another time, I used sarcasm, saying something about people having "at least 15 minute attention spans by the age of 13."
I found it increasingly difficult for me to accept that these students were not taking the responsibility for their learning that I had expected by this time in the year. I knew a large part of my frustration was from my own anxiety that, because some students expected me to solve the problems, their parents might call my administrator with their dissatisfactions rather than call me. I did not need more negative feelings conveyed to the administrator, but I was very aware this situation presented a strong probability for such actions.

**Teacher Examining Expectations**

My expectations, based on previous experience, had been that by March the class would be taking more control of their learning. Although I had observed episodes of the class taking more control of their learning, I also had observed a continuation of lack of speaking up and continued blame of other students because they "weren't doing their work," and of me because I was not solving the problems.

In examining my expectations, I saw that my benchmark for "more control" had been derived from other classes in other years. The students in this study were taking more control than they had
previously done. I realized I had to base my expectations on this group of people—where they had started and how far they had come.

**Continued Need for One-On-One Time**

Bobby Ann and I met as she had requested. She expressed great frustration because the class "is not getting anything done." She explained that "It just seems like all year we haven't accomplished a thing." I asked her if she would bring her thoughts up in class, and she said no, "They'll probably be angry at me, or they'll just ignore it." I asked her if she thought anyone else felt the same way, and she said she didn't know. She expressed anger at particular students "who don't work in other classes either, and I'm sick of it because it hurts me, not just them."

Each time I directed the emphasis back to what she could do about the situation, she expressed anxiety about taking any action herself. I asked her to talk to other individuals in the class and learn if anyone else felt as she did. She was reluctant to do that.

Kara and I met, but her mother was unable to attend. After expressing her frustration about the students who were not doing their
work, she suggested "...we put the pressure on those who aren't doing the work." Together we brainstormed ways of putting on pressure, and when I asked her to bring up one of them in class, she was reluctant. I suggested she talk with others in the class and get their thoughts on the subject, and that perhaps a group could bring up an idea together. She said she could do that.

In addition to individual concerns with class discussions, the research project was presenting problems to some students, and I wanted to meet with them. Three students had not accomplished any of the research steps yet: James, Charles, and Ted. In addition, Amy and Sam had said they had been unable to find anything on their topics. Many of those who were experiencing no problems wanted to meet with me to discuss their progress.

Assessing Student Work

As I listened to the student's talk and ask questions during the class discussions, I learned a great deal about their understandings and their misunderstandings. I learned from one student's question that no one in the class knew who a particular character was, that the purpose of the Porter scene was remembered by only a few students, that there
was confusion about certain scenes, that the sarcasm in a particular conversation had not been recognized by anyone in the class, and to my delighted surprise, that one student recognized a pattern to Shakespeare's use of rhyme in the play. Each of these learnings on my part enabled me to direct the learning experience so that the students achieved deeper comprehension. The more comfortable the students became in talking and questioning together, the greater became my ability to assess their progress and thereby become a more effective teacher.

**Salient Problems**

By the third quarter, the novelty, as well as much of the shyness, felt in class discussion had gone, and the students were using many of the target communication skills on a regular basis. The students had even reached a level of comfort in admitting when they had not done their work. They were just beginning to learn how to make alternative plans when the original ones were not working.
This process created great frustration for several, frustration which when expressed revealed an exaggerated picture of the situation's problems. In one instance the frustration and exaggeration was taken home on a regular basis, and from this point, the parent discussed the situation, as presented by her daughter, with the Parent Advisory Board. No one asked me any questions, and I learned much of the details only after the school year had ended.

Thus two salient problems are presented here. The first is the frustration and difficulty students encounter when they have to confront their peers in team work. The second is the public perception of what is happening in the classroom. The following is a description of an illustrative episode.

On March 9, the day after the fiasco class in which only nine people had done the reading they had assigned to themselves, I noticed the same few people were doing all the talking. I voiced my observation and asked if this were acceptable to the class. Faith responded that she was tired of discussing the play. I asked if someone had an alternative idea of how to carry out the study of the play. Ben said he wanted the class discussions because he learned many things he couldn't pick up on his own. The problem solving continued and the
class decided to break into pairs to make their list and then to come together in the large group.

I saw that Kara had her hands over her face, and I had the strong impression she was feeling high frustration. I asked the class if everyone agreed with the decision to break into pairs. I emphasized this was their class, and all members had the responsibility to help the class by speaking up for what they needed in order to learn. Kara spoke angrily:

I'm frustrated with the fact we never get anything done. I'm serious that we never do anything but sit. If people did their work and we had a discussion we wouldn't be talking about Act III for six weeks.

Faith responded that she too got frustrated sometimes. I noticed Samantha and Johanna were nodding. I added that I too got frustrated.

Kara repeated how disgusting it was that we had spent six weeks to do the "beginning of Macbeth."

Rita asked me if they should now get into their pairs. I suggested she ask the class if that were agreeable to everyone. She did and the response was angry agreement with such comments as "Just do it," and "Let's get it over with."

256
Bobby Ann had said nothing even though the previous day she had been so angry she had conferenced with me to vent her feelings. Later I asked her how she felt about today's class, and she said she had not wanted to work in pairs, but had wanted to work in the large group. I commented that I had not heard her say so, and she said she had been unable to get into the conversation. She explained she had moved from frustration to boredom. When I told her boredom was anger, she replied with a laugh, "then I'm really angry I guess."

Despite the fact that they had spent a little over one-half of the school year in creating their own rules, in making group decisions, in doing no-lose problem solving, and in doing shared evaluations of their work, they continued to be most reluctant to confront one another with their concerns. Rita and Kara were the only students who ever confronted the others concerning lack of student work.

In the traditional teaching format, the responsibility for solving such a problem belongs to the teacher, and that is the prevalent expectation of both students and parents. It proved very difficult to guide the students through this type of problem solving process, and they continued throughout the year to believe that problem solving was "wasting time."
I had given little attention to Kara's exaggeration of the amount of
time we had spent on the play, "six weeks to do the beginning," nor to
her saying, "we never get anything done." Because she and I had
continued to conference on a regular basis, I had the impression she
was, with my support, fairly comfortable handling her classroom
frustrations. Not until school ended, and Kara, her mother, and I met
did I realize the extent to which her perceptions had been carried
home, had become the perceptions of her mother, and had become deep
dissatisfactions with "the English program." Even though the meeting
did not occur until after the fourth quarter, I include it at this point
because of its connection to the present discussion.

The three of us met because Kara and I had disagreed as to her
fourth quarter grade as she had written it out. I wanted a conference
to discuss all that happened during the quarter, and she requested her
mother be present. In the course of our discussion, I said I had been
very disappointed when she had skipped class during a group's
presentation, especially because her feedback had always been so
helpful. Her response was that she had not minded that only seven
students were in class the day her group had presented (my log shows
15 students present), and that, "students came in and out of class all
the time and didn't get noticed," (students had to show an office admission slip to return to class).

In addition to this perception which she had created for her mother, was the perception that students regularly came to class without having done their homework and this held her back. Her mother explained her own feelings about her perception of the class:

Kara would have her reading done and be prepared for discussion but then you have to go back and do the reading because however many kids didn't do the reading. That is very frustrating, because as a parent, to hear that, that's kind of wasting time. My kid did the work, so if somebody else didn't do the work, I don't know why you have to revert back... that's part of my frustration as well with her being in a class where her abilities are much greater than somebody else's or her understanding or her ability to pick up much quicker than others, so that's really been a thorn in my side all year long...It's not fair., I'm sure there are others who aren't bold enough to speak up to their classmates. If you didn't do the assignment, you take a zero for the day. We have to keep going, and to me I would see that as part of we're not accomplishing much because of it, because you're losing valuable class time.

I responded by saying there was another way of looking at what was happening in the classroom. I explained a little of what I had said
in our initial interview about the team concept and student problem solving. Her response to me was, "I don't know if it's that way in college. If you don't have it done, you're just out of luck."

I agreed that this teaching format did create a very different kind of classroom and explained that the process included learning the material and also learning how to work with others in a responsible way. I agreed that in the traditional approach the teacher made the decisions and frequently gave a zero to those not prepared for the day. I contrasted that format with the present format in which the teacher guided the students through the process of decision making and learning how to solve team problems. I concluded:

I don't think Kara loses out when she's done the work and some others haven't. She's gaining from having done the work, and she's gaining from a valuable group experience which affords her guided practice of team skills.

Her mother's response was to tell me, "That's not her personality type."

And she went on with deep commitment:

When you've done something and you have to sit there and wait for someone else to do it to get caught up with you, the frustration is not something that needs to be brought into the classroom.
and that's why, I know even in the Parent Advisory Programs, we discussed that the English program needs to be evaluated so these situations don't occur.

Kara's mother's expectations that the teacher take over and solve this problem by making sure those who have done the work reap the benefits and those who have not done the work be given a zero for the day, are, I believe, the expectations of the majority. Since the teaching format of this study is based on very different expectations, the public perception, as this case illustrates, can very easily become a negative one.

Student Responsibility for Learning

While all the students recognized they were using more support for their points in their paragraphs, not everyone saw this action as growth in their writing. When I asked Faith if she knew more about how to accomplish quality writing, she responded, "I know what you want. I'm not sure that's what another teacher would want." Because one of the student issues had been that my expectations were
different from those of other teachers, I still did not know to what extent, if any, this viewpoint had changed.

Individually, I observed a tendency on the part of three students to try and talk me into a grade they wanted. This was most evident with Amy, as described within the case study description, but also with Morry and Ted. Near the end of the quarter, both Morry and Ted had asked to make up vocabulary tests on which they had done below 70%. The class agreement was that all editing and retakes on tests would be accomplished by two weeks prior to the close of the quarter. Both of them blamed me for their inability to accomplish their work before the deadline, saying I had been too busy to give them the test. I reminded them of their plan to ask their study hall teacher to administer the test, and they remembered, with disappointment, that we had made such an agreement.

Morry, in writing his self assessment, mentioned all his successes and ignored his undone work completely. When we conferenced, I told him of his undone pieces and unedited ones. He continued to downplay them. "Ya, that's true, but look at how good I did on these other ones." Then he told me all the reasons he should be able to write them right
then. When I reminded him again of the two week agreement, he responded, "Oh Ya," as if he had forgotten.

Many students evaluated their work as less successful this quarter, and other than Amy, gave no excuses and blamed no outside forces. Ruth evaluated her work as a "0" saying she had made decisions because she had "to establish priorities." She had been making a personal decision which had created major stress, and she explained her decision making had taken precedence over school work during this time period. Charles had done almost no work and from the opening of our conference, took full responsibility for his decisions. He said he had failed two other subjects as well, and he talked about his disappointment at no longer being eligible to play baseball. He gave no excuses and blamed no outside forces. Kara had not turned in all the preliminary research steps, but had stayed in close contact with me as to her progress and her plans. In our grading conference, she decided her work was best represented by a "B-" rather than the "B+" she had evaluated her work the previous two quarters. Mark readily evaluated his work as 12 points lower than during the second quarter, citing both his incomplete and late work.
One of the definitions of responsible behavior as stated in Chapter II is the student "engages in goal setting." Garth had devoted a great amount of time to goal setting and revising as described within the case study section. Ted, although he did none of the research steps during the first four weeks of the quarter, did meet with me at my urging, and he was successful in setting research goals for himself and in carrying out what was required to achieve them.

In examining the students' work, I found my records showed more students had turned in work and turned it in on time than in the previous two quarters. I also noted much less evidence of need for a grade on individual assignments, but the reason may have been that the research work was preliminary work, and at this stage the students' goal was learning how to do the research. The finished product would be done in the last quarter.

In class discussions, I observed an increase in responsibility for learning. In addition to the two students who confronted the class with lack of responsibility, the students had twice voluntarily given themselves a reading assignment. The second time occurred on March 18 when I had suggested no weekend homework. Jon spoke up to disagree with my no homework suggestion. He suggested the class
read the last 15 pages of the play so that on Monday, pairs could work to make lists of the important events and on Tuesday, the whole class could share together. Everyone agreed.

Two days previous to this episode, on March 16, I had been absent. I left the substitute directions to listen and observe while the class discussed the play. She left me the information that all participated except James, Jon, and Amy. She ended her note,

Altogether I would say this was a successful discussion. A good number of questions were raised and answers, explanations, etc. were tendered...I only added about 3 comments.

The fact that the students carried on a serious pursuit of their planned study despite their teacher's absence was a strong example of students' taking responsibility for their learning.

In the grading conferences I noted a student action I had not, up to this time, experienced with this class. Many students spontaneously gave me feedback concerning which activities had been positive and helpful learning experiences for them and which ones had not. Several commented on an article I had asked them to examine in relation to its
paragraph structure, and gave me helpful information about what to change for the future. In relation to the library work, they told me a number of ways the library computers were helpful and also gave suggestions of ways I can change the plan for next year. Every student commented on the research step time schedule (which I had created and asked for their agreement), and everyone except Jon (who had opted to change his topic after the first week), commented that the time allowance for each step was comfortable. Almost everyone mentioned the benefits of having studied Macbeth in groups rather than alone. I had no sense that any of this feedback was given in the form of excuses or blame, but rather as information. I found the information very helpful to my planning for future classes.

The Final Third Quarter Grades

All the students and I came to agreement on a grade to represent their third quarter work, and these grades are listed in Appendix J. Nine students came to the conclusion their grade was lower than that of the previous quarter.
The study of the class in its entirety (as proposed in Chapter II) ended with the close of the third quarter. During the fourth quarter, the students continued the format of the first three quarters as they completed their study of literature and writing techniques, finished their research papers, and studied grammar and vocabulary.

A few observations about class attitude toward the contract are in order at this point. I saw the class contract as a living changing document that would be altered as the students and my needs changed. The students, I came to realize, saw the contract as a static document. They believed that revising and changing was "wasting time."

Both in February and at the opening of the fourth quarter, I had experienced difficulties with student lateness on editing of their work, and brought the issue up each time. I asked to hold a contract discussion, explaining I wanted to establish clarity on our definition of punctuality. In February, several students expressed impatience with taking class time for contract work. The first day of the fourth quarter, several were angry at discussing the contract so late in the year. Mark ridiculed my request to clarify a contract point. Speaking to no one
person in particular he said, "That's right, if you don't like something, just change it." Jon was emphatic in his opposition, "The rules should be made the first week and then everyone stick with them, not keep changing and wasting time." Several echoed his thoughts.

During the April class, the students spent 12 minutes on a contract clarification and update. I had the impression they just wanted to get it done and felt no investment in it. My perception was supported when several students told me they were "sick and tired of arguing." During the end of the year conferences, several suggested that in the future, the contract be completed the first week of school and not changed all year.

From the beginning, students expressed a need for rules, and yet displayed great reservation in making them. This was strongly evidenced in October when they decided not to call their class agreement a contract "because a contract is too binding." Instead they initially named it a pre-contract and then finally agreed to call it "Guidelines." Despite this fact, they wanted definite rules, and they continued to express frustration with changes in the rules once they made them.
Because so much of the teaching format is unfamiliar, I believe greater initial feelings of structure can be achieved if the teacher gives the students a list of rules and regulations for the class and tells the students any rule is negotiable if and when someone has a problem with it. Although I have in previous years, handed out the rules, for this study I chose to leave all decisions concerning the running of the class in the students' hands. Many gave me the feedback that they had been given too much responsibility too soon. Based on this feedback and their demonstrated insecurity and frustration with the contract, I will, in future years, resume my previous practice.

The Closing of the Case Study Students

James

Although I believed James and I had ended the third quarter on a positive note, I did not observe behavior which would indicate he had taken responsibility for his learning. During the fourth quarter, he turned in no work. He came to class most of the time; he participated in work related to his small group objective but not in work related to
his own individual objective; he did not participate in the class
discussions; and he did not take the final exams.

I observed that he displayed less volatility. While on the surface,
such a behavior change seems a positive one, I wondered if he were in
a depression. I did not learn of his further experiences with the
Student Assistance Team.

Amy

Amy, her mother, and I met on April 14. Amy showed us what she
had accomplished on her research project, and we discussed her need
to have transportation after school when she stayed at the library. Her
mother assured her if she knew ahead of time, she would make the
arrangements. We discussed her grade and her mother expressed deep
concern that Amy maintain honor grades.

Amy became involved in her research topic, and she and I met two
additional times to discuss her research, as well as on May 25 to do a
fourth quarter progress conference. She had written her progress
report in which she discussed the quantity, and punctuality of her work.
Her one comment on quality was to say her "spelling tests...absolutely
wonderful."
I directed our conference discussion to the topic of quality in her work by asking her how she had done on a paragraph I had returned with my feedback. As she had done all year, she placed the evaluation on the teacher saying, "You said it was wonderful."

I questioned her, "Did I say it was wonderful?" to which she said I had. I asked her to read my comments, and she read the following:

"Definitely an unfolding paragraph. Everything looks right."

I said I did not think that was what I had written, and she looked again, saying she could not read my writing. I read it to her:

"Definitely an unfolding paragraph. Everything unfolds right to the conclusion." It's impossible to avoid the impression she had switched words in order to make me the evaluator.

Amy was not only uncomfortable in stating her own evaluation of her work, she was unable to do so even after we had worked together for the entire year. Here was one of the most capable and creative thinkers in the school, and she could not allow herself to recognize, at least aloud, her own beautiful abilities.

Although she refused to state the quality of her own work and turned my statements into evaluation, she did evidence the self-confidence to disagree with my view of *The Glass Menagerie*, the play.
she had chosen for her outside of class reading assignment. I had told her earlier that I did not like the play, and when she finished it, she brought up my viewpoint, "I don't know what you didn't like about it. I loved it."

During our closing conference, I told her my observation that she put the judgment of her work outside herself, and requested that she give her own evaluation of her work. She said she didn't want to brag, and we discussed what bragging is and how one recognizes one's strengths in a job interview situation.

Our conference continued with Amy examining each of the fourth quarter outcomes and how she had accomplished them. In the outcomes for oral communication, she said, I don't know if I improved any...people seem to dominate the classroom, I mean, they're regulars, and I hate to interrupt them." We talked about ways she could join a conversation, and she said, "I could speak right from the beginning so I'd be a regular."

She brought up that each group she had been in all year had been uncooperative. I asked what she saw that she could do when this happened in the future, and she responded, "I suppose I could take control...you do this and you do that." I brought up the difference
between "you statements " and "I statements, and she mimicked an I statement in a sing song fashion. My conclusion was that she was still uncomfortable using the communication skills.

When she completed the comparison of all the outcomes to her work, the results were obvious to me. She had done high quality work. She looked to me and asked if she had done well this quarter. I asked her why she was asking, and she replied,

Well, I was thinking I got, like a high "A" but then I thought, 'no, no, let's keep it realistic,' but I think I did much better than last quarter.

Teacher: Well, you've said you have accomplished all the outcomes, so now we look at quality and you have said (I repeated the successes and areas needing work that we had listed together).

I feel quite happy with myself. Should I try and come up with a grade now?

I indicated yes, and she continued, speaking very slowly:

I don't know. I think, I think, it would be a or somewhere near that, maybe like a 94 or 95.

When I agreed with her conclusion, she thanked me as if the evaluation had been a gift or a compliment from me.
I wanted to learn some of Amy's thoughts concerning her experience with the teaching format. Her responses to my questions must, I believe, be accepted with a cautionary reminder that Amy evidenced a behavior pattern which, with the exception of third quarter, indicated a desire to please others.

My first question was to ask her if she would choose to take another class in which her papers were ungraded. Her immediate reply was a definite yes, and her reasons were interesting:

Because I've enjoyed this class. I think it's less stressful...Grades sort of accuse you. If you get a bad grade, it's like you have problems in this area, but like your comments were really really constructive because it's like all right: this part isn't so good, but over here this is a good point. And so you get to see how you are, not just a grade. Grades are really scary.

Grades were scary to Amy, and I see her fear as a direct result of her mother's emphasis on them. By making grades the most important outcome, her mother had inadvertently created a roadblock to Amy's learning. The previous year Amy had not applied for acceptance to the honors English class, a class which she could easily have accomplished
with high success. When I had asked her why she wasn't in the honors class, she had answered, "Are you kidding, that's all I need with my mothers' insistence on 'A's." Near the end of this year when I offered to recommend her for advanced junior composition, she had just stared at me, unsmiling, and said nothing. I made no recommendation.

Another question I asked concerned the conferences. She related two benefits from them, neither of which had to do with learning English:

Other than the tape recorder, I like them. I think I've sort of made friends with you. I don't ever develop any kind of relationship with teachers.

We get to explain ourselves, you know, I mean, we can tell you if we don't understand something. This was the best part of the whole year.

Amy represents a type of student often overlooked in the classroom; the capable, highly skilled, and seemingly self-sufficient student.
Sam

Sam demonstrated growth in ability to take responsibility for his learning, and growth in his writing skills. He did, for the most part, continue to view control of his actions as taking place outside of himself—forces over which he believed he had no power.

In his writing he started to experience success and he showed an interest in working on it. As he started to write the paragraphs for his research paper, we met often, and usually he requested the conference. Such behavior was new for him, and I believe, because he recognized his writing improvements, he felt unthreatened in the writing area. He expressed delight at observing that he was indeed creating paragraphs in which he stayed on one point and supported it.

He continued to demonstrate difficulties with vocabulary and grammar throughout the last quarter. On the grammar final exam, which all sophomores took the first week of June, he evidenced less than 70% accuracy.

By the middle of the fourth quarter, Sam showed progress in recognizing his accomplishments and his needs as he demonstrates in his progress report written on May 15—a report which, when compared to his first quarter progress report in which he related what the course
was about rather than what he was doing, reveals how very far Sam
had grown in his understanding of self assessment:

So far into this 4th quarter my writing
paragraph skills have improved quite a bit.
I feel more comfortable with them now.
Also I am getting better understanding of
Shakespeare and his style and poetry. I see
a need for work (on) my vocabulary section
because I am not greatly prepared in the area.
I must get myself a more complete under¬
standing of the prefixes. Also in the poetry
section I'm ok, but I don't have full knowledge
of sonnets. I'm doing ok this quarter, but I
would like to be doing better than this. It is
not my full potential.

The growth over the year is certainly evident in his letter, and his
ability to take responsibility for his learning peaked and valleyed for
the rest of the fourth quarter.

In our conferences, I found Sam experienced intense anxiety when
he had to examine areas in which he was having difficulties. It was
during this anxiety that he employed a variety of ways to avoid dealing
with the real issue: becoming confused, listing things that had
prevented him, changing the subject, and, as a last resort, down¬
playing his actions by insisting he could have done it, but had not put
any time into it. Trying to lead him to take action was most difficult (as had been evidenced during the third quarter when he began his research work), and continued to be time-intensive.

One of the actions I continually took with Sam was to describe what I saw him doing which blocked him from learning, and then engage him in making a plan to create new and effective behaviors. In one of our conferences, I mentioned the incorrect format he had used for the parenthetical documentation and bibliography of his rough draft. As was his ineffective behavior pattern, he immediately explained why the format had been wrong rather than using a behavior which would lead to successful use the next time. I described my observations:

Teacher: As we discussed before, Sam, what I see you do when you get confused is shut down. Do you want to do that?

Not really.

Teacher: What can you do instead?

Well, I could look at it in more depth.

Teacher: What would you do to actually look at it in depth?

278
In the beginning, Sam really did not know what specific actions he could do. Each time I would again lead him from my observation and through an effective behavior he could use. On this particular occasion, we made a list of actions he could take the next time he felt confused when reading.

Sam continued his pattern of avoidance rather than of action. In addition to making a plan of action, I wanted to help Sam recognize that no matter what his reasons for inaction, the end results were real and often hurt him. During our last conference for the quarter grade, we examined his final draft on which the format was still incorrect. His immediate response was to begin listing the things that had prevented him from having a correct format:

Ya, well, I did the first one and then I lost it. I think the first one was correct, but the second one I had to whiz through it because I discovered the day I got to school...

Teacher: Yes, that must have been very frustrating. The sad part is the end result was still an incorrect format, and you're having to live with the results of that. No matter what your reason, Sam, those results still happened, and they hurt you.
He did not respond, and I had no indication my words meant anything to him. He had not developed his ineffective behaviors quickly, and certainly, one year was not time enough for him to do more than begin to develop new and effective behaviors.

Sam experienced such pain in examining his mistakes and confronting his weaker learning areas that he became paralyzed in some instances. It was at these times, he employed his smokescreens. Throughout the last conference, whenever we touched on an area in which he had demonstrated difficulty, he used a smokescreen. When I mentioned his vocabulary tests indicated a possible problem, he responded it was no problem, that he just needed to spend more time on it (could have done it, so no problem). He then launched into a story of his success in third grade spelling and within one breath and two sentences was telling me how much he had liked his third grade teacher (change the subject).

I brought the discussion back to our evaluation by asking him to talk about a successful area—his writing. He recognized his successes and mentioned particularly his paragraph writing, saying that at the beginning of the year, he just wrote. He emphasized he had learned it and demonstrated it.
Next, I brought up the grammar final exam which I had returned two days previous asking him what the test had revealed about his strengths and weaknesses in grammar (I had listed these for the students on their test sheets). He did not remember what his list stated, did not have it with him, and immediately started talking about his confusion, ending by saying he could have done better:

I really, I just didn't, I just got confused there. I know I could do better on that thing... It's just that I didn't really, I didn't put much time or thought into it.

At one point, I described my observation of his avoidance behavior, but my action was premature and he was not ready to hear it:

Teacher: I'm hearing a pattern here, Sam. I'm hearing you say over and over that you could have put more time into things. I think this tells you something (He interrupted me).

Ya probably, but the thing is I was concentrating so hard on the other things you wanted, you know...
And then he launched into a talk about geometry. I brought the subject back to our topic:

Yes, this work is very hard to keep up with, but the fact is, Sam, if you want to do well, you need a plan to help you reach success.

He started talking about his success on the junior high exit grammar test, "I was one of only 5 who passed it...."

Sam's behavior was his attempt to save face and his elaborate verbal camouflages indicated an intelligent person who had developed ways to hide what he interpreted as shortcomings, behind all his verbal camouflages. My conclusion is that Sam did not know how to take action, and through our one-on-one conferencing, he began to learn some effective actions.

Sam's confusion when faced with choices was the central factor in his reaction to the teaching format. Whenever he had been in a situation in which he was free to make choices and think for himself, he had become uncomfortable and then developed confusion, accompanied by frustration, and then anger that an outside control was not present. When our last conference was ended and he had decided on his grade, I
asked him to talk about his reaction to the year, and he told me it had been more demanding than any other English class he had taken.

I asked him to describe what he likes in a class, and his response revealed a student who viewed learning as completely extrinsically motivated. He listed the following things:

- written homework every night so I can count on it.
- teacher collecting it and giving a test grade for the average of every four homeworks
- doing things on a scheduled basis...knowing every Monday will be a set thing and every Friday...
- having a definite time for things...no grace days to confuse you
- cover one thing at a time because that’s when I really start to lose interest in things

When I asked him what had been the hardest part of the year, he said there had been too many "expectations to deal with," and explained this was true of all his subjects, mentioning biology where the teacher gave notes on a lab one day, and the next day gave notes
on a different lab. He brought up Latin which he said he did not like, "because there's no distinct rules with that."

Sam represents a very interesting and important situation in relation to this teaching format. In December when his father wrote the letter to request Sam be changed to a more "structured English class," I had discussed Sam with his guidance counselor who had suggested that perhaps Sam was "not ready" for this type of format. Because such a consideration arose both within this study as well as in my previous use of the format, I include within Chapter IX a complete discussion of the outcomes from this study which address the concept of student readiness.

Garth

At the close of the third quarter, I had observed Garth making progress with his need to organize his things. Although not consistent in his punctuality, he was greatly improved in his ability to complete his tasks and remember to turn them in on time. My concerns about Garth continued in two major issues: (1) his not turning in work that he saw as less than perfect, and (2) his limited recognition of his strengths and weaknesses. Because in his third quarter evaluation, he
had talked about what he had done and not done, I was unclear as to how he evaluated the quality of his work.

His fourth quarter progress report did not reveal any different concepts. He concluded he had done well on grammar and vocabulary because his test scores were high. In writing and research, he said, "I have done well." He did not explain the specifics which led him to this conclusion. He wrote "I would rate my performance this quarter (so far) at about an 88."

He had overlooked an assignment he had not turned in, and I asked him about it. His need for perfection was evident again, "I did it and I hated it," he explained. We discussed this episode as an example of the way in which needing the paper to be perfect held him back, and we listed a few ideas of alternative actions. He decided to hand in a rough draft and get feedback before trying to complete the final draft.

In our year's end conference, Garth took the lead much as he had done during the mid-third quarter conference, but this time he discussed his specific strengths and weaknesses as he assessed them. Using the fourth quarter outcomes sheet which stated what he was to have demonstrated, he evaluated his work:
One of my problems this quarter was that on the Macbeth paper, I didn't prove what I said, but on the research I thought I did support everything I said, so I guess I would say I've shown improvement in that area." My big mar on my record is not doing the critical essay, and I didn't do the unfolding paragraph so I haven't demonstrated that I can do those kinds of writing. I engage in group work, but I'm not good in class discussions--I participate, but not a lot. In grammar, I didn't do very well with pronoun-antecedents.

He concluded, "Other than the critical essay and unfolding paragraph, "I've had a strong fourth quarter."

In February, he had stated he believed effort to be the more important between quality and effort, and yet, at the end of the year, he had based his evaluation on both, mentioning specific aspects which create quality.

Garth was concerned about his perfectionism, and talked about how it did hold him back everywhere in his life. He mentioned his art, "I draw a line on a piece of paper and then just stare at it for an hour."

My own observation has been that the most common reason a student fails to turn in assignments is perfectionism. This certainly was the block in Garth's case. Helping a student overcome it may be impossible, but I found that helping Garth to recognize it, and then to
examine a list of alternative behaviors gave him a starting place from which he could work. Despite our list of alternative actions, and his making a decision as to which action he would pursue, he did not always follow through with his decision. During the fourth quarter, he did not ever turn in the unfolding paragraph which he had written and "hated." He had, though, worked with me several times to obtain help with areas he had not liked in his research paper.

During the year, Garth had not made any comments about the class, and after he had decided what he would give himself for a grade, I asked him to "give me feedback about the class; things that were helpful, things you would change." I include his entire response:

It's certainly unlike any other English class I've ever been in. At first I was frustrated with it. I found out it was harder than anything else I've ever had. Now that I look back, I've probably learned more in this English class than I've learned in any other English class because you're really forced to learn. You have to do something (emphasis on "something"). I mean when you get a paper back, instead of, say, getting an A, you know what you've done right and what you've done wrong and that way, the next paper you know what to do again... And in reading, the way we disect it in class. That's very helpful. When you look at the hidden meanings in something, it makes everything so much more clear. When we read books
before in English, we just read it and talked about what happened and then we had a quiz on it and read the next chapter. In this class, we just tie everything together. I like reading. When you look at the way someone writes a book, you can use that in your own writing. That's very important...I think instead of this being the class that's different, it should be the model for what classes should be. It's more work, but it's worth it. I think you learn more in this type of class.

Another interesting factor about Garth is his contrast to Sam in what he likes in a class. Although both students were experiencing a block from their use of ineffective behavior, and both benefitted from one-on-one conferencing, and both demonstrated growth in their use of more effective behavior, they experienced the teaching format in very different ways.
CHAPTER IX

DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

Structure of the Chapter

The questions used to guide this study address the development of student responsibility for learning, inherent problems in the use of the teaching strategy, and response of the students and teacher over the course of the study. Chapters IV through VIII described the events that occurred in relation to each of these three areas and presented an analysis of the salient problems.

Chapter IX is a presentation of conclusions reached in response to question I and a presentation of issues in response to question II. These sections are followed by a brief section which includes implications for teacher education and staff development. In closing, I make a few comments concerning the research itself.
Student Responsibility for Learning

The first research question asks if students demonstrate increasing responsibility for their own learning process when the teacher employs the format of the present study. The second questions asks how the students respond to the format over the course of the study.

Responsibility was defined within Chapter I as the following:

Behavior involving (a) critically analyzing a situation and (b) taking consequent action which is in the best interest of self and others ...evidenced by the following student behaviors:

1. attends class and is on time
2. brings class materials to class
3. completes assignments and turns them in on time
4. regularly maintains the data base materials by storing all work in personal folder
5. seeks out teacher or peer to clarify assignments or to obtain them when appropriate

6. responds to and interacts with the teacher in relation to the teacher's written comments on assignments

7. reworks assignments in relation to teacher feedback or self critical analysis

8. engages in comparison of personal progress to the course objectives at least twice each quarter

9. recognizes when help is needed and, without teacher intervention, seeks out teacher, peer, parent or appropriate other to provide this assistance

10. demonstrates sharing of responsibility within classroom group projects

11. edits written work as a result of reflection and self-critical analysis of this work

12. demonstrates growing awareness of successful strategies for achieving the course outcomes

13. avoids blaming people or events for non-accomplishment of course objectives

14. recognizes and freely expresses personal successes in meeting course objectives

15. recognizes and freely expresses instances of failure to achieve course objectives
16. engages in personal goal setting as part of the ongoing effort to achieve course objectives

17. revises personal goals as appropriate in the effort to achieve course objectives

18. asks to engage in additional work in order to meet personal goals or course objectives

19. demonstrates willingness to take risk through engaging in personal creative learning activities

20. evidences a growth in responsibility for personal learning by demonstrating an increasing use throughout the school year, of these behaviors listed as #1 through #19.

Based on the data presented in Chapters V through VIII, I found that most students evidenced growth in responsibility by demonstrating an increasing use of, at least, several behaviors that are specified in the responsibility criteria, listed in numbers 1 through 20. It is obvious from the reported data that student response was not a steady straightforward path, but rather a step forward often followed by two steps backward as shown perhaps most clearly through the struggles of Sam and Garth. (See Appendix K for the case study students' recorded performance with each criteria.) Both students were taking a great
deal more responsibility for their learning by the end of the year, however they were not yet completely able to accomplish the tasks without guidance and support.

I would like to call attention to criterion #19 because I did not observe any students demonstrating "willingness to take risk through engaging in personal creative learning activities." It may have been that the task of engaging in the study itself created all the anxiety students could tolerate. Certainly the recorded student response would support such a conclusion.

Of particular import in relation to the task of developing responsibility is what the present study indicates concerning the reasons students do not assume responsibility in a particular area and what the study reveals about the process by which students learn to develop responsibility. It is evident that when students encountered difficulties in carrying out their responsibilities, various personal blocks were deterring them; blocks which in some instances were not within the student's awareness, and in all instances, blocks which, to overcome, required skills the students did not have.

The case study students most clearly reveal examples of student difficulty in overcoming blocks to their taking responsibility. Garth's
need for perfection and difficulties with organizational skills, Sam's use of smokescreens and his severe difficulties with organizational skills, Amy's personal issues, James' personal difficulties—all blocks for which they did not have the skills they needed to work through the situations.

As for other students who, at various times, did not engage in behavior consistent with the criteria for responsible behavior, different blocks were present. In both Ruth's and Ben's situations—when Ruth did not turn in an assignment, or when Ben did not edit his work, each had made a conscious decision to spend additional energy in other areas. As for Beth, she was in an almost constant state of confusion, a situation, I later learned, she had experienced during the previous year as well. She did not yet have the skills for dealing with her confusion. Charles evidenced a pattern of mentally withdrawing from situations in which he felt confused, and of avoiding unpleasantness. He too, did not yet have the skills to overcome his ineffective behavior patterns. Jon frequently denied his assignments needed to be edited. Bobby Ann and Kara both felt frequent anger toward the class, and although their propensity to blame the others and their reluctance to confront their
peers was not in their own best interest, it was understandable in light of the fact that each lacked the skills and experience to deal successfully with the situation.

In each situation in which the student began to learn the skills needed to deal with the block, the student increased in his or her ability to be responsible for learning. Garth and Sam both made strong gains in their ability to organize their time and their writing. Charles and Jon, who had initially included almost no support for their writing topics, improved in their ability to do so and thereby, although not overcoming their blocks, did bypass them in that particular area. As Kara learned the skills needed, she confronted the class with her frustrations and consequently started to create positive change.

For a few, it was impossible to detect change in the desired direction. Bobby Ann and I discussed the skills she could use to confront the class, but she did not use them this year in this situation. James and I had many discussions, but I did not observe him taking responsibility for his learning. Of course, in the absence of schoolwide data sources and a follow-up study, it presently is impossible to know
the degree to which the changes observed in the majority of students either generalized to situations outside sophomore English or persisted over time.

**Student Response to the Format**

**Students Lack of Confidence in Themselves as Learners**

Chapters U and VI describe a class of students who, during the first quarter of the school year, were unable to identify their strengths and weaknesses in their writing, believed effort (defined as time spent and quantity of work) to be the basis of earning a grade; had debilitating difficulties in carrying out assignments without the teacher's constant reassurance of how to do the work; did not trust their own thinking, research, and decisions as important enough to be the substance of notetaking; insisted that the teacher tell them the right answers so they would "get a lot more accomplished" and would not "waste so much time;" could interpret the teacher's feedback only in terms of the teacher "liking" or "disliking" their work; and in their initial efforts at problem solving, were able only to list ways for me to solve the
problems for them. By this study's definition of responsibility—critically analyzing a situation and taking action which is in the best interest of self and others—these students were unable to take responsibility for their own learning either because they did not know how to do so because they had never been permitted to do so, or because they never had been encouraged or rewarded for doing so. The data and my experience in this study strongly suggest the first interpretation for most students.

Beneath all the frustration and anger, the blaming, the insistence on my taking over, was fear; fear that if they did not know what I thought was important enough to write in their notebooks and what I believed were the right answers, they would be lost. Without knowledge of the teacher's expectations they would not get the grade they "deserved " or "needed," and they would not know the information "to get a good SAT score," or "to have something useful." Their insecurity with themselves as learners was clearly evidenced by their great anxiety and constant need to know my expectations: "Just what do you want?" and "I don't know. What do you think?"

Because finding the right answers was the objective, the students did not view learning as a process. Many could see no purpose to the
discussion and thought talking about ideas to be, as Becky phrased it, "wasting a lot of time," or as Sam described it to his guidance counselor, "a philosophy class, not an English class."

The fact that students can go to school for nine years and when put into a situation which requires them to process information, exhibit debilitating confusion, is an indictment of their past educational experiences. When the students do not trust their own thinking and believe the teacher's job is to provide the right answers, when the students see discussion of ideas as "wasting time," when students understand effort to be the foundation of the grade they receive--when students do not actively engage in the learning process with a teacher who serves as an experienced and knowledgeable guide, they can not develop enough confidence in their learning ability to dare to take responsibility.

Students Preoccupation With Grades

Despite the nongrading of individual work, it is evident from the students' expressed conclusions in their initial self assessments, progress reports, contract making, and conferences, that they saw the primary objective of the course to be a grade. This was demonstrated
most poignantly with Amy (and her mother), and to lesser degrees with other students. The outcome of such a viewpoint is that learning becomes, at best, a secondary objective of the course. Initially, the primary task is to figure out what the teacher wants.

Throughout the first quarter, students regularly requested private conference during which they asked me to tell them what grade I would have given their recently returned paper "if we had grades." During this same time period, one-half of the students consistently edited and redid their writing assignments, sometimes after conferencing with me, but more and more frequently on their own. Their reason for additional edited drafts was, "I don't know where I stand." The grades inform the students about where they stand and serve as a benchmark indicating where the teacher stands in relation to the student's work.

Student View of the Teaching Format As Lacking Structure

The students received few of the expected benchmarks in the form of grades and teacher judgment, and they did not trust their own abilities to learn. Because my expectations were not what they had experienced during their previous nine years in school, they struggled
to learn them. Their insecurity with the teaching format was directly expressed by several students in their first quarter progress reports when they referred to "Mrs. Holmes expectations." Beth said she was working hard to learn Mrs. Holmes' expectations of me." As the data presented reveal, the insecurity was so intense that several students believed my standards were different from those of other teachers. Sam worded it perhaps the most succinctly when he wrote in his progress report that his writing had improved "by Mrs. Holmes' standards, not in general."

The expectations for learning behavior (as distinct from qualitative performance standards), as depicted in this study, actually were very different from those the students had experienced during their previous school years. The expectations within this teaching format were not for right answers, but rather for answers and ideas which were supported with various types of evidence. The expectations were that the evidence not come from the teacher alone, but rather from the students' own individual and shared research and study. The expectations were that the teacher reaction to student work be given as non-judgmental feedback (which, however, often included reiteration of qualitative standards), rather than as judgment.
in the form of statements and of a grade. Then the expectation was that the students read the feedback and use it as information from which they would evaluate their work and make decisions concerning their next step. As a result of the changed expectations, students felt immense free-floating anxiety because they did not know the rules for this format. Because they did not know the rules, they, and parents as evidenced in the three parent letters, often described the teaching format as lacking structure. If structure refers to deliberate and consistent use of rules for pedagogical operation, given descriptions of typical English teaching as a point of reference, this class was atypical in its exceptionally high degree of structure.

**Eventual Outcomes of Not Knowing the Teacher's Judgment**

In the beginning, a little over one-third of the students were expressing difficulties. The confusion became so great for many that they felt they could not function, and indeed, many displayed behavior which indicated they were unable to function. This was reflected, for example, in their initial insistence that I was giving the assignments at the end of the class (James said, "while the bell was ringing), that the
room was filled with talking and thus confusion while I was giving assignments, and that I, and not they, had made the initial pre-contract.

While the class tapes did not substantiate any of these claims, the students held to them even in the face of opposing evidence. The most extreme occasion took place concerning an assignment the class did not do. The students insisted that I had not given it. I played the tape for them, and Beth's response was they had not heard it at the time because the room was filled with confusion. When I said I had not heard confusion, she replied that was because "it didn't come out on the tape."

As the students were persistently and firmly encouraged (indeed, required) to deal with the expectations that they engage in the learning process and that they support their ideas with specific evidence, their confusion gradually lessened, and many were able to recognize specific strengths and weaknesses in their writing as seen in their self-evaluations as early as the end of the first quarter. This ability was shown to varying degrees as evidenced particularly by Sam, at one extreme, who had experienced the most difficulty with the format, yet had shown the greatest growth in his ability to recognize his strengths, and, at the other extreme, by Amy who remained, for the most part,
unable to verbalize her considerable and obvious strengths, still seeing them in terms of what I liked and disliked. As individual students gained confidence to speak out in class—as Sam, Jaime, Jon, Beth, Ted, Rita, Kara, and Ruth, had done during times of confusion or frustration—everyone began to take additional responsibility for the class discussions and for the homework assignments, as evidenced by their assigning their own homework, even when I had suggested that there be no homework, and also evidenced by their carrying on the class discussion with a substitute teacher.

The study showed that when the students were taught how to process information and were provided with an ongoing guided experience in doing so, all but two students increased their ability to recognize their strengths and weaknesses as well as their ability to think in terms of skills rather than in terms of a grade (In regard to the other two students, there simply is no explicit evidence to the contrary, that is there is no evidence they regressed or did not increase their ability). The study further showed that the students did begin to learn to take responsibility for their learning, particularly in relying on their own abilities and judgment as they carried on a process for learning instead of expecting the teacher to give the answers.
Students Learning the Concept of Quality

As discussed in the Quarter I section under Salient Problems, the students viewed quantity of work and amount of time spent in accomplishing quantity of work as creating the basis of their learning, their evaluation, and their grade. Their viewpoint was that these two items showed the amount of effort one had given. Further, they held the strong conviction that if someone tried "really really hard," it would be "unfair" for that person to receive a low grade. Completely missing from their concept was a consideration of quality.

Leading them to be conscious of quality was a long and not entirely successful experience. Some of the experiences included reading and discussing examples of excellent writings, listing the qualities of excellence in each, generating a list of characteristics students could incorporate into their writing, using the words excellence and quality, and engaging students in creating personal specific action plans to aid in their efforts toward achieving quality work. I had been encouraged when, during the second quarter, Morry had responded to one of my comments to a student, "Remember, Mrs. Holmes, It's not quantity; it's quality," whereupon, Mike said, "No, it's both quantity and quality."
Despite evidence of growing awareness, in February, when I asked them to write about quantity and quality, four students stated that quality was more important. All the others said quantity was more important because it showed effort.

When the students experienced an emphasis on quality rather than their expectation of emphasis on effort, they said my standards were different from those of other teachers. As they became familiar with the feedback I gave them, fewer students edited to correct grammatical and spelling problems alone, and more students edited to include additional supporting evidence, and by the end of third quarter, to create varied sentence structure. I observed a direct connection between student knowledge of quality and decreasing emphasis on effort.

One note must be made here concerning student understanding of quality. All students did not come to see the characteristics of effective writing as those of quality student performance on an assignment. At least one continued to view them as my personal standards as shown by Faith's statement during the third quarter in which she indicated she was not sure other teachers' expectations for
her writing would be the same as mine, thus she said she did not know if she knew more about writing.

The concept that quality has standards of its own was not a concept held by most of the students as evidenced in the extensive class discussion during the first quarter and by their continued struggle to learn what I expected of them. Having to attend to the specific meaning of my feedback to them and edit based on what they learned in the feedback helped most of the students to increase their understanding of specific characteristics that create quality work. This positive outcome strongly supports the benefits of avoiding teacher judgement, and in its place to provide specific information.

Implications

Implications for Scheduling of the School Day

During the last individual grading conference, I asked each student to talk about the most beneficial part of the study. Without exception, all named the individual conferences, saying such specific things as, "helps the student/teacher relationship" and "gives you a clearer idea
of what you need to do." In the beginning of the study, the conferences served to provide security. As the year progressed, the conferences became individual work sessions. The students learned more about how to do the work and how to become responsible.

My own experience with the conferences leads me to view them as a necessary component of this style of teaching because my learnings were as great as those of the student with whom I conferenced. I learned the student's individual work habits and skill levels to an extent which I could not have done while working only in a group format.

Under ordinary circumstances, time is one of the major blocks which prevents such conferencing from becoming a regular part of the teacher/student work. During the present study, while employed on a part time basis, I taught four classes and a total of 61 students. During the morning hours, I taught classes, and during the early afternoon hours, I conferenced with students. Although the study included only two conferences each quarter, many students conferenced with me much more often. Assessing student work, and creating lesson plans took great amounts of time, and I usually devoted time to this part of my work during evening hours as well as during several weekend hours.
In addition, I had other school responsibilities. One afternoon a week, I took part in the regularly scheduled faculty inservice program, and I served on the scheduling committee, a task which involved bi-weekly late afternoon meetings, visitations to other schools, presentations of reports, and faculty interaction tasks. Beginning in March, I attended the Parent Advisory Committee meetings which convened once a month during the early evening. Finding sufficient time to accomplish the required work and meet one-on-one with students proved to be extremely stressful, and sometimes even impossible.

Based on the data collected in this study, individual student-teacher work is a powerful teaching intervention. The students' unanimous positive response to one-on-one time with the teacher, combined with the data showing the beneficial outcomes of such time, is strong evidence of the need to make adequate provisions for such work.

Implications for Teacher Education and Staff Development Programs

The initial premise of this study is that learning requires that each learner construct meaning rather than merely accepting another's explanation or answer. This constructivist concept is supported in the
research cited in Chapter II. When students, whose teacher engages them in a process for constructing meaning, become debilitated to the extent depicted within the present study, fear takes over and learning can not result until that anxiety subsides. If, in contrast, students were engaged in such learning processes from the time they first entered school, their expectations would be congruent not only with those held in this study, but also with what research asserts about how learning can best be facilitated.

The fact that each of the students who exhibited difficulty engaging in responsible behavior had an issue which blocked their path to effective learning is a most important observation. The implication is that an important part of teacher work consists of observing students and listening to them. Then, based on continual teacher monitoring, to guide students through a process for learning the new skills they need to overcome or circumvent the block and engage in the responsible behaviors.

Based on both the student response to the teaching format and the indication that those who do not take responsibility for their learning do not know how to do so, this study presents a strong argument supporting the conclusion that both teacher education programs and
staff development programs should encourage teachers to become proficient in non-judgmental communication skills. If my own experience in this study teaches anything that truly is generalizable, it is that teachers who work with students in a way which effectively avoids becoming an adversary or a rescuer, and which simultaneously leads students into assuming learning responsibilities, have to be as expert in their use of nonjudgmental communication as they are in their subject matter.

Implications for Future Study

Because at least part of the students' growing confidence could be attributed to their growth in understanding my "expectations" of them, further study would provide broader insight into the process of developing responsibility. Does it generalize across subject matter lines? Does it persist over time, most particularly over summer vacation? A study which documents students' activities through several years' experience (and thus with several different teachers), is the first recommendation.
The Teacher’s Response to the Format

The second research question asks the question of the teacher's response to the teaching format. Because the main part of this topic has been included within the quarter sections entitled "The Teacher," only three topics are included here: time, perception, and collegiality.

Class Time

Time was a major issue for both the students and myself. A 45 minute class is not sufficient time for a completely meaningful discussion followed by evaluation of the communication process. Many classes ended just as a point of closure was about to happen, thus the students left with the frustration of knowing only seemingly unrelated pieces of information. Picking up the discussion the following day was frequently a difficult task. Both the momentum of the discussion and, often, the points of the discussion had been lost. Consequently, we then had to engage in reconstructing the previous day's work before continuing to closure. This process may well have contributed to confusion.
In addition to the need for longer discussion time, is the need for time in which to discuss the communication process as experienced on a given day. Listing the productive and nonproductive aspects of a discussion and then making a plan for ways to improve it on the next day, provides a procedure for students to learn how to take control of problem areas and conveys the message that learning to communicate effectively is an important part of the curriculum.

**Conference Time**

The crucial importance of the individual conferences as revealed in this study is an important observation. By spending time with each student, I was able to understand the student's difficulties and strengths, to help each make action plans, to reassess student work and plans, and through the process, come to know each student on an individual basis.

**Teacher Assessment Time**

Writing the extensive and nonjudgmental feedback required of this format was very time consuming. I found that when there was no grade to inform the students of how they did, I had to write long notes.
An interesting outcome of my going into detail about points within their work, however, was that I came to see the individual student's work with greater clarity, and thus was able to be more effective in guiding the student toward success.

Not only did I gain from this experience, but also the students gained. First of all, coming to recognize one's strengths and weaknesses as well as amount of work accomplished is a process which students must experience often if they are to develop the ability to take responsibility for their learning. Secondly, a large part of taking responsibility involves making and revising action plans. Thirdly, this entire study underscored the fact (to an even greater degree than I had anticipated), that a major learning task for the students was learning to be specific in all their work. Because giving meaningful feedback on the students' self assessments took such a significant amount of time, I had to cut back the number of times they engaged in writing the self-assessments. As a consequence, the assessments lost some of their value.
Teacher-Parent-Student Time

Although I spent a minimal amount of time during the study in direct discussion with parents, I believe a necessary part of successful use of this teaching format must include regular time for three-way conferencing. This would serve the purpose of keeping the parents informed, thus decreasing differences in interpretation of events and providing the means for parents to help their children develop their learning processes. Such three-way interaction could result in individual educational programs of various types. The work which Garth and I and then Garth, his mother and I did together is such an example.

Differences in Perception

Many problems which directly impact my professional reputation have been created by use of the present teaching format. The fact that students experience this format as being so different from their expectations that they believe it is not a real English class has, as demonstrated by my administrator’s actions, created a major problem for me. Kara’s mother’s viewpoint that engaging the students in solving a problem such as undone homework by some of the students, is a “frustration that does not need to be in a classroom,” is one held
by the general public as evidenced by the Parent Advisory Board members' attitude that the English Department must stop these practices. One can conclude the attitude would be the same were the class solving a classroom management problem such as lateness to class or noise level. The traditional teaching format places the teacher in control, and if the students take time to engage in solving problems, it is seen as "wasting time."

The accepted concept of "the teacher" as someone who transmits information and judges products is so commonly accepted as to be ubiquitous. Even my principal's choice of word "delivering" in his letter to me indicates this concept, "...that you are delivering the same curriculum as designed by the English Department...." When I created a teacher role in which the teacher became one who guided students through the experience of learning and of evaluating their own work, much initial student confusion ensued. As a result, many believed the format lacked structure. This format, as evidenced in the reported data, is highly structured; however, because it is not the expected structure, many students, parents, and even other educators do not readily see it.
I found this teaching format to be very difficult in the beginning of the year, and most rewarding in the end. Being blamed for problems encountered in the beginning definitely created a roller-coaster effect for my own self-confidence. Observing the gradual change and the growth toward independence from the teacher was the eventual reward. In between were massive amounts of hard work and very little positive feedback. The dangers in this, particularly for less experienced teachers, or for those only incompletely trained in the format, are too obvious to require further comment.

Colleagiality

My experiences and emotional responses with the teaching format strongly support the need for teachers who vary their teaching from the expected norm, to be part of a support group. It is evident that even with years of experience in using the communication skills and with understanding of the Drama Triangle, I did not always choose the most productive path in my efforts to lead students to take responsibility for their learning. Using this format is an ongoing learning experience for the teacher as well as for the students and its foundation requires a willingness to reflect upon one's own behavior in
order to recognize strengths and weaknesses, and then to create
action plans for the future. All of this teacher "self-work" can be
enhanced by interaction with other teachers who are themselves
involved in similar work.

My personal need to be a part of a group of other teachers grew in
proportion to the difficulties and disappointments I encountered. Other
than three of my colleagues who periodically inquired about the study,
I experienced no support and no evidence of collegial interest. Based
upon the strong need I had to discuss my experiences in the study, I
believe any teacher who decides to use this teaching format would find
the process more rewarding if he or she created an alliance with at
least one other teacher with whom to discuss issues, raise ideas, gain
support, mourn defeats, and celebrate successes.

The Teacher and Action Research

Trying to teach and to carry on research was a very difficult task,
and at times I found it to be nearly impossible. From problems with the
audio-taping equipment to time constraints, nothing about the study
was easy or smooth. In November I informed a colleague that I would never engage in such research again. By April I had changed my mind.

Although I had used most aspects of this teaching format for many years, and had experienced all of the same difficulties which arose, I had not previously included the nongrading part—an aspect which served to escalate student anxiety greatly, thus resulting in student frustration and confusion to a far greater degree than had been my experience in previous years. My ongoing engagement in the study was invaluable in that I was literally forced to recognize and examine details to an extent beyond that which I had done in the past.

The major reason I changed my mind about engaging in classroom research is the great amount I learned from the study—learnings which have enabled me to make informed changes in the format. I have listed what I see to be the four most significant learnings (distinguished from those concerning individual students) and consequent changes in the format:

Because of the massive student anxiety concerning expectations, rather than involve students in rule-making at the outset of the course, I will provide a
list of class expectations. As the course develops, I will encourage students to make changes in the expectations as they find need to do so. This change will also serve to provide a familiar structure within the teaching format.

To avoid the impression that I am not following the English curriculum, I plan to devote the first quarter primarily to concrete and familiar learnings—learnings which have been traditionally seen as "English"—vocabulary and grammar. As for the literature discussions, I have developed a plan to introduce them in a gradual manner, and, rather than periodically summarizing the discussions, I plan to write the summaries on the board, at least in the beginning of the year.

Based upon the extent to which the students believed effort should be the foundation for their evaluation, combined with their inability to identify
characteristics of quality work, my plan is to open
the year with identification and discussion of quality.
I am presently gathering materials to carry on this
process throughout the course. (The present study
shows that an additional advantage of engaging
students in such a process is that it guides them
through the practice of using specific support for
their conclusions.)

My greatest learning came as a result of the
individual conferences--those students who did not
take responsibility for learning, did not know how to
do so. From the one-on-one work I carried on with
each student, I have developed a much more inclusive
understanding of the teacher's role as a guide in the
student process of learning how to take responsibility.

In spite of the many learnings, I would not again undertake so
massive a research project alone. The nature of this study, I believe,
necessitated that I record data over a significant period of the school year, and maintaining that involvement in research was a monumental task.

A question of how good the research actually is arises whenever the researcher is the researched. There is no question in my mind that the thoroughness with which I approached the task during the first quarter was not fully sustained throughout the other quarters. Although I continued to record detailed data on the case study students, and to follow the taping and conference schedule as outlined in Chapter III, I did not, during the other quarters, maintain as thorough a data base in the Class Events log as I had done during the first quarter. Indeed, the study as outlined in Chapter III dictated that during the second, third, and fourth quarters, I devote my intense observations to the selected case study students. As a result, there may have been student responses which did not become a part of the data base. Despite this probability, my examination of the thousand plus pages of careful detail recorded over an extended period of time, lead me to feel confident that this database provides a comprehensive frame for understanding the particulars which form the aspects of the study presented here.
APPENDIX A

PILOT STUDY

During the 1992-93 school year, a pilot study was conducted with a sophomore English class, level 1-2, initially containing fifteen students—8 males and 7 females. By the end of the pilot study, one female had left and two males had transferred into the class. With the exception of one Spanish-speaking exchange student, all spoke English as their primary language. One male student was repeating the class. All were white, middle class adolescents.

All aspects of the curriculum, the student and class selection process, the grant writing, and the parental conferencing were identical to those which are proposed within Chapter III for this dissertation.

As a result of the pilot study, I noticed certain themes and patterns which have guided my initial coding. Of particular interest is the anxiety theme which arose each time the students engaged in self evaluation. The students also expressed displeasure at our schedule of after-school conferencing instead of in-class conferencing. In myself I came to recognize an anxiety in relation to keeping parents informed in order to protect myself and the pilot study. I found I was contacting parents to the point of student discomfort. In addition to specific anxieties, I recognized a great deal of free-floating student anxiety. I found that addressing these feelings through frequent whole class discussions in which the students and I made and continually revised class rules served to discharge much of this fear.

The following is a list of questions from the pilot study and which may serve to help guide the emerging analysis:

1. Are there particular time periods during which the students as a group experience elevated anxiety?

2. Are there patterns in student response to this anxiety?
3. Is there an apparent turning point at which time the majority of the students seem to have achieved a comfort level with the strategy?

4. Do students use materials and pursue tasks in such a way that they demonstrate growing use of the higher thinking levels as delineated in Bloom's Taxonomy, especially the highest level; evaluation?

5. Are there differences between female and male students' comfort level and learning progress with this strategy?
APPENDIX B

DESCRIPTION OF MODIFIED HETEROGENEOUS GROUPING PROCEDURE

All tenth grade students in the proposed case study site may register for the English 1-2 level of sophomore classes. In addition to this class, the school offers an honors English class and a special skills English class.

During the spring of their freshman year, all students meet with each of their teachers to discuss their sophomore course of studies. At this time, teachers make recommendations as to which level of any particular course may be appropriate for individual students. The students, however, are free to follow the teacher's recommendations or to make their own choices. In the cases of those students who choose not to take their teachers' recommendations, a parent/student/guidance counselor conference is arranged to discuss the matter further. The final decision is always made by the student and family.

Any student may apply to the honors English class. The application procedure consists of (a) writing and submitting a paper on a topic chosen by the English Department, (b) having earned a freshman English grade of A or B, and (c) having a recommendation from one's freshman English teacher. These steps are flexible in that a teacher's recommendation is considered more important than a high grade average.

Entry into the special skills English class is a little different from entry into other classes in that students are admitted by recommendation only. They are then free, as with the other classes, to follow the recommendation or to join a level 1-2 English class. Recommendations are made on the basis of a student's reading and writing skill level. The average skill level is usually about fifth grade or lower, and often there are one or two nonreaders in this class.
June 15, 1993

Mr. and Mrs. Student Parent
Street Address
City, State Zip

Dear Mr. and Mrs. Parent:

Beginning this fall, I will be your child's English teacher for the sophomore year. In addition to my regular teaching duties at _____High School, I am completing a doctoral dissertation at the University of Massachusetts. I am interested in the aspects of schooling which relate to how students learn to take responsibility for their own learning. This information is valuable to teachers in that it can contribute to our knowledge of how to help students act in responsible ways.

I would like permission for your child to participate in a study which will be conducted as a part of his or her regularly scheduled English class. The only changes from the normal class will be the fact that each class and any student-teacher conferences will be audiotaped, and the grading process for the course will be conducted in the following manner:

Because gluing grades often causes the student to focus attention on the grade rather than on learning knowledge and mastering skills, I will eliminate grades on individual writing assignments, and will provide each student with
specific verbal feedback—both written and oral—concerning his or her progress in English and in personal skill development. The students will know exactly how they are doing in terms of what they have learned and not yet learned, but they will not receive letter grades on their work.

Quarter grades (in number form) for the rank card will be derived from ongoing joint teacher-student examination of the student file which will contain all work and the teacher's written assessments.

I would like to meet with you and (student's name) to discuss the program in greater detail and to answer questions you may have. In order to schedule a convenient meeting time for you, I will call you during the week of June 15 or June 21.

Sincerely,

Judy Holmes
APPENDIX D

PARENT INFORMED CONSENT

I am presently involved in writing a doctoral dissertation, and I am interested in the aspects of schooling which relate to how students learn to take responsibility for their own learning. This information is valuable to teachers in that it can contribute to our knowledge of how to help students act in responsible ways.

I would like permission for your child to participate in a study which will be conducted as a part of his or her regularly scheduled English class. The only changes from the normal class will be the fact that each class and any student-teacher conferences will be audiotaped, and the grading process for the course will be conducted in the following manner:

Because giving grades often causes the student to focus attention on the grade rather than on learning knowledge and mastering skills, I will eliminate grades on individual assignments, and will provide each student with specific verbal feedback--both written and oral--concerning his or her progress in English and in personal skill development. The students will know exactly how they are doing in terms of what they have learned and not yet learned, but they will not receive letter grades on their work.

Quarter grades (in number form) for the rank card will be derived from ongoing joint teacher-student examination of the student file which will contain all work and the teacher’s written assessments. If a student and I do not come to agreement on the student’s grade for a given quarter, it is here agreed that we will all abide by a third party (English teacher) decision.

Excerpts from selected audiotapes in the form of quotations and paraphrases will be used in reports of this research; however, students
will not be identified by name. Your child’s participation in this work is voluntary, and if you decide not to participate, a different English class will be assigned. If you decide to participate, and have questions at any time, please contact me at school, 829-4805, or at my home, 846-4784. When the results of the study become available, I will provide the principal with a summary which will be available to you upon request.

Your signature below indicates that you give your permission for ______ to participate in this study and that you have read and understood the information in this consent form.

Parent(s)
Signature_____________________________________Date__________

Investigator’s
Signature_____________________________________Date__________
I am presently involved in writing a doctoral dissertation, and I am interested in the aspects of schooling which relate to how students learn to take responsibility for their own learning. This information is valuable to teachers in that it can contribute to our knowledge of how to help students improve in their responsibility skills.

I would like your consent to participate in a study which will be conducted as a part of your regularly scheduled English class. The only changes from the normal class will be the fact that each class and any student-teacher conferences will be audiotaped, and the grading process for the course will be conducted in the following manner:

Because giving grades often causes the student to focus attention on the grade rather than on learning knowledge and mastering skills, I will eliminate grades on individual assignments, and will provide you with specific verbal feedback--both written and oral--concerning your progress in English and in your personal skill development. You will know exactly how you are doing in terms of what you have learned and what you have not yet learned, but you will not receive letter grades on this work.

Quarter grades (in number form) for the rank card will be derived from ongoing joint teacher-student examination of your file which will contain all your work and the teacher's written assessments. If you and I do not come to agreement on your grade for a given quarter, it is here agreed that we will abide by a third party (English teacher) decision.
Excerpts from selected audiotapes in the form of quotations and paraphrases will be used in reports of this research; however, students will not be identified by name. Your participation in this work is voluntary, and if you decide not to participate, a different English class will be assigned. If you decide to participate, and have questions at any time, please contact me at school or call me at my home, 846-4784. As the results of the study become available, I will provide you with a summary copy. A portion of the classtime will be scheduled for class discussion of the summary.

Your signature below indicates that you agree to participate in this study and that you have read and understood the information in this consent form.

Student's Signature________________________________________Date__________

Investigator's
Signature________________________________________Date__________
Twenty-one years ago I began, with great enthusiasm, to teach high school English. After two years I was ready to quit!

I love literature and writing and philosophy. As I entered my career, I visualized my classes—students filled with eager appetites, avidly reading, discussing, debating, painstakingly writing. Very soon I had to readjust my thinking.

"Motivation," I thought, "if I do more to motivate my students, they'll surely become involved in school." I had studied many ways of motivating students. I would use these methods. And I did.

Again I readjusted my thinking. Now it went something like this: "The little monsters...."

Even as I blamed the students, I slowly began to notice some things. Most students showed no confidence in their ability to do things right: those students labeled as top ability asked for constant reassurance, those labeled as average kept trying to hide, and those labeled as low ability had been failing for so many years they'd given up on school learning, and most of their teachers had given up on them. Could it be that something other than laziness was standing in the way of learning? Gradually I began to see that all my knowledge of the subject matter known as ENGLISH was only part of the route to becoming a GOOD teacher.

I asked myself all kinds of questions for which I had no answers. Everyone else thought I was an excellent teacher, but I knew I needed much more. I began studying books on education.

The ideas were exciting, and I started trying them. I individualized, held class meetings, encouraged students to participate in class decision making, gave them responsibility, encouraged them to process information rather than to memorize answers, and throughout all, to interact in problem-solving rather than to rely on the teacher to give answers.

Bedlam broke loose! Frustrated students complained, angry parents called, worried administrators glowered. I had fallen from Grace.
few short months I had managed to drop from "most frequently requested teacher" to quite the opposite standing.

I was discouraged and angry. I returned to my original method of teaching—lecture and explanation. Now I felt like a hypocrite. As I stood in front of these students with my information and repeated explanations (for those who dared to ask questions), all I could see were students stuffed into frustrating little boxes and growing more and more convinced every day of their stupidity.

When I questioned my peers about their experiences and observations, I heard responses that fell primarily into two categories. One might label the first group as compassionate; these teachers expressed concern and sympathy for the students who "try so hard, but can't do the work...poor things, I just give them a passing grade if they come for help and turn in the homework." The other group might be called the hard core teachers; they made such comments as "Well, if those kids can't, or won't, do the work in my class, they better move down to the low group." Both responses conflicted with my own teaching experiences.

In my classes, I had observed that when I changed my teaching strategies to less judgmental responses—when I listened to the students explain their work, when I asked questions rather than just giving directions—I frequently witnessed these same "dumb" and "lazy" adolescents turned on to learning. And I believe they were learning. By this time, the issue had become an ethical one for me. I couldn't teach in the traditional lecture-and-explain method because my observation was that this was hurting many students, and I didn't know how to teach in the ways I was reading about. Two years into my teaching career, I made the decision to resign.

At this point, a new special education teacher joined our staff, and through her influence and our teaming, I stayed in education. I continued to study and earned a master's degree in counseling which taught me to use the nonjudgmental language which I have continued to employ as a teaching strategy to encourage students to take responsibility for their social behavior and for their learning behavior.

Personal Bias Based on my Experiences

I have found, and most teachers with whom I have worked in classes and seminars have concurred, that the very language we traditionally use with our students can, and usually does, inadvertently create an atmosphere of conflict—an ongoing and usually subtle
classroom struggle that is so common we have accepted it as the norm. I believe this atmosphere undermines the development of student responsibility, and that by changing our use of language, we can help students learn to take responsibility for their own behavior and their own learning.

The process, however, is not without serious pitfalls for both teacher and student. Each year when I do not respond to their ideas and answers with the expected "right" or "wrong," students develop great anxiety. Their mounting anxiety continues to reveal to me the frightening extent to which students rely on the teacher to affirm their thinking and their products.

During the pilot study, I used this method as teacher feedback on student written work as well as in my interactions with the students. Based upon this experience, I expect several problems to develop, and the following is an overview of the pattern which emerged during the first quarter of the pilot study:

1. Initially their anxiety will be translated into anger, and they will insist the strategy is not working and that they cannot learn this way. This is followed with demands to return to a "normal" class. Students may act out their anxiety from either Persecutor position or Victim position of the Drama Triangle.

2. When this return is not forthcoming, students will blame all difficulties on the strategy and the teacher. They will again be acting from one of these positions.

3. Simultaneously, they seek solace from other teachers and try to incorporate the help of parents and administrators in an effort to force a return to the familiar.

Through my growing understanding of the ways in which powerstruggles are carried on, I am becoming much more successful at staying out of them and guiding students through their intense anxiety. I have come to know that once a student experiences success within this process, that student begins feeling more secure. Gradually, with
this success, comes self-confidence. As the students build confidence in their own learning ability, they rely less on the teacher. Then the process of learning and the process of taking responsibility become one.
APPENDIX G

SELF-ASSESSMENT AND ACTION PLAN

Name

WEEKLY ASSESSMENT-date:

1. Effort:
   A) I brought all my materials to class ___ days.
   B) I attended class _______ days.
   C) I was on time for class _____ days.

   D) Assignments completed on time:

   E) Assignments completed, but late:

   F) Assignments not completed:

   G) Revisions/Editing completed:

   H) Revisions/Editing still to accomplish:

   I) During the week, I met with____________ for help and/or feedback concerning___________________________. As a result_________________________.

   ___
II. **Accuracy** - Here are my present results of tests I took this week. (Please note that later in the year this section will expand to include knowledge and skills growth over time.)

III. **Class and/or team participation**

A) I contributed to class discussions by ____________________________

B) I have attached my individual team work evaluation sheets.

IV. **Evaluation of my Work**

A) Based upon what I've done this week, I see my strengths to be ______________

B) Based upon what I've done this week, I see my work areas to be ______________

V. **Action Plan** (1. After careful examination of all my week's work, the following is my next week's plan for change and/or improvement for each specific area in which I see a need for something.) OR (I am pleased with my progress and my action plan is to create the following learning challenge for myself.)
APPENDIX H

TEAM WORK ASSESSMENT SHEETS

TEAM WORK ASSESSMENT

Please fill this in for yourself and then ask your team members to add their assessments by stating where they agree or disagree with your own comments.

Content (meeting the academic objective)

1. I contributed the following work share of the team task:

2. I participated and helped the team in the following ways:
   A) Offering ideas
   B) Asking questions
   C) Listening while other(s) were talking

3. I declined doing other team member's work.

Process (creating and maintaining team rapport)

I contributed to creating a positive working atmosphere by using the following communication/social skills:
APPENDIX I

NO-LOSE PROBLEM SOLVING

The following steps are listed and explained by Gordon, (1974, p. 228):

1. Defining the problem
2. Generating possible solutions
3. Evaluating the solutions
4. Deciding which solution is best
5. Determining how to implement the decision
6. Assessing how well the solution solved the problem
## APPENDIX J

### STUDENT QUARTER GRADES

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# Case Study Student Responsibility Chart

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