TEACHING IN AN INNER CITY SCHOOL

by

JOYCE M. BRAND

A thesis submitted to the
Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research
in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of
Master of Arts

Sociology Dept. September 1972

ABSTRACT

This study deals with the problems posed for teachers in a school where the pupils were predominantly recent immigrants of various nationalities, and where the school had particular organizational features which created and sustained these problems. In particular, the focus is on the teachers' problems in interpreting the pupils' behaviors and assessing their capabilities and, consequently their problems in organizing some practical actions which would effectively control their classes for the purpose of getting something taught.

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PREFACE

This is a study of how teachers in an inner-city elementary school attempt to interpret and evaluate the particular behaviors and abilities of their pupils, in face of cultural and language differences. The social and cultural characteristics of the school population, combined with specific organizational features, generated ambiguities in teaching tasks and the educational process generally. Because the process of interpretation, assessment of pupils and teaching were problematic, teachers developed and employed provisional strategies to manage and come to terms with their situation.

What interests us, then, is the complex task of teaching a large number of pupils with multi-

dimensional differences and the way in which teachers perceived and attempted to deal with a conflict situation. Necessity forced them to interact in such a fashion so as to accomplish their purposes in a situation which makes it impossible to use formal methods.

The study was made possible through my participating in this school as a regular volunteer worker for one school year. My role was that of a volunteer in order to do research. I had met with the principal of the school, who agreed to allow me to do research only in exchange for some volunteer services. He stressed that consistency and flexibility were essential to maintaining a viable role with the teachers. Taking his conditions seriously, I attended the school daily (from 9:00 - 3:00) for three months, then three times weekly (from 9:00 - 3:00) for 4 months. My role essentially developed into helping the teachers by taking those pupils who had difficulty understanding and speaking English outside the classroom to give them

extra lessons in specific subjects.

It took several weeks before I (as volunteer worker and researcher) was able to record my observations systematically. Teachers compared their pupils' progress and described how they coped with pressures, daily teaching tasks and disciplinary problems. For the most part, they seemed to be seeking a way to cope with the task of teaching "some content" to a large and varied pupil population. Issues important to them became clearer as they made specific demands on me. I was requested to take children outside the classroom and "teach them something", in fact, "teach them anything". I began to examine the factors which underlay the teachers' frustrations in attempting to interpret and assess their pupils when it became apparent that they were all experiencing a "general" problem.

I am indebted to Professors P. Rains, M. Spector, and W. Hanigsberg for their advice, critical comments and encouragement. I also wish to thank

the principal and teaching staff of Devonshire School for their invaluable help. Also, I am grateful to a teacher and friend, Mrs. R. Zinman and my husband for their emotional support and patience in listening to my ideas, reading draft copies and having constructive criticisms.

J. Brand
August, 1972.

CHAPTER I

THE DEVONSHIRE SCHOOL

Mass education at the present time uses a cohort system to process large student populations. That is, pupils are generally assigned to classrooms on the basis of age and level of performance to confront similar sets of demands and to perform similar tasks.[1] In most schools, regular classroom tests and IQ tests are given to pupils to assess their abilities and capacities, to assign them to grades when this is necessary, and to promote them from grade to grade, thus separating age-grade categories and the task-demands implicit in each category.[2]

This graded school system creates a situation in which at least some homogeneity exists in each grade according to presumed knowledge or schooling.

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[1] Dreeben, R., What is Learned in School, Addison-Wesley Publishing Company, 1968.

[2] Discrepancies between theory and practice of our educational system are subtly manifested by the use of IQ tests designed to sort the intellectually

Inevitably there is, however, a wide range in levels of ability (in the sense of performance; that is capacity to read, spell, do math, etc.) within a given classroom which teachers recognize and must cope with by creating various forms of grouping to process large numbers of pupils. That is, individual classroom teachers for practical purposes, have to organize their classrooms to teach various types of content to a large number of pupils. This grouping may occur within classrooms at the same grade level or across grade levels, but is usually based on achievement assessed through testing and teachers' judgments.

It is the purpose of this study to describe a school in which, for a variety of reasons, the creation of grouping of any kind for the purposes of teaching was a particular problem. The purpose

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"capable" from the "inferior". IQ tests are an unreliable basis for classifying students since they presuppose common language experiences and motivation to do well. Individual ability is based on specific subjective experiences; thus words familiar to North American, middle class children differ from those native to Chinese, Greek or other ethnic groups. The widely disparate socio-cultural experiences, attitudes, concerning the importance of success and competitiveness in school are directly related to performance on IQ tests. Since "culture free" intelligence tests are yet to be devised, inner-city school teachers are forced to evaluate pupils using criteria other than ability or measured intelligence.

of this chapter is to provide some orienting descriptive material about the school and to outline several of the sources of the particular problems teachers faced there; the second chapter will describe in greater detail the nature of these problems as they appeared for teachers in the classroom; and the third chapter will describe the strategies teachers employed to cope, however haphazardly, with these problems in their day-to-day work in the classroom.

The School and its Pupils:

Devonshire, a Protestant elementary school located in a low-income area of Montreal, is housed in an old, red-brick building surrounded by a high wire fence; two small asphalt playgrounds at the front and at the rear - a small park in the background, no greenery, sand and rubbish, swings, bars and benches. Inside the atmosphere is sombre..... high ceilings, long, wide, thickly painted corridors, exposed pipes and sinks, a general air of mustiness. Foul odors and a high noise level permeate the halls

on all four levels of the school. Parents who walk their kids to school often bring lunches and wait in the basement of the school until lunchtime to feed their children.

The school population fluctuates between 650-750 pupils. The majority (roughly 70% of the pupil population) are children of immigrants, primarily Greeks and Chinese, with a sprinkling of Italians, Portugese, Yugoslavians, Indians, French and West Indians. According to the teachers, about seventy percent of the pupils come from a home environment where neither French, nor English is spoken. The children in general come from low-income families; their parents work as cooks, waiters, laundrymen, landscapers, with an occasional professional, usually an immigrant student. The children come from large families and live in low-rental and poor housing.

The Staff:

The teaching staff consists of 23 full time teachers. In addition, the board hires librarians, teachers in home and industry, music, physical education and French. On a part time basis there is a speech therapist and a drama teacher. There are also social workers who are part of a community health project and some volunteer workers, generally students working for their master's degree.

All teachers are placed by the Montreal Protestant School Board. Should teachers ask to teach at an inner-city school they would generally be given a preference. As one teacher pointed out, perhaps optimistically:

> "You find that most teachers in this school really want to teach here. You know it's become very fashionable to teach in an inner-city school...some wouldn't think of teaching anywhere else...!"

One third of the staff have B.A. degrees and two thirds have a two year teacher's training course. Two teachers are of Greek origin and can speak Greek,

three are British, two West Indian, the remainder are mostly English Protestant and a few Jewish teachers. There are no Chinese teachers, or anyone who can speak Chinese on the staff. There is a high turnover of staff in the school. As a teacher indicated:

> "There seems to be a three year cycle. Most leave after three years. The year I came here - 1969 - there were 19 new teachers on staff. But you know, it's not just the problems in this school which cause a high turnover. The general state of the profession in this province, working conditions, the pupil-teacher ratio, inadequate equipment, just the physical condition and atmosphere of this place all seem to impinge on the teachers' decisions to either change schools or even leave the profession completely."

The Organization of the School:

Apart from kindergarten, there are six grade levels in the school. Each grade level has two or three classrooms, each with its teacher. There are approximately thirty to thirty-five pupils to one teacher.

There are also two "special classes"- junior and senior. The official rationale for "special classes" is that they provide more individualized teaching for pupils with specific problems; for pupils classed as "emotionally disturbed" or "educable retarded". Pupils referred to these classes are generally given IQ tests; placement in a "special class" typically involves parental consent in the form of the parents' signatures. Each special class has approximately ten to fourteen pupils (depending on who drops out or is referred to more specialized schools). The process of referring pupils to "special classes" and the teachers' particular use of and attitudes toward such classes will be discussed in a later chapter. For, in fact, these classes serve somewhat different purposes at Devonshire than at other, particularly middle class, schools.

In addition to the regular grade levels from one to six, and the "special classes", there is a language class for new immigrant children. These children attend the language class for a maximum

of one school year; mid-way through the year, language-class children are sent to regular classes for an hour or two a day so that they can slowly adapt to a new situation. Following the year of language class, they are placed into grade levels on the basis of age, according to government regulation.

It is, in fact, this government regulation which constitutes a significant organizational feature of the Devonshire school. Specifically, Regulation 1 is a government imposed legislation in the Province of Quebec requiring pupils' placement in grades on the basis of age rather than previous schooling or demonstrable level of achievement; this means, for example, that children cannot be failed. Teachers indicated that the rationale for the bill had to do with:

> "A desire to "humanize the school system" which implies that children should not be kept back. Its important for kids to be with their peers. The school also realizes its social, moral obligations to children. Therefore, it attempts to place them with their peers to facilitate social development. In the past, children were kept back if they were out of step

> with others of their own age group. They were stigmatized."

While failing is therefore not a possibility at Devonshire, there is a system of grading and report cards. The Protestant school board requires that report cards be issued in all schools; the type of report is, however, determined by each school. At Devonshire, there are three types of reports:

> "The first type of report is a face to face interview with the parent, once a year. You could have this interview anytime you want. Then there's a progress report - either we request a second interview with the parent or we send a form to them saying the child is progressing satisfactorily. Thirdly, there are 3 report cards sent home, in October, February, and June. These illustrate 3 levels - commendable, satisfactory and having difficulty. There's also a space for comments."

As will be described, problems existed for teachers in determining how to write and make these reports. Although grading was seemingly not as important as in the past, due to Regulation 1, a teacher emphasized that:

> "The board feels very strongly about reports or report cards. You see, it's the only tangible way they can assess their children's progress. They feel it's their (the board's) obligation to society!"

At Devonshire, the organizational constraints imposed by Regulation 1 combined with the large number of immigrant children create the problems which teachers faced in the classroom. Put generally, teachers faced classes which were homogeneous in terms of age, but remarkably heterogeneous in terms of cultural and ethnic differences, levels of previous schooling and achievement, and above all, heterogeneous at the very fundamental level of the degree to which children could understand the language being spoken in the class. The following chapter describes the variety of problems generated by these two features of the Devonshire school as these problems were experienced by the teachers in the classroom.

CHAPTER II

TEACHING AT DEVONSHIRE

Like all teachers, the teachers at the Devonshire school were routinely concerned with the matters of interpreting, defining, and managing their pupils' classroom behavior for the practical purposes of teaching various types of content to a variety of pupils. Yet in a number of ways, the specific features of this school made these tasks more than usually problematic.

Grounded in the uncommon diversity of the classes they taught, the problems faced by the teachers at Devonshire had in part to do with the wide variety of their pupils per se, but had even more to do with the fact that their pupils varied along so many dimensions. Faced with classes which varied in their ability to understand and speak

English as well as in their abilities to read, spell, and do arithmetic, and with classes which varied culturally as well as individually, teachers found themselves faced not only with the problems of coping with these various sorts of diversity, but also with the more fundamental problem of determining which diversity most accurately interpreted a given situation. It is the intention of this chapter then to describe these problems, particularly the problems of interpretation, as they were experienced by teachers in the two central areas of their daily concerns: getting something effectively taught, and maintaining some order and discipline in the classroom.

Problems in Interpreting and Dealing with Performance: Getting something Effectively Taught

The teaching profession is crucially concerned with recognizing differences in ability, both for the purposes of tapping talent and for the practical purposes of organizing large and varied classes

into groups for teaching. Many studies have documented the extent to which the grounds for recognizing ability have to do with class-related differences in the educational objectives and expectations held by pupils' parents, in pupils' reactions to teaching and schooling, in the results of educational testing, as well as with other factors not fundamentally indicative of ability.* Yet teachers tend to operate on the assumption that they can recognize differences in ability and can account for differences in performance, at least in part, on this basis. In grouping children for the purposes of teaching, and in dealing with children who are having trouble, teachers tend to rely, and perhaps must, not just on assessments of performance but on some scheme for interpreting

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*Rist, R.D., "Student Social Class and Teacher Expectations: The Self-Fulfilling Prophecy in Ghetto Education"; Harvard Educational Review, Vol. 40, August, 1970.
Cicourel, A., and Kitsuse, J., The Educational Decision Makers, Bobbs-Merrill Co., N.Y., 1963.
Schaffer, W., Olexa, C., Polk, K., "Programmed for Social Class: Tracking in High School", in Transaction, Vol. 7, October, 1970
Becker, H., "Social Class Variations in Teacher-Pupil Relationships", Journal of Educational Sociology, Vol 25, 1952.

differences and troubles in performance. And the most common interpretive schemes, however much they may rely on other sorts of differences, in fact call on notions of ability, motivation and, in the case of children with severe troubles, personal or family pathology.

In interpreting the wide variations in performance which existed in classes at Devonshire, the teacher's first experience had to do with the inapplicability of the comparisons, categories and interpretive schemes developed in her past experience. Teachers at Devonshire found that they could not refer to similar problems experienced in the past and could not apply similar rules of procedure for interpreting and handling the problems posed in this school. For they were faced with classes whose varying levels of performance might reflect differences in ability, motivation and personality, but might as easily reflect differences in previous schooling, ability to speak and understand English, and ethnic or cultural background.

In accounting for children's difficulties and their own difficulties in teaching, the teachers at Devonshire could rather easily appreciate the extent to which these difficulties were generated within the school itself. In speaking of children who were 'behind', for example, teachers attributed and understood their problems in terms of the school policies according to which children were placed in grades on the basis of age without regard for their level of previous schooling or ability to understand what was going on.

> "As it is those placed (in regular classes) after a year of language class are so far behind! They can't function in a regular classroom situation. All they've really done there is oral work."

> "Teachers generally experience real problems here. Jane can tell you that, she was really in a quandry last year. Pat could tell you more because she's been in the higher grades for a longer time. Miss Man has only been here for one year and she's really broiling in it. Do you know that most of her kids in grade 2 can't even read. I believe they should be made to repeat (grades) at that level. I don't believe they should be made to repeat in the higher grades but there's nothing wrong with it at this level. How could you keep pushing them through! Maybe I'm old fashion, but I still believe in drill methods and kids should be forced to learn certain things. Take a look at at Regulation 1 which states that no one

> can repeat a grade. Well, I think exceptions should be made to that bill! There's one grade that pupils should fail and that's grade 1. If they can't read, then they can't pass! These kids can't learn from each other...they're all the same!"
>
> "There's a problem in placing these children in classes according to age. You see, after one year of language they are still so far behind that if you put them in a regular class they create real problems for the teacher."

Perhaps because ethnicity was the clearest and least ambiguous kind of difference among the children in their classes, and also because it was a real difference manifest in the demeanor and background of their pupils, teachers were also inclined to call upon cultural differences in accounting for some of the more specific variations of difficulty they encountered. Teachers' sense of cultural differences did not, of course, proceed out of a disinterested concern for accurate cultural description, but out of a more interested set of practical classroom experiences. They were inclined, therefore, to experience and describe cultural differences in terms of the troubles these generated for teaching. So, from the point

of view of the teachers, the Chinese children were so quiet that it was especially difficult to assess their abilities - they posed problems of interpretation; the Yugoslavian children lacked discipline - they posed problems of control; the Greek children were generally more motivated and competitive - they presented fewer problems. More generally, the teachers referred their troubles to the lack of out-of-school support for the learning of English and the doing of schoolwork at home, sometimes calling on their own past experiences as immigrants as a point of comparison:

> "When they play they speak their native tongue, they don't speak English. And when they do (speak English) it's just awful, you get the feeling they'll never learn. When we went to Outremont (school) we were forced to speak English because we were only a few (immigrants), and our parents forced us to do our homework. These kids take work home but they never do it."

While teachers might in these ways refer the problems they experienced in class to the general features of the situation within which they worked, and to the immigrant backgrounds of their pupils,

they were nevertheless faced with having to handle their classes and particular pupils in terms of more specific understandings. And these more specific understandings depended on being able to select out of a number of possible interpretive schemes an appropriate one.

In dealing with particular children, for example, teachers wanted to be able to decide whether a child's difficulties had to do with his or her inability to understand what was going on, with an inappropriate assessment of the level at which the child could operate in various subjects, with emotional or intellectual problems of a more general sort, with the child's interest or motivation in school matters, or with the child's culturally-based unfamiliarity with subjects being discussed. And it was at this level of rather more precise interpretation that teachers were unable to order, sort out and act on their understandings; their problems were in large measure problems of interpretation - that is, problems in not being able to interpret.

> "You know Jovan, John, and the two little Chinese girls and Zoron, I don't know whether it's their ability or language, or that they just can't perform, but since they don't respond verbally, I just can't put them in a fast group. I can't simply because I don't know if they understand what I'm trying to teach half the time. They probably don't, I don't know!"
>
> "It's hard to tell if someone is high or low in ability because of language. I can think of several people in my class who are having difficulty in coping and I don't know if it's because they are slow, lazy, emotionally disturbed, aggressive, nervous, shy or whatever."

Because the grounds for interpreting children's performance were so varied and so intertwined, the teachers at Devonshire did not regard pupils who performed poorly as necessarily low in ability or in motivation. The almost moral distinction which school systems frequently generate between "slow" students and "bright" students was less sustainable at Devonshire. As one sort of example, children who could be understood as "slow" in the conventional sense because they spoke English as their native language and did poorly in school, were for practical purposes grouped with children whose poor performance was understood in other ways:

> "They're the Anglo-Saxon children from welfare families. They too, in a sense, have language problems because they don't understand, therefore, they can't cope. They end up coming into the slower group where they can get things explained a second time and do simpler work. You might say I group for explanation and understanding and it doesn't matter if it's a slow child or one who doesn't understand English who comes for extra help, because basically, from a teaching point of view, there's no difference.

In the same way, children who were felt to be "bright" might nevertheless do poorly for a variety of understandable reasons, and have to be handled as if they were "slow".

> "I have lots of kids who are bright but can't participate or perform. Either, they can't express themselves because of language, (they don't speak English well enough) or they have emotional problems."

The teachers' inability to do much more than deal with their pupils strictly on the basis of what they could demonstrably do, as well as the obvious variety of sources for children's difficulties, underplayed the invidious and moral evaluations which, in other circumstances, can become attached to assessments of performance particularly when

they are taken as reflective of ability. As one teacher commented in objection to even the rather minimal requirements for grading:

> "We have to hand in a report saying their work is either commendable, satisfactory or having difficulty. I'm in a dilemma! I don't give them tests. How can I? They aren't all at the same level and I can't devise 30 different tests. As I get to know my kids I learn to have certain expectations from them. To me they're all satisfactory; from their positions, they are! How can I give them tests in grade 5 science when they can only read at grade 3 level? Do You see the discrepancies?"

If the necessary separation of assessments of performance from assessments of ability expressed teachers' awareness of the special difficulties of their pupils at Devonshire, as well as their own problems in adequately interpreting these difficulties, the teachers were nevertheless also aware of the extent to which their pupils' current difficulties would become the future grounds for failure. And the teachers were particularly alive to the ways in which their own current inability to get something effectively taught would eventually disadvantage those children whose high abilities might for the

moment be disguised by their inability to get along in English. For while children were regularly advanced through grades in elementary school, and while grading was therefore essentially irrelevant at this level, teachers were aware that, further on in the educational system, evaluations would be made which would have consequences for children's adult lives.

> "Come into my class, you'll see those who'll never make it. The Tonies, Nickies, all those stand right out. You can't miss them. You don't need marks to tell you... they're the future laborers of our society. You know, they've changed the structure of grading at one level of the system but what's going to happen at the next level? These kids are knocked off, and fast! Quite clearly, it's going to catch up with them and it starts from grades 1 and 2. It's not just this school, it's happening in middle class schools also. I have a son who's in grade 5. He's at the grade 4 level in reading; now, if he doesn't improve, he'll never make it to college. And teachers don't push him (because that's the new trend). But what's going to happen if he just keeps falling behind. He too will be eliminated."

> "This is where this non grading business is so inconsistent. At some point most of them are going to get knocked out."

The teachers at Devonshire thus had both general and specific reasons for wishing to be able to interpret children's classroom behavior in specific terms, and for wishing to be able to act on their interpretations. Yet the fundamental problem they experienced was an inability to interpret children's difficulties, and therefore their own, in other than general terms. And while these general terms - having mostly to do with the nature of school policies - may in fact be the most suitable explanation for their difficulties, they were not useful for teachers faced with the immediate and practical necessity of getting something effectively taught. Furthermore, the teachers' problems had not only to do with their inability to interpret and order their understandings for the practical purposes of teaching, but also with the consequences of this inability. Specifically, teachers complained of their difficulties in maintaining order and discipline in the classroom, yet these difficulties were as much a consequence as a source of teachers' problems in class.

Problems in Maintaining Order and Discipline in the Classroom:

The wide variation present in classes at Devonshire posed problems not only in interpreting particular pupils' performance but also in organizing the classroom more generally. At a practical level, teachers must develop ways of grouping their pupils in order to cope with large classes and with variations in levels of performance in different subject matters. The situation for teachers at Devonshire was doubly difficult in this respect. First, the placement of immigrant children in classes on the basis of age alone made for a wider than usual variation in levels of performance in every subject matter. Second, it was difficult, given the problems teachers faced in attempting to interpret children's capabilities and troubles, to determine the grounds on which grouping might be done. The teachers thus systematically complained of the difficulties they faced in getting their classes organized.

> "Some just don't fit into groups. What they need is individual attention which no one has time to give."

"No matter what I do in that class, I just can't get it organized. It's impossible for anything to run smoothly. I can't get any kind of routine going. I can't group them, nothing! There's just too wide a range in this class!"

"I came across a problem of grouping kids in my class last year. I couldn't seem to organize it. It was really bad! I tried all sorts of different ways but nothing worked. This year I didn't have this problem because the groups I had for reading were fairly homogeneous - according to ability, that is."

"I don't group them according to ability because I can't! I group them, but it's just for company. I have some that are real language problems, they're behind in everything and I have to give them individual work."

"I feel I just can't group because it just doesn't work. The way to work it is to keep forming groups for whatever you're doing at the moment, then break them up and form another group. The idea is to keep the grouping as flexible as possible so that they can fit anywhere at anytime."

While teachers understood their difficulties in getting their classes organized, partly in terms of the varying levels at which their pupils could do various types of work, and in terms of the special problems involved in interpreting children's troubles, they were inclined to experience these difficulties

most immediately as behavior problems, as problems in controlling the class. Teachers at Devonshire consistently complained of their problems in controlling their classes:

> "I have some who withdraw completely and some who become aggressive and troublesome to the others, and some who are just like wild animals! Talk about difficult to teach!"
>
> "Some can't participate at all in the class and they present real problems. They can only sit for so long, then they start disrupting and become aggressive."
>
> "They can't fit him into a regular grade 5. He's so far behind and he can't keep at anything for longer than 10-15 minutes. It could be because he doesn't speak English well enough, I don't know...I'm not sure. What he needs, I think, is individual attention which is something a grade 5 teacher or I (language class teacher) can't give him. You see, what happens in my class is that he knows most of the work I give the others, so he gets bored and restless and bothers everyone around him."

The situation at Devonshire was in fact understandably productive of discipline problems. The children there were faced with the problems and difficulties of learning and getting along in a

strange language, of being subjected to new rules and regulations, of coping with feelings and emotions generated in a daily recurring situation in which the meanings were not clear, of feeling criticized and inadequate, and of not being able to explain themselves or their problems adequately. The children did not necessarily understand the demands made of them, and, in this sense, their responses - ranging from withdrawal to aggressive trouble-making - proceeded as much from the situation they were in as from any more idiosyncratic grounds. And in this sense, also, discipline problems were as much a reflection of teachers' inabilities to organize their classes as productive of those inabilities.

Yet, from the teachers' point of view, the most practically-relevant result of having a large number of children in class who were "behind", or who could not, for one or another reason, participate, was the creation of discipline problems and an atmosphere not conducive to teaching. And if, as will be described in the following chapter, teachers' practical remedies for their classroom difficulties

typically took the form of removing temporarily and in a variety of ways those pupils who were most troublesome, this should be understood in the light of their wish to get something taught.

> "I'm just so glad to have him out of the class for a while. It gives me at least an hour of excellent teaching time. When he's in the class he disrupts everything."

Teaching at Devonshire:

The teachers' daily experiences clearly demonstrate that they cannot expect anything concrete in terms of "lessons learned" from a class containing too large a number of pupils with diverse backgrounds. They find it difficult to function and bear the frustrations involved in knowing that at this stage of the pupils' development they have no right to expect that they will produce anything which, to them, means progress. Teachers continuously stressed:

> "Teachers don't succeed here, no matter what their intentions are. We have a very sympathetic group of teachers, I think, but they can't think of teaching, they can only think of numbers to control. I really worry about Jane sometimes; she goes home feeling guilty because she thinks she's not really

> teaching those who could go ahead. But how can she with a class her size!"
>
> "You must expect nothing. You just keep working with them until they get restless."
>
> "You mustn't have any expectations with regard to performance, behavior or anything!"

The teacher is faced with a situation in which she is unable to implement what she has been trained for and what she conceives as being essential. Her role is to teach content and recognize ability. Yet, she is confronted with a situation where a strictly age-graded system, large classes, and ethnic and cultural diversities combine to make it difficult for her to act on the basis of her perceived role. In part, her complaints are general ones addressed to the features of the situation she is in:

> "Some of these kids really don't belong here (in grade 2). I don't know where they should be, but they have to be taken way back, like almost at the nursery school level. They should be working with visual materials, pictures so they can learn to make associations. They've never learned to make associations! Like mother goose, for example, or any rhyme that kids usually learn. They build on these rhymes and learn to make other associations. I think they really need this kind of training."

> "At the most teachers should have 20 kids per class here. The problems in this school are compounded because it's an immigrant school and I think the teacher really gets a raw deal. Oh sure, there are problems in other schools but they aren't as intense as here."

And in part her complaints, out of exasperation, are focused on the pupils, who embody in specifically troublesome ways the combined results of all these features of the situation at Devonshire.

> "It's the attitudes some of these kids have! They've just got to learn what we expect from them!"

> "He's impossible! When he decides he doesn't want to do something, that's it! He won't! We as adults should be able to decide what we think they ought to learn and do."

Complaining of the chaos in their classrooms, the teachers saw both the necessity and impossibility of providing their pupils with the kind of individual attention which would combine love and affection with a correct understanding of the child's emotional and intellectual situation, an understanding which would ideally also express an accurate regard for the ethnic and cultural differences present in the class.

To some extent, teachers could give their pupils individual attention either directly or by calling on the services of volunteer workers.

> "Could you come in and play with Mina. All she needs is a lot of attention... You know, hugging and kissing. That's all! I don't have time for that, they're so many others in the class and she's always crying for my attention."
>
> "I have some who hide under their desks and cry until I go and get them and hold them for a while."

For the most part, however, teachers' attempts to solve their classroom problems were necessarily directed at finding ways of more effectively handling the class as a whole. The following chapter describes these attempts which were an integral feature of teaching at Devonshire.

CHAPTER III

TINKERING AND MAKING DO

In the previous chapter I have described the situation in which teachers find themselves at the Devonshire school, particularly focusing on the difficulties they experienced in attempting to interpret and assess the abilities of their pupils. In this chapter, I shall describe several provisional strategies employed by teachers in their both collective and individual attempts to handle the ambiguities of their teaching situation. These strategies, emerging out of a process of trial and error and having at best an only temporary effectiveness, can most accurately be understood in terms of tinkering, patching up, making do.

Some relatively structured tinkering was done on a school-wide basis. While the assignment of children to grade-levels was inflexible, being done

on the basis of age, there was some flexibility in the assignment of children to teachers within a given grade-level. Before the school year started, the principal met with each teacher to evaluate her personality, teaching methods, etc., and to discuss children (with specific problems) who would be placed in her classroom. It was an evaluative process attempting to match the teacher's philosophy, approach and personality with the pupil's problems and personality, as well as to more evenly distribute difficult pupils.

In addition to these informal assessment and placement procedures, the school had a formal grouping structure which has only in part been described.

1. Children are grouped on ability within grade levels in math. They are assigned to fast, regular and modified groups on the basis of the teacher's judgment. The principal assigns teachers to teach various groups. Only the grade 3 teachers have opted not to participate in this grouping system.

2. There are the two special classes for those classed as "educable retarded" or "emotionally disturbed". (The extent to which these classes are used will be discussed in the following pages.)

3. A language class has been set up to teach new immigrant children enough English to be put into regular classrooms.

4. Remedial classes are given to pupils who have particular problems in either reading or math in grades 4, 5 and 6.

5. An individualized reading program referred to as the S.W. Sullivan system has recently been implemented. Students are pretested and grouped accordingly within each class.

Within these general outlines, however, teachers both collectively and individually improvised various ways of coping with the diversities present in their classes, at times employing this general framework as one of several resources for solving problems.

Collective Attempts at Coping with Teaching Problems: Tinkering

Exchanging Pupils: Students are not only grouped on ability in math and switched from one group to another within grade levels for that subject, but also some teachers participate in an "informal exchange system" in other subjects and use criteria other than ability and language to determine who goes where. This exchange process which developed

as a means of coping with a heterogeneous population was detailed and complex but did not necessarily occur in all grade levels; its use largely depended on the relationships between teachers. In the fifth grade teachers indicated the following:

> (Do you exchange pupils in subjects other than in math?)
> "Yes, in French. The teachers in 3 of the grade fives got together and we each teach a group (which is) either fast, regular or slow. Here again, there is a flow between the classes because some pupils don't perform adequately (or consistently) and they have to be switched."
>
> (Who decides who is to teach different groups?)
> "In French the decision as to who teaches which group depends essentially on a kind of collective agreement, for the teacher who teaches slow math doesn't want slow French. Since I teach slow math, there's no way I want slow French. There's an attempt to equalize the work load among the teachers."
>
> (Why did you decide to group in French?)
> We were really confused so we decided to meet and discuss how we could divide the classes for French. But since this method has been set up, again, the groups started to break down like they do in math, so we just keep exchanging pupils depending on how they perform."

The criteria for grouping and exchanging pupils varied. In bargaining over pupils and tasks, teachers used criteria which had to do, not just with a child's performance, but with his or her personality, general behavior and ability to understand English. For example, if a teacher could manage a pupil better in her class, then he was placed with her, regardless of his level of ability and/or performance. Although teachers liked to take the children's best interests into consideration, should they be faced with having to cope with difficult personality problems in more than one group, they complained:

> "There's no way I'll have Jimmie in both my math and French group!"

The obvious principles of exchange which apply to social behavior generally, also apply to the teachers. Both parties had to benefit by the bargaining - needs had to be jointly satisfied. The patterns of negotiation which existed depended on the teachers involved, the cooperation between them and the kinds of pupils they had in their class. If a request on the part of one teacher entailed

considerable inconvenience to another, negotiations did not take place. Only those who felt competent enough to handle their situation or those who were bound by tradition and were threatened by change would not participate in this exchange system. A teacher explained:

> "There's an arrangement between the teachers. If a kid doesn't fit in a teacher's group she could send the kid back but that doesn't happen if you want a favour in return. Whether you return or accept a kid depends on the kind of relationship you have with the teachers involved. You find this happens when you exchange kids for math too. Last year I couldn't participate in this kind of thing because one of the teachers wouldn't allow any exchanges with her pupils. To her that meant defeat. You must remember the high turnover of staff makes this kind of thing difficult to organize and maintain. And if you don't have a kind of arrangement with the other teachers in your grade-level then you want recourse to the principal who can impose some viable rules."

> "The only way you can have a workable situation is to have cooperative teachers working in the same grade-level as you. It's cooperation for the benefit of all which is important."

The object was to get relief from pressures. If she could not do so with the other teachers, then she wanted the alternative to be able to call on the principal who represented authority and could impose rules and regulations which might, at least in part,

lessen conflict. If nothing else, there would be formal definitions of the situation and prescribed actions based on those definitions.

As the school year progressed, this type of exchange system and cooperation did not persist for this group of teachers. The major complaint was that the constant flow of pupils between classes gave them less, rather than more control over the situation. When one teacher refused to continue to participate in the relationship, exchanges ceased.

> "I don't know if it's me or if it's just this school or if I'd experience the same problems in any other school, but I just can't cope with some of the things going on. There's just too many kids walking in and out of the class, constantly disrupting! I'm beginning to think that maybe it's all these exchanges going on, and all these other kids just barging in on me. I can't control them! It's not my own kids, it's these others who create the problems. I can control my own but the minute the others run in they just disregard what's going on and take over. What do you think, should I ask if I could close my door and not participate in exchanges any more? Do you think I'd have less problems?"

Exchanging Work Loads: Teachers in the sixth grade level participated in a different sort of exchange system which involved exchanging the teaching of

different subject matters rather than the exchange of particular pupils. One teacher would teach an area of a certain subject to all students in that grade level to reduce her work load in terms of teaching content. Grouping of the class did not occur here since the teachers did not know the pupils well enough to determine how they should be subdivided.

This system too had its disadvantages. Teachers indicated that students who performed well for their own class teacher did not necessarily do so for the exchange teacher. Also, the teacher could never spend enough time with the students to learn what to expect from them or what demands to make. She therefore, had to direct her teaching to the middle stream. Teachers explained:

> "This kind of exchange is good in a sense because the grade sixes are treated as one grade and they get to know or learn what different teachers' expectations are; and at the same time they learn to interact with and respect all three teachers."
>
> (Do you have difficulty in determining who may have language problems in these other classes you teach?)
> "You can never really get to know the other pupils as well as you do your own, and even if you do, and you know that they have certain problems, you can't really give them

> extra help because you don't have the time. There are a few I know who are good students. Their teachers tell me; but when I go into their class they don't do good work for me, and the same goes on in my class."

What was important for the teacher, then, was to find a way to handle the demands made on her. Organizational constraints, educational goals, and daily teaching tasks created a situation in which she had to develop an effective plan of action. Attempts to collectively organize and fit together activities in order to create some viable working structure were in effect attempts to develop techniques flexible enough to maintain some order and control. Conceivably, the relatively loose structure which was developed was desirable to the extent that it allowed an out for the teacher who was unable to cope with teaching problems. The consequence, however, was that the teacher was either faced with a greater discipline problem or with pupils who had to learn to meet new expectations and demands they rarely understood in the first place. The problems of numbers, diversities, discipline, control, teaching, remained whether she "opened" or "closed" her door, or "lessened" her work load.

Individual Solutions to Teaching Problems: Making do

In addition to the kinds of loosely-organized and collective efforts at problem-solving exampled above, teachers improvised their own solutions to particular problems, employing as informal resource material school services ostensibly and presumably designed for other purposes. School services used in this fashion included open gym classes, drama classes, the speech therapist, "special" classes designed for the "educable retarded" and "emotionally disturbed", part-time volunteer workers and, less successfully, a group of social workers acting as consultants to the school.

The open gym and drama classes could be used as stop-gap measures. If a child became "unmanageable" during a class, then the teacher could choose to send him to open gym; or, if it was Wednesday and the drama teacher was in the school, a "troublesome" or "withdrawn" child could be referred to that class and encouraged to "act" out his problems. Because the "special classes" were understood by teachers

as a "dead end" intended for those with serious learning problems, they were reluctant to refer pupils to this more than stop-gap measure in dealing with troublesome children. Yet the decision to refer a child to a special class relied somewhat more than usually on the teacher's judgment since, because of the language barrier, the sorts of educational testing relied on in most schools to warrant classifying a child as "educable retarded" or "emotionally disturbed" could not be relied on here. In this sense, the special classes served as a last-resort solution, however reluctantly employed, for children whose problems of intelligence, language or behavior sufficiently distinguished them from others.

> "You know, there are so many kids who have different quirks. Last year I had one sitting at the back of the class, constantly singing or making different wierd noises or he'd hop on his chair, sat there making like a bird. Like the kid was really out of it! Emotionally disturbed? So what are you suppose to do with him? Special! Special!"

> "I had a little boy who kept crawling under his desk and I had to go and get him each time. Well, he wasn't playing under the desk, he was actually hiding and I'd have to beg him or bribe him to come out. If he wasn't under the desk he was crying

> his heart out in the back of the class. I'd have to drop everything and run to him and put my arms around him. It became impossible to cope with him. I looked into his background, his mother was a snake dancer or something like that, and he had several fathers. Because he needed so much individual attention and I couldn't cope with him in a regular classroom situation I had to refer him to a special. I'm not sure I agree with this kind of class for someone like him, but there seems to be no choice here."
>
> "There are so many children like him in this school, I think it's such a pity. I'm sure he's still experiencing difficulty expressing himself in English. But who knows what a good solution would be. If you put them in a regular class they just fall so far behind that you can't keep them in that class anymore, if you put them in a special class it's a dead end..."

It was in fact this blend of possible explanations which made referring a child to a special class especially difficult, for the teachers at Devonshire were more than usually aware of the arbitrariness of the designation "educable retarded" or "emotionally disturbed" in this setting. Yet because these decisions were made on some grounds, and because the grounds for acting oddly proceeded from a variety of sources, the "special classes" at

Devonshire served more obviously as a structural solution to organizational problems than in schools where classifications like "educable retarded" and "emotionally disturbed are supported and supportable through testing.

Perhaps the clearest illustration of this use of specialized services as a resource for handling other sorts of problems is provided by the use teachers made of the speech therapist. Trained to handle speech problems, and accustomed at other schools to handling referrals whose problems were clearly defined along that dimension, the speech therapist, speaking of her experience at Devonshire, complained:

> "I don't think I can even group them because their problems aren't really speech problems. They come to me and just sit there. I don't even know if some of them can even speak English!"
>
> "Hardly any of these children have lisps or even stutter...the children I see have more than just speech problems. Things are generally clearer at the other school I go to (a lower middle class school). Kids there stutter and have lisps, but here there's just this vague problem everyone seems to have, and I don't think it's just the ones I see, either."

While the use of recreational and other services to handle classroom problems bent the more specialized intentions of these services to more general purposes, the teachers were, in other instances, able to employ rather amorphously defined resources to more specific ends. Volunteer workers, who could be used in a variety of ways - to do clerical work, to assist in the classroom, to take children out of the classroom for individual work- were in fact almost exclusively used in the last mentioned way, providing teachers with a way to get those who had difficulties participating out of the class, thus creating more teaching time and fewer problems to cope with. Teachers in fact explicitly regarded volunteer workers as resource material, there to service the teacher in the ways she saw fit, a conception which did not necessarily mesh with the intentions of the volunteer workers, many of whom were there for the purposes of research:

> "I don't know what it is about her (a volunteer) but she really upsets me, I know what my kids need and here she walks into my class and starts telling me my method is wrong!"

While the volunteer workers therefore might not fully share the vision of themselves as perfectly malleable resource material, they retained their own perogatives at least in the sense that they did not need to continue to service the purposes of those teachers who were not in some way willing to service their own purposes for being volunteers. In my own experience as a volunteer, for example, I did not return to help those teachers who were not willing to serve my purposes by discussing problems that I or they were experiencing in the school. In this sense, the teachers were able to employ volunteer workers as resource material for solving their problems as long as the volunteers could manage to fit this use to their own ends. It is likely in fact that the volunteers' own other purposes for being at Devonshire enhanced their willingness to be used as teachers saw fit, for they depended on the good will of the teachers to do their own work and did not need to be motivated by the intrinsic interest of the tasks they were assigned.

This reciprocity and complementarity of perspective did not, however, characterize the relations between the teachers and the social work consultants at Devonshire. These consultants were at Devonshire as part of a "community health project" sponsored by the University Settlement, YWCA and the Mental Health Project in Montreal. Students in the McGill School of Social Work, a psychiatric resident and a psychiatric consultant were involved in the project. The aims of this project were, broadly speaking, to make the school a community centered institution. As one social worker explained:

> "We are trying to get the school to open it's doors to the parents, give them a chance to get involved in educating their children. The teachers, I think, just don't understand this kind of approach. They close all opportunities to show the parents their worth. They feel it's the parents that are to blame for the children's problems. We're trying to show that this is not so. These are not necessarily culturally <u>deprived</u> children, they may be culturally different, but not deprived. A lot of these parents can contribute to the school, their different cultures...So what we are aiming at, in this project, is community involvement in the school, to help the parents or immigrants feel that they are valuable. The school should serve the community it's in. Don't you think?"

The quote illustrates several of the assumptions made by the social workers: first, that their approach is more positive and conducive to change; second, that the role of the teacher is that of "community-caretaker" and third, that the teachers and school administrators are unaware of the dynamics of the neighborhood they serve and the different roles the school plays in the community. A major premise underlying their orientation is that the school is an instrument of social and personal change, suggesting therefore, that the school alter the way it transmits knowledge and values.

From the teachers' point of view, the orientation of the social workers contained an implicit, often explicit, and somewhat self-serving critique of their own orientations and activities. And they were thus disinclined to regard the social workers' activities as helpful. In addition, however, there existed a number of discontinuities between the perspectives of the social workers and those of the teachers.

The teachers did not regard themselves as unaware of problems in the community and felt particularly sensitive to the possibility of imposing middle class values on different cultural groups.

> "A major problem is the community. It's a very difficult problem; you know we've changed our methods and expectations but the parents don't understand this. We send report cards home and most of them don't understand what these reports say. Nobody fails, and we don't grade them excellent, very good or no good. Now I can't call a meeting and stand up on a platform with a clenched fist and tell them what I'm trying to do and explain why. I feel we still have a lot to learn about their cultures, ideas about education, etc. It's like my superiors trying to tell me how to run my school and for that matter telling the children to learn X when they don't want to learn X or maybe can't learn it. You must remember you can't have any expectations with these children. Teachers also have to learn this. A lot of them have difficulty adjusting and they have to go on and teach somewhere else."

> "There are a lot of problems here and we can't solve them by ourselves; we have to turn to resourceful people. It's not that we want to turn this school into a middle class school, not at all. But as an inner-city school we want to learn more about the different immigrants, their values, culture, in order to improve our methods."

And this point of view served not simply as a defense against the critique they felt was being made of them, but as a critique, in turn, of the social workers' activities. For example, having called on the social workers for help with a particular child, the teachers found that:

> "...what they did was go to this kid's home! Well! Were the parents insensed! They came down here and let the principal have it. You have to be very careful; this was a Chinese kid and you just don't walk into a Chinese home and say I want to talk to you about your son!"
>
> "...they've gone to that home so many times; they've questioned, analyzed, practically dissected this family into bits and pieces but did nothing to help the kid. What could they do? All they did was antagonize the parents so much that they wouldn't have anything to do with them anymore!"

The social workers' interpretations of teaching problems, the school's role and the extent to which the community could be involved in the school, were made for the practical purposes of implementing the aims of the project. That is to say, from the point of view of the social workers,

specific activities were geared to facilitate the accomplishment of their tasks which was the development of a community school. The general consensus on the part of the teaching staff, however, was that you could not invade people's privacy unless the child concerned had very specific and definite problems which they felt parents should be told about. From the teacher's perspective there are rules and practices constituting school policy which cannot so easily be changed.

> "It's not the school's place to tell parents what to do with their children or even to examine what their home environment should be. It could be very embarrassing to the family!"

Differences in perspective also existed on an organizational level. This became clear in observations made at a meeting between a psychiatrist and teachers. The question being discussed was how the psychiatrist could most effectively serve the teachers' needs.

> (Teacher) "I don't exactly understand what you're trying to say. So what if we have a problem. So we come to you. Then what. What are you going to do? Take the problem away? I have 9 problems! Nine

> specials in my class. One of them is always joking. Everything is one big joke for him! So I come to you and tell you about him. What are you going to do? You can't stop him from laughing."
>
> (Psychiatrist) "Well no, but maybe we can discuss why he's like that and if you become aware of his problems, you might be able to cope with him better."
>
> (Teacher) "Yes, but making me aware that he has problems doesn't make me feel better or less frustrated when I'm trying to teach the others in the class while he's laughing."

The psychiatrist is interested in therapeutic relationships. From his point of view, analysis and insight into problems lessen conflict. The teacher, on the other hand, wants immediate relief. What can she do to maintain control so that she can teach?

A similar situation existed with the social workers. One of the teachers asked the psychiatrist what all the social workers were doing in the school. His answer was that they were to be used as resource people. Teachers' reactions were:

> "Resource people! By definition a resource person knows more than I know about the field I'm in. Do they? First let them

> experience what it's like to teach 30 kids in one classroom, then they can become resource people! I don't doubt that they can help, but let them help where they can and not by sitting and writing notes!"
>
> "If those social workers want to help, then I think they'd better start asking us what we really need or what we would like them to do around here."

The social workers with their background training, evidently do not share a practical understanding of teaching tasks. The teachers' desires to get through the day with the minimum number of crises situations and their objectives of getting something taught, and the social workers' and psychiatrists' concerns with long-term developmental change are at opposite ends of a continuum. For the teacher, only those who have had experience in teaching are competent enough to do the work and to judge what should be taught and how. In a sense, the social worker is viewed as an outsider attempting to control the teachers' occupational behavior.

> "Some have given her (the social worker) the information she wants; they don't really understanding what's happening.

> Others are very aware of the obvious issues. They aren't so easily conned. You see it's teacher vs social worker. The social workers feel they are more qualified to cope with learning problems. It's difficult to say that they wouldn't do a better job, but first let them work as teachers and then let them set themselves up as authorities and tell us what to do with our kids."

Other complaints illustrate the teachers' feelings that the social workers do not know enough about the situation they are called on to modify:

> "There are so many interesting little incidences that occur in an environment of this kind. It's so easy to set yourself up as an authority without really experiencing the problems first."

> "I can't see how they're supposed to help improve teaching here by sitting in the back of the class observing. Besides who can teach with someone sitting there criticizing! And they say they're not here to criticize, but to help. If I were sitting in the back of the class, I'd criticize, so why shouldn't they!"

> "What are all these social workers running around with their little notebooks for observing. What is observing doing to help us? Do they want to help us? If so, then where the hell are they? Why don't they ask <u>us</u> what we need?"

> "A social worker just came to see me. They are so stupid! It's amazing! They go about doing things in such a half assed way. At the beginning of the year they came to us and asked us to refer kids we thought would

> benefit from a group. But you can't just refer kids. Do you think they'll just go to their groups! They want to form groups and they have no idea of how to go about doing it. Don't they realize that if you want to help you have to first form a relationship with these kids, they'll come to you and tell you all their problems then. Children aren't like adults, they'll tell you all you want to know about their problems, but first you have to get close to them, show them you like them and you care. I told her, if she wants a group, then she should come into my class and get familiar with the kids, see what happens in class, then she could form her group. But you know how it is. What do I know? I'm just a teacher!"

Briefly then, the tension that was generated between the teachers and the social workers had to do with their commitments to different professional ideologies, differing task orientations and background training. Both provide professional services and pride themselves in their judgments in their area; they orient themselves to solving specific problems based on this judgment. Butthe social workers, when trying to apply their expertise in a school, are "stepping" on the teachers' territory. From the teachers' point of view, their knowledge is based on theory and not on practical experiences. The teachers see themselves as having lots of practical experience and therefore a hard won

expertise, while social workers only have theories, mostly inappropriate when applied to real situations. If the social workers were oriented to the particular problems which existed at the Devonshire school, they were nevertheless oriented to these problems in such a way as to be unusable as a resource for the immediate problems faced by teachers in the classroom. They could not, like the volunteer workers, be employed in direct ways to alleviate the teachers' problems at hand; nor could they, like the speech therapist and recreational classes, be used in less direct ways.

To summarize, school life at Devonshire was "loose" and teachers, faced with a number of problems in the classroom, attempted to handle, if not solve, these problems in a variety of ways. These attempts consisted of what I have called tinkering - attempts to alter in small ways the structure within which teaching is done, and what I have called making do - attempts to improvise and bend, out of the resources at hand, informal and temporary measures for dealing

with immediate classroom problems. While generally unsuccessful, in the sense that these attempts generated problems - discipline problems, problems of relationship with other teachers and staff members - without serving as much more than stop-gap measures, they nevertheless serve to illustrate the variety of ways in which the teachers at Devonshire attempted to stabilize, define and order their daily life in class.

CHAPTER IV

CONCLUSIONS

This has been a case study describing the problems posed for teachers at the Devonshire school, a school in which the pupils were predominantly the children of recent immigrants of varying nationalities. I have described the Devonshire school largely from the point of view of the teachers, focusing on their problems in interpreting pupils' capabilities and troubles. The data indicated that; the placement of children into grade levels on the basis of age rather than previous schooling and knowledge, combined with the cultural and linguistic heterogeneity of the pupil population, generated organizational and teaching problems. That is, since children came from varied educational backgrounds, age was not an indication of what they were likely to know. Further, there was a wide variation in the children's ability to understand or speak English, such that the teacher could not be certain if her pupils were

experiencing language-problems or learning-problems. In effect, for the teacher to be able to recognize ability the pupil had to be able to express himself in English and through this culture's content.

The teacher, then, could not call on her practical experience and typifications to compare, classify and group her pupils. Grouping assumes homogeneity of some kind; it assumes that the pupils' experiences are similar, at least comparable. By implication, their social psychological experiences and capacities must be similar and they must be able to cope with the demands of the teachers and participate in the class. Lacking this sort of homogeneity to rely on, then, the teacher had to develop attitudes and techniques for the practical purpose of coping with the multidimensional differences of the pupils in order to get something effectively taught.

The teachers' attempts at sorting and classifying a culturally and linguistic hetergeneous class

were generally ineffective. Interactional problems experienced by both teachers and pupils prevented effective communication and stable definitions of the situation. From the teacher's point of view, it would have been desirable to differentiate and group pupils on the basis of presumed ability to do certain tasks, so that she could teach more effectively. But, in this situation she had to develop alternatives. These consisted of provisional arrangements with other teachers which had the character of tinkering with the structure within which teaching was done. Teachers also attempted to "make-do" improvising, out of various sorts of school services, resources for handling problem pupils. These alternative strategies were less than fully successful; attempts to "make-do" only temporarily handled troublesome pupils by removing them from class without however solving their special problems, and created problems in turn for those to whom they were sent. Furthermore, attempts to "make-do" did not address the issue of how to most

effectively teach those who remained in class. Similarly, attempts at "tinkering" depended on cooperation which broke down when exchanges generated discipline problems. "Tinkering", in this sense, addressed the issue of how to effectively teach those in the class, but generated a larger number of troublesome pupils.

The teachers' relative ineffectiveness in their attempts to organize and change their classroom situation is more fundamentally due to structural variables which they could not control. The centralization of the school system's decision-making structure - governmental regulations, the policies and politics of the school board, available funds - all affect the classroom experience. To implement changes at the classroom-level, then, would require educational reforms directly affecting the school's organizational structure.

CHAPTER V

APPENDIX

Methodology and Research Process:

This single case study of an inner-city, elementary school was not intended to test hypotheses or to conduct a predesigned questionnaire or interviews. The intent was rather to explore some general processes which occur in a school where the majority of the pupils are recent immigrants. Data for the study were systematically collected through participant observation, volunteer work and unstructured interviewing, over a seven month period. Daily observations and participation occurred over a three month period, then twice or more weekly, depending on my work load. The research developed gradually with the gathering of data and the developing of an analysis which came to focus on questions about teachers and classroom organization.

From the outset my acceptance in the school to do research was conditional. I had to do volunteer work in return for any information I wanted to collect. Several factors determined my acceptance by teachers. First, I started a new school year along with many new teachers so that any ignorance I inadvertently showed about teaching generally, or the school in particular, was not misinterpreted. On the contrary, teachers who had taught at Devonshire in previous years were most anxious to "clue me in". Second, teachers became aware that I was consistent and serious about working with pupils and they began seeking my help rather than vice versa. Third, my intense involvement provided me with insights into the complexity of the teacher's role which I never would have achieved through observation alone. In addition, my activities as a volunteer gave me enough confidence to participate in informal discussions, primarily at lunch-time and recess. These provided me with additional information which I recorded along with observations made during volunteer work.

This type of qualitative research method combined with the role of volunteer allowed me to study problems teachers experienced from the teachers' point of view and in terms of what seemed of greatest importance to them. I worked with children who could not "participate" or "fit" into groups or regular classrooms. Acting intuitively, I attempted to help these pupils express themselves in English, feeling that if I could work through some of the language barriers they would eventually be able to participate in class. Any demands teachers made, I tried to comply with; I questioned only those teachers whose purposes I had served and felt I would not antagonize.

In addition to gathering data through participant observation and volunteer work, I made use of indirect interviewing techniques. For the most part, my sensitivity to the teachers' feelings and subsequent development of "indirect" interviewing was due to a rare opportunity to observe other researchers in the school. In particular, these

were social workers involved in a mental health project. Implicit in their approach was an evaluation of teachers, based on their point of view, which produced negative reactions. For example, teachers pointed out:

> "I can't stand that girl's approach! Did you see the way she came up to me. It's interesting because basically I'm in agreement with the kind of thing they're trying to do with this school but as a matter of principle I won't give in to her. I don't understand why she can't be sincere. I find she's sly and suspicious."

For me, the above data contained relevant information for my own field research. I had to be sincere to gain the teachers' friendship and confidence; I made a point of not challenging her position, ideological concepts, methods and I made no demands. Inadvertently, teachers whose pupils I worked with gave me feedback on other teachers' reactions to the social workers. Since I shared certain experiences with them and could identify with their frustrations, they felt free to express themselves. My interest and questioning with reference to teaching, school organization and general problems was accepted by most teachers.

The direction of informal interviews and the questions asked were dependent on observations made. General questions I started with were: What happens at Devonshire where the majority of the pupils were recent immigrants? Why is there such great demand for volunteers? It seemed reasonable to infer that the teachers needed some extra help and/or that certain pupils needed special attention; but why were volunteers in such great demand here.

Generally speaking, I had no specific ideas about what my central focus should be or what procedures should be taken. I listened to complaints teachers had about pupils, problems they had to cope with in their classrooms and to specific demands they made on me as a volunteer. I recorded as many events as possible, selecting relevant events on the basis of what seemed important for the teacher, as well as what I thought were related issues to their comments. Accounts of conversations in "verbatim" form were recorded at the end of each day. As the research problem and possible working hypotheses emerged and became clearer, I recorded only those

events and conversations which were directly relevant.

The first general focus which emerged was that of the school as an organization where immigrant children were being trained and assimilated through the educational process. From the observations made of this process, questions I began concentrating on were based on the broad categories of the teacher's educational goals, organizational goals, and the contextual variables of the neighborhood. The decision to look at these categories led me to examine organizational features such as Regulation 1, pupil-teacher ratio, and their effects on teaching and classroom organization.

The atmosphere at Devonshire was generally chaotic, the noise level, littering and general disorder, incredible. Everyone seemed to feel that teaching at Devonshire was certainly more difficult and different from teaching in a middle class school.

> "If you went into a middle class school you wouldn't see the mess you see here. No one would let them get away with

> throwing sandwiches in the halls and spilling milk or spitting on the floor. Here we're just not sure what we should do."

The basic questions became: Why did discipline, required for teaching, break down? Why could the teachers not agree on a common perspective? This problem indirectly led to questions about grouping children of various cultural backgrounds and previous schooling and how teachers had difficulty interpreting pupils' behaviors, abilities, etc. The pupils I worked with provided further evidence of the complexity in understanding what specific problems certain immigrant children experience and what one should do to lessen conflict and help them adapt to a classroom situation.

Thus by focusing on a problem which was of particular interest to the teachers, the basic conflict in interpreting, sorting and labelling of a varied student population became clearer. Cultural, ethnic and language diversities combined with existing organizational constraints generated an ambiguous situation which teachers had to adapt to, so as to be able to get on with the task of teaching.

Strategies which they developed to manage their situation also became of interest and were therefore recorded and described.

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