LOSING TOUCH: THE EARLY SCHOOL LEAVING OF FOUR YOUNG PORTUGUESE-CANADIAN MEN

by

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ABSTRACT

Approximately 25% of students in Ontario secondary schools leave with no secondary school diploma and enter the workforce (King, Warren, King, Brook, & Kocher, 2009). This study pertains to some of these students.

Early school leaving continues to be an issue that garners much attention from administrators, educators and academics. In this study I review the existing literature on risk factors relating to early school leaving while examining the role of social context on educational aspirations and expectations. Research findings (Alberta Learning, 2001; Ferguson, Tilleczek, Boydell, & Rummens, 2005; Satchwell, 2004) show that early school leaving is a long process of disengagement that arises from multiple factors associated with experiences both inside and outside of school. In this study I carry out a qualitative analysis of both school and non-school related risk factors deemed to be significant to the early leaving of four young Portuguese-Canadian men.

Their stories attest to the complexity of the phenomenon as they affirm the impact of both school and non-school related factors on early school leaving such as irrelevant curriculum, learning community, socio-economic status, and social context. In recounting their stories, and analyzing them through Bourdieu and Passeron’s (1979) understanding of “cultural capital” and “habitus,” I provide insights in this study into how administrators, educators and policymakers alike may make learning more meaningful and authentic in order to curb early school leaving.
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DEDICATION

This study is dedicated to the four participants. Their willingness to openly speak to me made this possible. Without them, this study would not exist. Thank you!
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CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

Three years ago, before I started my Master’s of Education, I had an interesting conversation with a friend about his early school leaving. When I asked him why he had decided to leave secondary school before obtaining a diploma, the answer I received was, “Why would I study if I can work construction and make $30 an hour”? I had absolutely no response, and instead shrugged my shoulders. His answer made me re-evaluate a phenomenon I had been witnessing for a long time. Growing up as a Portuguese-Canadian, many of my male, Portuguese-Canadian peers, acquaintances and relatives did not finish secondary school and, instead, entered the workforce. I understood how working full-time could be financially attractive, but I did not understand why so many of the young, Portuguese-Canadian men who left school did so to work in the skilled trades.

Having grown up in a working-class family, with my father working in the construction industry, I know how physically demanding his line of work is. Although my father never complained, he worked long hours in the blistering heat and shuddering cold. Why would these young men leave school for the prospect of working in harsh conditions at a job that was physically exhausting?

The conversation with my friend not only made me think back to my father’s time in the construction industry, but also to a discussion I had with my father while in secondary school. When talking to him about the difficulties I was experiencing looking for summer employment, my father said, “If you were a boy, you could work with me on the job in the summer.” This recollection made me question the role social context plays in educational trajectories. Could it be that in a largely working-class community, young Portuguese-Canadian men were influenced
by their social context? Is educational attainment, in addition to experiences with school, also a function of the characteristics specific to one’s social context?

I felt compelled to attend graduate school to research the early school leaving phenomenon among young Portuguese-Canadian men. However, as I progressed in my graduate program, I came to understand that early school leaving is a complex phenomenon, and social context is only one of many risk factors—an expression used in the literature to describe factors associated with early school leaving. Students may be at-risk of leaving due to a multitude of factors, such as curricula perceived as irrelevant and negative school climate. What also emerged was the notion that early school leaving is a long process that stems from educational disengagement. Students do not leave school on a whim, but instead have been disengaged and disaffected for a considerable time prior to leaving. It is during this phase of disaffection that students are oftentimes labelled to be “at-risk”.

**Definition of Terms**

In this thesis, I employ the terms at-risk, disengaged, disaffected, early school leaving and early school leavers to refer to certain groups of students and the process of leaving school without a secondary school diploma.

The term, “at-risk” as defined by the Ontario Ministry of Education (2003) refers to students who may not successfully complete secondary school because they: (a) are performing below the provincial standard (earning marks in the 50s and low 60s); (b) do not have the foundations to be successful in the new curriculum; and (c) are disengaged for a variety of reasons, which tend to be expressed through several types of withdrawal behaviours such as low academic achievement, course failures and truancy. However, risk factors fluctuate over time, and students may be at-risk at any given time (Barr & Parrett, 1995; Ferguson, Tilleczek, Boydell, & Rummens, 2005). Thus, it is extremely important that preventative and intervention programs be established to re-engage at-risk youth so as to deter early school leaving.
The term “disengaged” refers to a student who has lost interest in what he or she is learning. A student may be disengaged from curricular content, but not necessarily at-risk of leaving school early. For example, a student may not be interested in his or her required mathematics course, but may be engaged in his or her French course.

“Disaffection” refers to a student who has lost the desire to learn and has become resistant to engaging in the learning process. Researchers, such as Riley and Rustique-Forrester (2002), however, tell us that disaffected students are no longer interested in learning not because they are not capable of learning, but because they are not interested in what is being taught and how it is being taught.

At-risk students tend to be both disengaged and disaffected. It is both the lack of interest and the resistance to engaging in the learning process that heightens the probability of early school leaving. The term “early school leaving” refers to the actual process of leaving secondary school without a diploma.

A student who has left school early is known as an “early school leaver.” Although there is no universally accepted definition for those who leave school early, the term early school leaver has been adopted in this study to refer to this specific group. Early school leavers are former at-risk students who left school without obtaining a secondary school diploma and have not returned to any form of education to receive their diploma.

In data relating to at-risk characteristics among Portuguese-Canadian students one notes that they had: (a) lower achievement levels in the Intermediate/Secondary panels when compared to other ethnic minority groups, (b) the highest percentages of Grade 9 at-risk youth according to credit accumulation, and (c) the highest dropout rate at 43% (Brown, 2006; Brown & Sinay, 2008). Furthermore, in other research (Ornstein, 2006) it is suggested that the educational qualifications among Portuguese-Canadian community members are quite low. Roughly 22.5% of Portuguese-Canadians between the ages of 18–24 are not in school full-time and have not completed high school and approximately 33% between the ages of 25–34 had not completed
high school (Ornstein, 2006). Of these Portuguese-Canadians who have not obtained a secondary school diploma, a large proportion is male. Evidence suggests that approximately 20% more young female Portuguese-Canadians have a secondary school diploma when compared to young, male Portuguese-Canadians (Statistics Canada, 2001), and nearly double the number of young, female Portuguese-Canadians in comparison to their male colleagues have a university degree (Statistics Canada, 2001). These statistics make apparent the continual low educational attainment within the male segment of the Portuguese-Canadian community.

Purpose

The purpose of this study is threefold. First, to understand the early school leaving phenomenon among four young, Portuguese-Canadian men. Second, to examine the role of social context on early school leaving. Third, to suggest avenues of exploration for both educators and researchers so as to better support those considering early school leaving.

Research Questions

As a Portuguese-Canadian who witnessed first-hand the early school leaving phenomenon among young Portuguese-Canadians, I wanted to gain an understanding of their motivations for leaving school. However, I was also curious as to whether their particular social context (i.e., membership and identification as a Portuguese-Canadian) impacted their leaving. For these two reasons, my study is guided by the following questions:

- How have school related risk factors experienced by young, Portuguese-Canadian men led to their early school leaving?
- How have non-school related risk factors experienced by young, Portuguese-Canadian men led to their early school leaving?
- How does membership within the Portuguese-Canadian community lead to early school leaving among young Portuguese-Canadian men?
• How does identification within the Portuguese-Canadian community lead to early school leaving among young Portuguese-Canadian men?

In keeping with the literature (Alberta Learning, 2001; Ferguson et al., 2005; Satchwell, 2004) on early school leaving, I have chosen to look at school and non-school related factors as the leaving process is seen to be a function of the integrative nature of both categories. Furthermore, in order to account for the role of social context on educational attainment, data analysis is guided by Bourdieu and Passeron’s (1979) theories of “cultural capital” and “habitus.”

According to Bourdieu and Passeron (1979), cultural capital affects educational attainment. Cultural capital can come to mean an array of possessions such as cultural knowledge, educational credentials, access to resources, and information about institutional practices and policies and linguistic fluency. The more cultural capital one possesses, the greater the chances of succeeding academically.

Although Bourdieu and Passeron (1979) note that cultural capital affects educational outcomes, they also note that habitus comes to determine one’s aspirations and expectations for educational investment. Habitus, which is derived from the word habit, is a way of describing how one perceives and relates to his or her world. One’s habitus, which is determined by one’s social context, through association with family and peers, influences one’s ways of being and doing. For Bourdieu and Passeron, one’s habitus—aspirations and expectations for educational attainment—can impact one’s educational achievement.

Significance of the Study

The significance of this research lies in its applicability to understanding what young Portuguese men who were early school leavers deem to be meaningful to their leaving school. This study is meant to be a resource for all members of the educational field. In studying how school and non-school related risk factors affect early school leaving, the study, although focusing specifically on young Portuguese-Canadian early school leavers, has wider implications for all students who are considered to be at-risk. The study may provide a means by which to
investigate how other ethno-cultural groups experiencing a high percentage of early school leaving, such as the Spanish or Somali (Brown, 2006), make sense of secondary school and come to create and interpret their aspirations and expectations for educational attainment.

The study also adds to the existing literature on the educational disadvantage of the Portuguese-Canadian community. Although past studies (Noivo, 1997; Nunes, 1998; 2003; Santos, 2006) have focused on academic underachievement through the viewpoint of various Portuguese-Canadian community members, this study offers a vehicle by which young Portuguese-Canadian early school leavers may voice their particular early school leaving process. This research, therefore, presents an exploration of an unmapped terrain.

**Thesis Overview**

In this chapter I explained my interest in the early school leaving phenomenon of young Portuguese-Canadian men. I have outlined the study’s purpose, the reasons behind the questions guiding my inquiry and the significance of the study. The remainder of this thesis is divided into six chapters. In chapter 2 I present a review of the literature. The literature review is divided into three parts: (a) contextualizing the participants’ secondary school experience, (b) school related risk factors, and (c) non-school related risk factors. Interlaced in the section on non-school related risk factors is an account of the Portuguese context before and after immigration to Canada and Bourdieu and Passeron’s (1979) theories of cultural capital and habitus. In Chapter 3 I outline the methodological approach adopted for the study. I discuss both the methodology and the methods used to collect and analyze data. In Chapter 4 I report the experiences and perceptions of four, young male Portuguese-Canadian early school leavers. In Chapter 5 I discuss the experiences and perceptions of the participants in relation to the literature while also providing a critical analysis of the data through Bourdieu and Passeron’s theories of cultural capital and habitus. In Chapter 5 I also provide practice recommendations. In Chapter 6 I discuss implications for future research, research limitations and include concluding remarks.
CHAPTER 2
LITERATURE REVIEW

In this chapter, I examine the literature which frames this research. The literature review is divided into three areas. First, I contextualize the Ontario secondary school system with which my participants had experience, namely with reference to official education documents. Second, I describe school related risk factors. Third, non-school related risk factors are discussed. In the section on non-school related risk factors is an account of the Portuguese context before and after immigration to Canada interwoven with Bourdieu and Passeron’s (1979) theories of cultural capital and habitus. These three sections constitute the basis of my literature review in relation to the early school leaving of four young Portuguese-Canadian men.

Contextualizing the Participants’ Secondary School Experience

When all participants were in secondary school, they fell under the double-track secondary school program as outlined by the Ontario Ministry of Education (1989). In this program, students could obtain an Ontario Secondary School Diploma (OSSD) through two routes. The first was a four-year program. In order to fulfill the requirements of an OSSD under this program, students were required to complete a total of 30 secondary school credits. Students took eight compulsory credits in Grade 9 (one English, one math, one science, one French, one health and physical education, one Canadian geography, one art and one technology) followed by 22 credits in Grades 10–12. Of these 22 credits, eight were compulsory (four English courses, one science, two social studies, one of which was a Canadian history credit, and one math) and 14 were elective. After having completed the full 30 credits, a student was eligible to graduate with an OSSD. This route allowed students to apply to college programs.

In addition to this route, students who met provincial standards, that is, successfully completed 22 credits in Grades 10–12 under the academic stream, could opt to enroll for an additional secondary school year after having completed their fourth-year. In this final year, students took
Ontario Academic Credits (OACs). They were required to take a minimum of six OACs if planning to attend university.

In addition to the double-track system, students were also streamed along Basic, General and Academic levels following the end of Grade 9. At the end of Grade 9, students had the option to choose their stream.

This secondary school system was in place when all the participants attended school.

**Early School Leaving Risk Factors**

Much concern has been expressed and attention paid to students who leave school without obtaining a secondary school diploma (Alberta Learning, 2001; Ferguson et al., 2005; Satchwell, 2004; Schwartz, 1995). The issue of early school leaving is now seen to be not only an individual problem, but also a systemic problem (Rosenthal, 1998; Tilleczek, 2003). A holistic approach based on school related and non-school related risk factors must be adopted to understand the early school leaving phenomenon. Research (Alberta Learning, 2001; Ferguson et al., 2005) notes that many risk factors, such as perceived irrelevant curriculum, negative school climate and negative relationships with teachers and school guidance, personal issues, cognitive difficulties, socio-economic factors and family instability can affect early school leaving. Moreover, risk factor categories fluctuate over time and therefore are best understood as interrelated points on a continuum. An early school leaver may have experienced challenging school-related factors, such as a poor school climate and negative relationships with teachers, but not have faced non-school related challenges. The reverse may also have been true. It is the interrelationship between and exposure to multiple risk factors within the school and non-school categories that increase a student’s likelihood of leaving school without obtaining a secondary school diploma.

**School related risk factors.**

The most common factors voiced by those who did not obtain a secondary school diploma were school-related rather than non-school related influences (Alberta Learning, 2001; Ferguson et al., 2005). Although there are numerous school-related risk factors, for the purpose of this
literature review, attention has been paid to the perceived lack of relevant curriculum, negative relationships with teachers and the lack of adequate counseling and guidance as they are the most cited factors by early school leavers (Alberta Learning, 2001; Ferguson et al., 2005).

**Perceived lack of relevant curriculum.**

One of the most cited school related reasons for early school leaving is students’ perceived lack of relevant curriculum. For early school leavers, the lack of differentiated learning and experiential learning is often cited (Alberta Learning, 2001; Ferguson et al., 2005; Satchwell, 2004).

**Lack of differentiated learning.**

Early school leavers often claim that their educational disengagement and disaffection were caused, in part, to the inability of curricula to reach their personal interests (Alberta Learning, 2001; Ferguson et al., 2005). Riley and Rustique-Forrester (2002) found that students claimed they would have been more engaged had teaching and learning accommodated their particular learning needs. Early school leavers, thus, cite a lack of differentiated learning as a reason for their educational disaffection. Differentiated learning is an approach to learning and teaching that centers on the belief that all students differ in their readiness to learn, their interests and how they learn. In order for students to learn through differentiation, educators are to offer multiple teaching and learning strategies by which students can acquire content and demonstrate their learning. Boomer (1992), however, claims that differentiated learning may only occur when students take an active approach to their learning through curriculum negotiation. In negotiating the curriculum, students and teachers collaborate on improving the learning process in that curriculum is tailored to meet students’ specific needs as they co-plan units, activities, goals and assignments. The purpose is to bring about the best possible learning experience for all learners.

**Lack of experiential learning.**

Many early school leavers also feel that schools fail to offer experiential learning opportunities. Research (Alberta Learning, 2001; Ferguson et al., 2005; Riley & Rustique-
Forrester, 2002) has found that early school leavers often claim that schools should focus on curricular approaches that emphasize experiential learning so as to reengage those who are considering leaving school. Experiential learning emphasizes a project-based (Newell, 2003), student-centered pedagogy substantiated on a link between school, external communities and workplace applicability. Of the multiple pathways provided by Ontario secondary schools, broad-based technological education, cooperative education and the Ontario Youth Apprenticeship Program (OYAP) enable those considering leaving school early to reconnect with school.

*Broad-based technological education.*

As outlined by its guiding philosophy, the Technological Education Curriculum states that: “Students learn best by doing [italics in original]. The curriculum therefore adopts an activity-based, project-driven approach that involves students in problem solving as they develop knowledge and skills and gain experience in the technological subject area of their choice” (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2009b, p. 5). This philosophy is developed from the overall goals of technological education:

1. Gain an understanding of the fundamental concepts underlying technological education;
2. Achieve the level of technological competence that they will need in order to succeed in their postsecondary education or training programs or in the workplace;
3. Develop a creative and flexible approach to problem solving that will help them address challenges in various areas throughout their lives;
4. Develop the skills, including critical thinking skills, and the knowledge of strategies required to do research, conduct inquiries, and communicate findings accurately, ethically and effectively;
5. Develop life-long learning habits that will help them adapt to technological advances in the changing workplace and world;
6. Make connections that will help them take advantage of potential postsecondary educational and work opportunities (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2009b, p. 4).

Technological education centers on fostering student engagement and motivation through a project-based, cooperative approach which emphasizes not only literacy and numeracy skills, but also individual student interest and community partnership. Importance is placed on “activities which enable students to relate and apply . . . concepts to the social, environmental, and economic conditions and concerns of the world in which they live” (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2009b, p. 7).

As Hill and Smith (1998) discovered, technological education allowed for the process of creativity, risk taking and knowledge making thereby contributing to self-efficacy and self-esteem. It is the extension of learning in real-life student contexts that makes this form of education a prime vehicle for motivating students to learn in an “authentic manner” (Hill & Smith, 1998).

Cooperative education.

As a form of planned learning, cooperative education offers students the opportunity to work towards secondary school credits while engaging in workplace learning. According to the Ontario Ministry of Education, cooperative education is:

- Designed to suit the student’s strengths, interests, and needs and to enhance the student’s preparation for the future.
- Cooperative education courses include a classroom component, comprising pre-placement and integration activities, and a placement component.
- Cooperative education involves a partnership between education and business, industry, agriculture, labour, or community organization that includes students, teachers, parents, employers, and placement supervisors. (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2000, p. 10)

Key features of cooperative education are: (a) the substantial link between school and external communities as “the cooperative education ‘classroom’ alternates between the school and the community” (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2000, p. 34); and (b) the integration process of the classroom component. For every 110 hours of cooperative education, a minimum of seven hours
of integrative classroom time is scheduled. During this time, students are given the task of applying the skills learned in the workplace to curriculum expectations.

Stasz (1997) claims that the ultimate learning goals of workplace learning are problem solving, communication and team-work. Stone and Mortimer (1998) define workplace learning goals as general career knowledge. Chin, Bell, Munby and Hutchinson (2004) illustrate how both goals are not independent of one another in that learning in the workplace is an integrative process by which cooperative education students learn to become part of a “community of practice” (Lave & Wenger, 1991). They are not only introduced to specific career knowledge and skills, but come to learn embedded and intersubjective beliefs of the world of work.

Ontario Youth Apprenticeship Program (OYAP).

The Ontario Youth Apprenticeship Program (OYAP) allows secondary school students to meet OSSD requirements while providing them with the opportunity to work towards becoming registered apprentices in numerous skilled trades. As defined by the Ontario Ministry of Education, OYAP:

- Is a specialized program that enables students who are 16 years of age or older to meet diploma requirements while participating in an occupation that requires apprenticeship. An OYAP student is a student who is earning cooperative education credits for work experience in an apprenticeship occupation. The student may or may not be formally registered as an apprentice while attending secondary school.
- All students participating in OYAP must:
  - Complete sixteen credits towards the OSSD prior to starting the program;
  - Be enrolled as full-time students during the program;
  - Complete all compulsory credits required for the OSSD. (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2000, p. 12)

In addition to meeting OYAP registration age and credit level requirements, students intending to take part in the program must submit a Personalized Placement Learning Plan. This plan, which is agreed upon by the student, the placement supervisor or employer and the school, must outline the course of study for the placement component and the means of assessment and evaluation. The placement plan ensures that the student will apply the curricular knowledge and skills of the given cooperative education course. The placement plan, in addition to outlining
overall and specific curricular expectations, must also “be developed to complement, or must be based on, the skills outlined in the training standards for the appropriate trade and its related training program” (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2000, p. 24).

Although the Ontario Ministry of Education agrees that program options which emphasize program relevancy are effective in assisting at-risk students (Ontario Ministry of Education & O’Connor, 2003) the regimented nature of OSSD credit requirements makes it extremely difficult for most students to avail themselves of experiential learning opportunities. King, Warren, Boyce, Chin and King (2002) investigated the impact of the restructured secondary school system on post-secondary enrollment and found that although 95% of the schools mentioned cooperative education, the actual term appeared in only 25% of the students’ course selections. The lack of uniformity between cooperative education visibility within course calendars and the percentage of cooperative education enrollment may suggest that work-related programs, in addition to being difficult to apply to a structured credit system, may not be perceived as a valued form of school programming.

Like cooperative education, the Ontario Youth Apprenticeship Program (OYAP) has also struggled with the task of increasing participation numbers. Although secondary school OYAP enrollment and OYAP registered apprentice numbers have steadily increased from the 2001–2002 school year on, the number of individuals who then completed apprenticeship training in Ontario was only 50% (King, Warren, King, Brook & Kocher, 2009). Furthermore, King et al. (2009), in an analysis of the characteristics of young people who do not pursue post-secondary education, determined that the low rate of apprenticeship completion was due to a negative perception of trade careers and limited knowledge of apprenticeship as a learning and career option. The Canadian Apprenticeship Forum (2004), further corroborated King et al.’s (2009) conclusion that the trades were negatively viewed by students. Students believed the trades had poor career potential and precarious career stability, were typically perceived as hard, labouring jobs, and for those who were less academically inclined. Students also voiced the overwhelming concern over
lack of information regarding apprenticeship programs: “Schools need to advertise more about trades and apprenticeship; these are not ‘pushed’ much in high school; counselors provide little information about it” (Canadian Apprenticeship Forum, 2004, p. 18). Aggravating a negative perception of trades is the status level attached to apprenticeship programs versus that given to other forms of post-secondary education, including university or college. Parents, although acknowledging the importance of trades and apprenticeship programs, “[do] not proactively encourage youth to look at trades careers, preferring their children to attend university” (Canadian Apprenticeship Forum, 2004, p. 13).

The findings reported by the Canadian Apprenticeship Forum (2004) were later corroborated by the *Evaluation of the Ontario Ministry of Education’s Student Success/Learning to 18 Strategy Final Report* (Ungerleider, 2008) which found that schools experience systemic difficulties when implementing experiential programs. These difficulties resulted from negative societal perceptions regarding the role and importance of cooperative education and apprenticeship programs. There was a general assumption that academically focused programs and courses were superior to experiential and vocational programs. Ungerleider (2008) also found that educators experienced difficulties and resistance in advocacy of the benefits of such programs. For those students interested in trades or apprenticeship programs the emphasis placed on a university education, the relative lack of knowledge of such programs on the part of school personnel and the continuing negative perception of skilled trades may deter students such as potential early school leavers, who benefit most from experiential learning, from participating.

**School climate.**

As the literature suggests (Alberta Learning, 2001; Barr & Parrett, 1995; Deci & Ryan, 1992; Ferguson et al., 2005; Hudley, 1997; Newell, 2003; Satchwell, 2004) the overall school environment is crucial to student motivation and success. The foundation of a supportive and positive school climate depends on the relationships between students and school personnel, the level to which students feel they belong and the level of autonomy students experience.
Negative relationships with teachers.

A positive school climate tends to hinge on the relationships between students and school personnel. Studies suggest (Alberta Learning, 2001; Ferguson et al., 2005) that students who have negative rapport with teachers or have unfavourable perceptions of teachers tend to view school as undesirable and are thus dissatisfied with or do not like school. In the Early School Leavers Report (Ferguson et al., 2005) and the Removing Barriers to High School Completion: Technical Report (Alberta Learning, 2001) researchers noted that early school leavers believe their teachers to be unconcerned with their well-being and make little attempts to assist them. In fact, Satchwell (2004) found that, “of those permanently excluded from school, only 9% had satisfactory relationships with all of their teachers and 57% with some teacher” (p. 26). Nonetheless, Satchwell (2004) and Ferguson et al. (2005) affirm that students did not blame teachers for their decision to leave school as they understood teachers’ limitations.

Lack of adequate counseling and guidance.

In addition to negative student-teacher relationships, researchers (Alberta Learning, 2001; Ferguson et al., 2005) found that one of the most mentioned reasons for early leaving was a lack of adequate counseling or guidance. Early school leavers note inadequate and oftentimes discriminatory attitudes upheld by school personnel and, in particular, guidance counselors. Many voice indirect and direct messages from school personnel indicating that they were not wanted. For Soloman and Palmer (2004), the lack of adequate counseling or guidance is a covert strategy used to “push out” at-risk students. Soloman and Palmer remind one of the effects of “pushing out” students. Conflict, typically in the case of both direct and indirect threats to school suspension and expulsion often results in students’ eventual exclusion from school. The lack of adequate counseling and guidance felt by early school leavers may thus be a point in the early school leaving process. Other research results (Alberta Learning, 2001; Bushnik, Barr-Telford, & Bussiere, 2004; Daniels et al., 2003) corroborate Soloman and Palmer’s findings in that early
school leaving is described more as a process rather than a choice as at-risk students do not choose to leave, but are instead driven to leave through suspensions and expulsions.

*Overall school climate.*

As the Ontario Ministry of Education has emphasized in its policy memoranda (2007; 2009), a positive school climate is vital to the promotion of responsibility, respect, civility and academic excellence. Taking into account the Ontario Ministry of Education’s policies, some Ontario school boards (Toronto Catholic District School Board, 1995; Toronto District School Board, 2005) have implemented policies targeted at creating positive climates in order to ensure mutual respect, responsibility and civility among all school members.

Hudley (1997) argues that the overall school climate influences academic achievement. Students who experience controlling educational settings are more likely to be low achieving and more likely to leave school early. Deci and Ryan (1992) further contend that controlling activities decrease intrinsic motivation and may lead to early school leaving.

One of the most crucial steps to encouraging student learning is through the creation of a supportive and caring environment (Alberta Learning, 2001; Barr & Parrett, 1995; Freeman & Hutchinson, 1994; Newell, 2003). The mutual respect between teacher and student validates students’ perceptions of themselves as learners and members of the student body while encouraging academic risk-taking. For students who are considering leaving school early, a supportive learning environment is important. These students need school staff who are willing to be understanding and believe in them (Barr & Parrett, 1995; Newell, 2003).

Although other school related risk factors exist, such as streaming, academic problems, lack of assessment and evaluation for students with exceptionalities, this literature review has focused specifically on the perceived lack of relevant curriculum and unfavourable interactions with teachers and guidance and overall school climate as these three factors are the most commonly cited by early school leavers (Alberta Learning, 2001; Ferguson et al., 2005; Satchwell, 2004).
Understanding these three factors offers a route by which we may understand the early school leaving of four, young Portuguese-Canadian men.

**Non-school related risk factors.**

The above body of literature accounts for risk factors related to school experiences; however, in order to fully grasp the early school leaving phenomenon, non-school related factors must also be considered. Although many non-school related risk factors abound, the major non-school related risk factors associated with early school leaving are socio-economic status (SES), engagement in risky behaviour and working while in school. For the purpose of this literature review, the following body of literature details these three categories as they are seen to be the most influential in regards to early school leaving (Alberta Learning, 2001; Ferguson et al., 2005).

**Socio-economic status (SES).**

One of the most extensively documented risk factors associated with academic achievement is socio-economic status (SES) (Alberta Learning, 2001; Ferguson et al., 2005; Sirin, 2005). SES is generally considered to be a function of family income, parental education and parental occupational level (Rosenthal, 1998; Sirin, 2005). Schargel and Smink (2001) found that students from the lowest quartile of income are seven times more likely to leave school early. In fact, in *Our Children, our schools: The environmental scan of the TDSB* (Toronto District School Board, 2008) it demonstrated how student achievement levels reflect average family income. Two separate neighbourhood maps (student achievement levels and average family income) when superimposed, expose the correlation between low student achievement levels and low average family income.

Indicators also show that parental education is related to achievement and outcomes (Bushnik, 2003; Finnie, Laporte, & Lascelles, 2004). Students whose parents did not complete secondary school are more likely to leave school early (Bushnik, 2003) and students with university-educated parents are more likely to be at the Ontario standards levels. Davis-Kean (2005) and
Lareau (1987) suggest that parental education influences behaviour and beliefs about the importance of education. Parents with higher education hold higher expectations for their children and these expectations are subsequently translated into academic achievement. Finnie, Laporte and Lascelles (2004), investigating the participation rates of those in post-secondary education, noted that between 1991–2000 rates declined for young men whose parents had either no secondary school education or had only completed secondary school. Finnie, Laporte and Lascelles also found that not knowing one’s parents’ level of education was most negatively significant with respect to participation in post-secondary education.

Parental occupational levels also mediate a child’s educational attainment (Bushnik, 2003; Reid, 2000). In Ontario secondary schools, students are assessed under four rubric categories: one, two, three, and four with four being the highest level of achievement. Students whose parents are from professional backgrounds are more likely to be at Levels three and four in the Ontario standards and are more likely to pass the Ontario Secondary School Literacy Test on first administration. Students are also at a heightened risk of leaving school early if their parents work in an occupation associated with lower educational requirements (Brown & Sinay, 2008). However, how the influence of SES on early school leaving is exerted is vague. It is not known if financial difficulty, which may result in household stress, leads to early school leaving or if the influence is exerted through low parental education which is mediated through support for continued schooling. Although SES and early school leaving appear to be interrelated, how SES affects early school leaving is far less known. Is the SES influence additive or complex? Smale (2001) has suggested that parents with lower educational credentials tend to be more permissive, provide less supervision, have lower academic expectations for their children and often times communicate on fewer occasions with the school. Epstein (1983), in his study of the developmental impact of two way communication between the home and school, noted that elementary school students from classrooms where joint communication between teachers and parents was high not only exhibited sustained academic engagement in high school, but had
higher grades. Lareau (1987) suggests that parents with higher academic credentials are more inclined to actively participate in their children’s education. They communicate regularly with the school, are more knowledgeable in content material and, therefore, better equipped to help their children with schoolwork. Lareau found a correlation between SES and parental involvement. She discerned how lower SES parents have, for a number of reasons including financial and social factors, less capacity to intervene in their children’s education. Lareau’s study investigated parental involvement in two diverse school communities; one comprised of middle-class parents who were mostly college graduates; the other was a working-class community in which the majority of the parents had left school early. Although both school communities promoted parental involvement, communication and expectations differed amongst the two communities in that the relationship between parents and schools was interdependent in the middle-class school and independent in the working-class school. That is, parents in the former school, due to their financial and social resources, were able to devote more time to their children’s schooling. They also believed in a relationship of reciprocity between themselves and the teachers. Parents in the working-class community were not only limited in financial and social resources, but they believed that the onus to educate their children lay solely with teachers. Lareau’s study highlights the extent to which SES affects parent participation and may thus mediate student success as parental involvement has been positively linked to student achievement (Fan & Chen, 2001; Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1995; Miedel & Reynolds, 1999).

As parental involvement is seen to mediate student achievement, the Ontario Ministry of Education (2005) mandated the creation of Parent Involvement Committees in each school board. The aim of the policy is to provide parents with a direct participatory vehicle by which they make a contribution to both their children’s educational success and the success of schools.

With respect to Portuguese-Canadians, Nunes (1998) has shown that, “on average, individuals in the Portuguese community tend to earn less than is the case with all immigrants or the general population” (p. 12). Ornstein (2006) confirmed these findings; the mean income for Portuguese-
Canadians was $43,000. Ornstein also found that 60% of Portuguese-Canadian adults between the ages of 35–54 had not completed high school and only 5.2% held professional jobs and a high proportion, 28.3%, worked in unskilled manual labour. Thus, if SES is related to parental income, education and occupation, the Portuguese-Canadian community is markedly at risk with respect to educational attainment. These statistics may provide insight into the interrelationship between SES and low educational attainment of Portuguese-Canadian youth. Despite relating the SES of the Portuguese-Canadian community to the educational attainment of its members, such statistical findings may be further interpreted using Bourdieu and Passeron’s (1979) theory of cultural capital.

**Cultural capital.**

According to Bourdieu and Passeron (1979) individuals draw on certain resources to either enhance or maintain their location in any given social order. Bourdieu (1993) uses the notion of “field” to denote a common ground on which the interplay between individuals occurs. However, how individuals are invited into that field, or allowed access, depends on the notion of capital. This capital is specific to the field; it could be social, political, economic or cultural, and who has what capital and how much determines the power structure within that specific field. Bourdieu (1993) writes:

> The structure of the field is a state of the power relations among the agents or institutions engaged in the struggle, or, to put it another way, a state of the distribution of the specific capital which has been accumulated in the course of previous struggles and which orients subsequent strategies. (p. 73)

Furthermore, the field of power is schismatically structured through two principles: economic capital and cultural capital. The dominant principle of hierarchization, economic capital, is

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1 The statistics are not a true reflection of the mean earnings of the Portuguese-Canadian community as the mean income is derived from the 1991–2001 censuses, which, according to the Portuguese Embassy in Canada, failed to poll a vast number of Portuguese-Canadians.
intersected through the second principle of hierarchization, cultural capital. However, individuals tend to draw disproportionately from either economic or cultural capital. Individuals located within the higher economic and cultural capital strata are described as having a high cultural heritage. With respect to education, economic and cultural capitals greatly influence educational attainment. The ability to draw from one’s economic capital in order to invest in education leads to a high “scholastic capital” (i.e., educational credentials), which can then be transferred to occupations and income. Furthermore, cultural capital also affects educational attainment. Cultural capital can come to mean an array of possessions such as cultural knowledge, linguistic fluency, access to resources and information about institutional practices and policies. It is the interplay between economic and cultural capital that creates the ground for hierarchical power struggles and unequal educational outcomes. As Bourdieu and Passeron (1979) remind us:

Not only do the most privileged students derive from their background of origin habits, skills, and attitudes which serve them directly in their scholastic tasks, but they inherit from it knowledge and know-how, tastes, and a ‘good taste’ whose scholastic profitability is no less certain for being indirect. (p. 17)

Although Lareau’s (1987) study of two diverse school communities does attest to the influence of cultural capital, her analysis is limited because it does not account for how various capitals may promote or hinder parental involvement. In the case of Portuguese-Canadians, one such cultural capital is that of linguistic fluency. Studies and personal accounts (Nunes, 2003; Santos, 2006) relating to Portuguese-Canadian low educational attainment attest to the lack of linguistic fluency and knowledge of educational institutions as a reason for low levels of educational credentials within the community. Santos (2006), in his exploratory study of low academic achievement among Portuguese-Canadians residing in British Columbia, discerned that lack of parental involvement was often rationalized along a linguistic deficit as participants noted that their parents explained that their lack of involvement was due to their limited knowledge of the English language.
Nunes (2003), in his analysis of the disproportionate number of students of Portuguese descent in Special Education programs within the Toronto District School Board (roughly 15% of Portuguese students versus 9% of the entire student body), attributed this phenomenon to a lack of cultural capital. In addition to the lack of linguistic fluency, which made it difficult for parents to be fully informed of access to community personnel, including liaison officers and translators who may have assisted in the identification process or challenging the board’s decision, Portuguese-Canadian parents also lacked knowledge about institutional policy and procedures with respect to their children’s education. The majority of parents, having only a primary school education, were unaware of the processes governing both elementary and secondary schools, let alone the process involved in being identified as needing special education. Furthermore, the socio-political context of immigrant parents made challenging institutional authority culturally unacceptable and was therefore not common practice. Thus, the high proportion of Portuguese-Canadian students in Special Education programs is rationalized along a cultural capital model.

A lack of certain resources, such as English proficiency and knowledge of institutional policies, programs and support networks and culturally different ways of engaging in education made it difficult for early immigrant parents to fully participate in their children’s education. Portuguese children were left to independently navigate a foreign education system, which subsequently affected academic outcomes and attainment.

The empirical evidence attesting to the role of cultural capital on educational attainment is, however, wrought with contradictions. Although some researchers, such as DiMaggio (1982) suggest that cultural capital has modest but positive effects on students’ educational attainment, others (Edgerton, Peter, & Roberts, 2008) express concern over the simplification of cultural capital as it has been operationalized as familiarity and knowledge of high-brow culture. Other researchers, such as Swartz (1997), have suggested that in large, differentiated societies, where there is not as strong a dominant culture as in France, where Bourdieu comes from, cultural capital may not be as useful a concept.
However, Swartz’s (1997) discourse denies the existence of inequality by negating the struggles of some while acting in the interests of the privileged class. Others, (Edgerton, Peter, & Roberts, 2008; Lareau & Weininger, 2003) emphasize the importance of class within the discourse surrounding educational inequality. They suggest that cultural capital must be discussed through the important aspects of how socio-economic advantage translates into academic advantage.

Dumais (2002) and Wildhagen (2009) offer a more nuanced explanation for the effect of cultural capital on educational attainment through the teacher-selection mechanism. Wildhagen analyzed the teacher-selection mechanism, which argues that students who possess a high cultural capital enjoy better relationships with their teachers which in turn improve students’ educational attainment. Wildhagen explored whether students’ cultural capital impressed teachers and whether cultural capital mediated teachers’ judgment and grades. Their findings concluded that cultural capital does not affect teachers’ perceptions.

Although some studies (Dumais, 2002; Wildhagen, 2009) have contradicted the effect of cultural capital on educational attainment, other studies (Edgerton, Peter, & Roberts, 2008; Lareau & Weininger, 2003; Nunes, 2003) emphasize how SES and the theory of cultural capital may explain educational inequalities. In order to understand the unique early school leaving of my participants through the theory of cultural capitals of the participants, it is important to outline the specific socio-historical realities of Portuguese-Canadian immigrants to Canada.

**Historical context in the home country.**

As Bourdieu and Passeron (1979) argued, cultural capital informs one’s educational outcomes. In order to fully grasp the reasons for the early school leaving of the four young Portuguese-Canadian men, we must understand their cultural heritage and how it shaped their educational aspirations and expectations. In what follows, I provide a brief historical account of early Portuguese-Canadian immigrants’ context, both in the home country and after immigration to Canada.
The majority of Portuguese immigrated to Canada between the 1950s and the 1990s (Teixeira & Da Rosa, 2008). Portugal’s political climate from 1932 until 1974 was that of a dictatorship under the rule of António de Oliveria Salazar (Birmingham, 2003). Salazar’s regime, known as the “New State”, wrought totalitarianism and economic hardship. For 42 years, Salazar’s economic strategies were directed at agricultural and industrial policies aimed at controlling investment, output and prices and large investments so as to maintain Portugal’s African colonies. Such economic planning, however, came at the expense of social spending as Salazar’s government, despite granting education to all citizens, did not make education a priority. In fact, between the 1940s and 1960s, Portugal had significantly lower mandatory education levels than any other European nation (UNESCO, 1973, cited in Nunes, 2003). Following Salazar’s ousting, Portugal found itself on the verge of economic and political collapse and was thus forced to seek assistance from the International Monetary Fund (IMF). The IMF, in return, enforced large cuts in governmental spending and greater increases in taxation and interest rates (Lloyd-Jones, 2001).

Salazar’s totalitarian regime, and the political instability following his ousting hindered academic participation and deleteriously impacted the educational profile of early Portuguese immigrants to Canada. Nunes (1998) argues that the historical context prior to immigration to Canada affected early Portuguese immigrants. Compared to other ethno-cultural minority groups in Canada, the Portuguese, display the highest percentage of individuals, who possess no more than a primary school education, and one of the lowest proportions of individuals, with any type of schooling beyond the level of a secondary trade certificate. Ornstein (2006), in his analysis of ethno-cultural groups within the city of Toronto, found that approximately 22.5% of Portuguese-Canadians between 18–24 were not in school full-time and had not completed high school and approximately 33% between the ages of 25–34 had not completed high school. These numbers are alarming, especially when 13.3% of members aged 18–24 from other European ethno-cultural groups are not in school and 16.6% of members aged 25–34 from other European ethno-cultural groups have not completed high school. The numbers, although representative of a
disproportionate number of early Portuguese who immigrated from mainly agricultural, poorly-educated, working-class populations are reflective of the political and social climate of the locale of origin. However, these numbers are not a representation of the entire Portuguese-Canadian community as there were early Portuguese immigrants who did not fall into the aforementioned category.

The situational context after immigration to Canada.

In addition to being faced with a political and social context that limited educational access in Portugal, immigration policies instituted by Canada under the 1952 Immigration Act also played a role in limiting access to education after immigration. This, in combination with the host country’s lack of ability to provide a proper education, impacted on the type of person who would immigrate to Canada.

Outlined is a summary of immigration policies and the stated underlying reasons for the educational profile of early Portuguese-Canadians. By the early 1950s, news that Canada was actively seeking agricultural workers was well-known in Portugal (Anderson & Higgs, 1976). Canada was to recruit 2,000 farm hands, railway workers and forestry workers. The recruitment processes undertaken by Canada not only relegated new immigrants to menial, manual labour positions, but worked to undercut their social participation. Immigrants destined to rural locations had limited access to Canadian cultural and social network systems. Thus any hopes of acquiring English proficiency or availing themselves of social institutions such as the educational system were nearly non-existent.

By the 1970s, the Portuguese-Canadian community had grown significantly. Geographical research on the early Portuguese immigrant population in Canada (Anderson & Higgs, 1976; Teixeira & Da Rosa, 2008) describes the community’s settlement choices. The vast majority of early Portuguese immigrants to Ontario settled in Kensington Market in downtown Toronto. This was a working-class district, with poorly maintained, yet affordable housing; it was proximate to job sites, transportation and other Portuguese immigrants. As the population of Portuguese
immigrants increased, the Portuguese community emerged as a self-contained and self-sufficient entity. Numerous commercial enterprises and social services arose, which provided services in Portuguese. These institutions, although providing a focus for the community and ensuring the longevity of Portuguese culture, customs and traditions, worked to restrict immigrants’ participation outside of the Portuguese community. Although institutions providing assistance in the Portuguese language eased the process of immigration, a reliance on such institutions limited the opportunity for new immigrants to acquire the English language and to become knowledgeable about Canadian institutions. The stories of Portuguese immigrants are riddled with accounts of struggles due to lack of linguistic familiarity (Anderson & Higgs, 1976; Marques & Medeiros, 1980; Nunes, 1998). Unfamiliarity with the English language not only manifested itself in daily transactions, but, more importantly, rendered the process of acculturation and social participation extremely difficult.

Although by 1978 the Government of Canada implemented the first national language training program for newcomers through the Canadian Job Strategies program, which included financial incentives, certain deficiencies were rife in the program. As it was primarily for re-employment purposes, only the principal family wage earner was eligible (thereby creating a gender imbalance whereby the majority of participants were men), and recent immigrants were ineligible. Because of grievances put forth by many immigrant communities, the Canadian Job Strategies program was abandoned and in its place two language programs were implemented: (a) the Secretary of State Citizenship and the Language Training Program, and (b) the Citizenship and Community Participation Program. These two programs were short-lived, however. Immigrants were now allowed to participate, but no financial incentive for participation was offered. On the heels of these two programs came the Settlement Language Training Program, that started in 1986. It was more flexible than any of the other three and was designed to meet the needs of the Canadian immigrant population. The program provided onsite childcare and, at times, reimbursement for transportation costs so as to enable caregivers to partake. This program offered adult English as a
Second Language (ESL) courses in local community agencies especially through local school boards (Burnaby, 1989; Fleming, 2007). Nunes’ research (2003) on the Portuguese-Canadian community has illuminated that some community members lack English fluency due to the difficulties inherent in being a newcomer to Canada. Many Portuguese-Canadians could not participate in ESL classes due to inconvenient times which cut into work schedules. Parental English illiteracy is significant especially given the studies (Santos, 2006) documenting the lack of parental involvement in their children’s education as a function of English language skills.

The historical context in the home country and the situational context of the Portuguese who immigrated to Canada could explain the pattern of low educational attainment within the Portuguese-Canadian community because it contextualizes how particular socio-cultural factors relating to cultural capital affect low educational outcomes and the process of early school leaving.

*Habitus.*

Although Bourdieu and Passeron (1979) note that cultural capital affects educational outcomes, they also note that habitus comes to determine one’s aspirations and expectations for educational investment. It is one’s habitus, which is determined by one’s social context or, as Bourdieu and Passeron suggest, one’s location within the social structure (i.e., one’s social class), that influences how an individual perceives and relates to his or her world. Habitus draws insight from the notion that one’s social reality resides both inside and outside of an individual, both in one’s mind and in objects. Habitus, however, is derived from class-specific experiences of socialization within the family and greater social context. Perceptions and aspirations are generated by corresponding early socialization. It is a way of understanding how one’s social context influences human conduct. According to Bourdieu and Passeron, chances of success or failure are internalized and transformed into aspirations and expectations. Such aspirations and expectations are then externalized in action, which may subsequently lead to the reproduction and perpetuation of social roles.
In addition to analyzing the effect of cultural capital through the teacher-selection mechanism, Dumais (2002) and Wildhagen (2009) make use of the self-selection mechanism to determine the effect of cultural capital on educational attainment. This idea purports the belief that students who do not have a high cultural heritage are more likely to form lower educational expectations and therefore refrain from obtaining educational credentials. Cultural capital was found to have a positive effect on students’ educational expectations. Wildhagen’s results demonstrate that certain factors, such as parental education and income which are related to cultural capital affect students’ expectations for educational attainment. When holding other variables constant, such as parental expectations, race, and school location, Wildhagen’s results continued to indicate that parental education and social class, which are factors related to cultural capital, are associated to increases in students’ educational expectations. Thus, Wildhagen’s study points to the positive association between cultural capital and educational attainment on account of the self-selection mechanism. Both studies, by Dumais and by Wildhagen, illuminate the correlation between Bourdieu’s and Passeron’s (1979) concept of habitus and educational outcomes.

Swartz (1997), in his analysis of habitus, also draws a correlation between habitus and educational outcomes. He notes that, “a child’s ambitions and expectations with regard to education and career are the structurally determined products of parental and other reference-group educational experience and cultural life” (Swartz, 1997, p. 197). Bourdieu and Passeron (1979) found that working-class youth do not aspire to high levels of educational attainment because they have come to internalize the limited opportunities for school success due to their social location in that, “the subjective expectation which leads one to drop out depends directly on the conditions determining the objective chances of success proper to [one’s] category” (p. 156). Thus, it may not be so much whether one participates in cultural activities that influence educational outcomes, but whether one has the habitus, the educational aspirations and expectations, to continue with school. It is this internalization of the chances of success proper to one’s category that then comes to determine what is possible and what is not possible. Therefore
students’ educational expectations and their decision to invest in education are a direct function of their place in their social context and of their belief of whether people from the similar social context tend to be academically successful. Dumais (2002) and Wildhagen (2009) are therefore illuminative to my study because they demonstrate the importance of studying educational attainment through a twofold process. In order to fully analyze the educational attainment of young, male Portuguese-Canadians through Bourdieu and Passeron’s theoretical framework, one must not ignore the effects of cultural capital and habitus.

Portuguese-Canadian educational habitus.

In light of the above research pertaining to the socio-economic reality of the Portuguese-Canadian community and educational expectations, it is plausible to suggest that the educational aspirations of young, male Portuguese-Canadian students’ are a reflection of their social context. That is, young, male Portuguese-Canadians who come from a predominantly working-class community may not perceive education as a possibility or necessity for the types of employment they anticipate for themselves. Hence their motivation for education may be diminished.

McLaren (1986), Noivo (1997) and Willis (1977) have been instrumental in illuminating the way in which our social context, such as a working-class milieu is, “able to shape our personalities and beliefs, to approve, reject, or reinterpret our ideas and experiences” (Noivo, 1997, p. 29). McLaren found that Portuguese-Canadian parents, due to their own experiences as skilled-labourers, had acquiesced to the limiting potential of education to secure more than a blue-collar job. One student in describing his father’s understanding of the importance of education stated, “my dad says that even high school graduates can’t find jobs in this country. So we’re supposed to work for nothing” (McLaren, 1986, p. 139). The student’s remark emphasizes the transmission of habitus. The father’s disposition regarding education was communicated and consequently transferred and reproduced by his son. The father perceived a job ceiling effect and such perception was imparted to his child. What was ultimately communicated to the student was that no amount of education would guarantee a secure job.
Noivo’s (1997) findings further emphasize McLaren’s (1986) work. She found that young Portuguese-Canadians take on the belief that education is not very relevant in securing employment. As one young member of the community stated:

I don’t worry. My grandparents came here [to Canada], they didn’t speak the language, had no education and no skills . . . . My parents don’t have a trade either . . . . My parents have a good [economic] life and no more education than me. Me, I speak English and French; so if they made it, why wouldn’t I? I’ll bet you that I’ll do even better than them. (Noivo, 1997, p. 93)

Young Portuguese-Canadians find themselves part of a social context, which is comprised primarily of working-class members (Nunes, 1998; Ornstein, 2006) who ascribe to low educational patterns, and, in turn, take on the habitus of their social context. Noivo’s work demonstrates the reproductive quality of habitus and its effect on educational aspirations, expectations and outcomes.

In contrast to McLaren (1986), who found that Portuguese-Canadian parents had acquiesced to the limiting potential of education, Nunes (1998) found that Portuguese-Canadian parents did, in fact, value education. Approximately 78% of the 120 participants polled indicated that either university or C.E.G.E.P.—a post-secondary education diploma specific to the province of Quebec—would be a sufficient level of schooling for their children (Nunes, 1998, p. 18). What is more interesting however, is that those participants with the lowest levels of educational qualifications—that is, those with no formal qualifications and those with only some elementary school—were amongst those with the highest frequency of this response. Nunes’ work does great justice to demystify the belief that the Portuguese-Canadian community does not value education (McLaren, 1986). Nonetheless, Nunes fails to show the interrelationship between parental educational values, parental participation, students’ understanding of their parents’ disposition to education and, ultimately, their educational expectations.

Although Nunes (1998) highlights the value Portuguese-Canadian parents attribute to education, he does not address dispositions to education along a gendered model. Willis (1977) was instrumental in illuminating how working-class boys valorized an anti-authoritarian,
collective working ethos, which stood in contradiction to the institutionalized educational ethos of obedience, individuality and study. The juxtaposition of these two ethoi then came to define the difference between education and work and shaped these young men’s social identity. Willis’ work is instrumental in highlighting how Bourdieu and Passeron’s (1979) concept of habitus within working-class families colours a young man’s disposition to education.

Willis (1977) demonstrated how some young men’s identity and educational aspirations and expectations were formed through their working-class origin. Willis’ participants, or “lads” as he referred to them, tended to see work as physically demanding, manual labour. The lads, due to their working-class origin which placed emphasis on manual labour, lived by a general criterion by which they judged themselves, their educational expectations, and their future work situations. Willis illuminated the significance of one’s social context in defining one’s educational aspirations and expectations.

More recent work (O’Donnell and Sharpe, 2000) however, demonstrated that although many working-class boys still expected to work in a skilled trade they were acutely aware of the importance of educational qualifications due to the changes occurring in the labour market. O’Donnell and Shape (2000) noted a shift in what was seen as a “man’s work” in heavy industry to employment in areas such as business, design, media and information technology. O’Donnell and Sharpe suggest that the division between working-class and middle-class young men is no longer as acute as was reported by Willis (1977) and that working-class men have now reinscribed themselves around academic achievement.

_Educational habitus influenced by peers._

Bourdieu and Passeron (1979) believe that one’s habitus is primarily influenced through one’s family and larger social context. However, Swartz (1997) argues that habitus can also be formed by other reference groups. With respect to educational outcomes, it is widely regarded that experiences with peers constitute an important developmental context for adolescents (Kiuru, Nurmi, Aunola, & Salmela-Aro, 2009; Ryan, 2001). Ryan (2001) investigated the influence
exerted by peer groups in students’ motivation and achievement in school. Her quantitative study of seventh-graders shows that young adolescent students tended to associate with other students who had similar academic characteristics. Ryan noted that students who were affiliated with low-achieving students showed a decline in level of achievement from sixth to seventh grade. Peer group was also found to influence changes in students’ intrinsic value for school; that is, whether one likes or dislikes school. Most interesting, however, is that peer group was not influential with regard to students’ utility value for school; that is, the usefulness and importance of school in their lives. Ryan’s research points to the differing levels of peer group influence with respect to academic motivation.

Kiuru, Nurmi, Aunola, and Salmela-Aro (2009), in their study of 773 ninth-graders facing transition from senior secondary or vocational education, investigated the role of peer groups with respect to expected academic trajectories. Participants were surveyed before and after transition. When controlling for variables such as individual ability, academic expectations and parental occupation, the researchers found that members of peer groups were very similar in terms of their educational trajectories and broader academic expectations. That is, members of peer groups that were characterized by low academic achievement and expectations tended to share similar educational trajectories. Furthermore, on an individual level, the findings reflect the effect of parental occupation on academic achievement and academic expectations. Students whose parents belonged to non-white collar occupations had lower academic achievement and expected to enter vocational education. These students also typically embarked on this educational trajectory. This study, therefore, also attests to the importance of cultural capital in determining educational aspirations and expectations.

The findings linking peers and educational trajectories reported by Ryan (2001) and Kiuru, Nurmi, Aunola, and Salmela-Aro (2009) reinforce Bourdieu and Passeron’s (1979) theory of habitus. One’s habitus—how one sees the world and his or her position within that social context—may not only be influenced through one’s immediate family, but also through
friendship links. Peers, therefore, have a certain amount of clout in influencing one’s educational disposition and attainment.

**Experimentation with risky behaviour.**

Researchers (Fagan & Pabon, 1990) point to a largely consistent relationship between early school leaving and substance use. Specifically, alcohol and marijuana use are more prevalent among early school leavers in comparison to graduates, and drugs are seen as a problem (Bushnik, 2003; Fagan & Pabon, 1990; McCrystal, Higgins, Percy, & Thornton, 2005). In fact, studies indicate that 63% of young people excluded from school had used drugs or were involved with drugs prior to and after their exclusion (Daniels et al., 2003) and 33% of early school leavers report that substance use was an important contributor to their leaving (Aloise-Young & Chavez, 2002).

Likewise, in additional research (Fagan & Pabon, 1990; Gutierrez & Montalvo, 1984), it was found that those who leave school early have higher rates of self-reported involvement in criminal activity and are more frequently involved in the Criminal Justice System.

Despite results indicating a relationship between early school leaving, alcohol use, illegal substance use and criminal activity, there are conflicting explanations for such links. Some (Rutter, 2002) suggest school failure may predispose young people to engage in risky behaviour. Rutter claims that the act of rejecting a school is fundamental to the belief that the institution has rejected them. Young people who have not lived up to the institution’s expectations may feel a sense of failure and rejection from the school and thus seek out alternative, self-defining behaviour. Others (Battin-Pearson et al., 2000) have argued that early school leavers who hold non-conforming attitudes and values and who attempt to establish their identities as independent and adult persons, are more likely to engage in substance use and criminal activity. Contradicting this, Gutierrez and Montalvo (1984), Townsend, Flisher and King (2007) and Aloise-Young and Chavez (2002) believe that defiant and experimental behaviour is correlated to socialization systems. That is, when ties to school and family are weak, and ties to peers are strong,
adolescents are more at risk of engaging in risky behaviour. Corroborating this theory are results found in Cohen (1977), Ennett and Bauman (1994) and Kandel (1978) which concur that best friends’, close friends’ and peer group influences are similar with regard to substance use and truancy. These theories imply that the relationship between early school leaving and substance use and criminal activity, although evident, is still quite spurious. Although substance use and criminal activity may influence early school leaving, such risky behaviour may be indicative of other social problems. Thus, research and explanations of early school leaving must incorporate an integrative approach which emphasizes a broader framework incorporating both school-based and other social factors.

Working while in school.

Working while in school has both positive and negative consequences. Although it may add to a constructive educational experience, working while in school may be detrimental to a student’s educational outcome (Bushnik, 2003). Bushnik suggests a relationship between the number of hours worked and early school leaving. Students who do not work are 1.5 times more likely to leave school, and those who work more than 30 hours a week are 2.4 times more likely to leave than are students who work between 1–20 hours per week. Furthermore, McNeal (1997) found that in addition to employment intensity, job type has a significant effect on early school leaving. Students are at a greater risk of leaving school if they are employed in retail, service, manufacturing and “other” occupations. Bushnik’s (2003) and McNeal’s findings hold particular weight when one takes into account employment statistics of Portuguese-Canadian students. Research results (Project Diploma, 1997) show that Portuguese-Canadian students within the Toronto District School Board worked on average an additional four hours per week as compared to 15 other ethno-cultural groups. Likewise, the jobs in which these students were employed were disproportionately skewed toward the service sector (i.e., servers and cashiers) and trades (i.e., labourer). Specifically, 16% of Portuguese-Canadian students worked part-time as labourers versus 6% of the entire student body (Project Diploma, 1997). However, there are complex
reasons as to why students either do not work or work an overwhelming amount of hours. Although many reasons are connected with the need to engage in part-time work, such as assuming adult roles, tending to elderly relatives, siblings or children and assisting with the family income, other studies (Bushnik, 2003; Willis, 1977) point to leaving school and entering the workforce based on one’s desire to earn instant money. Young men when compared to young women are more likely to cite the need to earn money as a determining factor in their early school leaving (Bushnik, 2003). Bushnik’s findings confirm the work done by Willis (1977), who found that young, male working-class students’ engagement and disposition for education were undermined by the desire to enter the workforce. As Willis (1977) found, young, male working-class students look to “their pockets . . . that’s in their minds” (p. 75). Money, thus, becomes “the spice of life” (Willis, 1977, p. 39), thereby undermining their engagement and disposition toward school. More recent work (O’Donnell & Sharpe, 2000), however, demonstrates that although many working-class boys still expected to work in a skilled trade they were acutely aware of the importance of educational qualifications due to the changes occurring in the labour market.

Summary

Many school and non-school related risk factors shape the process of early school leaving thereby making it a complex and integrative phenomenon. Although early school leavers predominantly cite a perceived lack of relevant curriculum and negative school climate as school related factors, other non-school related factors, such as socio-economic status, family and peer influence, risky behavior, and working while in school, affect student disaffection and early school leaving. In the case of young, Portuguese-Canadian men it is important to be cognizant of the social profile of early immigrants, the challenges faced in the host country and how such challenges shaped the community’s educational profile and the subsequent educational outcomes of later generations. Examining the phenomenon of early school leaving along an integrative framework provides a more comprehensive and accurate account of the early school leaving
phenomenon. The following chapter details my research methodology and the methods used to collect and analyze data.
CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

This chapter provides a detailed account of the methodological approach to my study and the methods used to collect and analyze data. The chapter begins with a description of the research design. Next, I provide details of the research method: (a) participant selection, (b) participant recruitment, (c) participants’ backgrounds, (d) data collection, (e) organization of data, (f) developing a coding scheme, and (g) content analysis. The chapter ends with a description of the procedure followed to gain ethical clearance for the study and the methods used to enhance trustworthiness.

Research Design

Given that my research purpose was to uncover the reasons for early school leaving among four young, male Portuguese-Canadians, a qualitative methodology was most appropriate as it enabled description and analysis of “people’s individual and collective social action, beliefs, thoughts and perceptions” (McMillan & Schumacher, 2006, p. 315). My research design is a combination of an interview study and a collective case study in that my goal was to understand points of view, meaning in experiences, in order to uncover “[the] lived world” (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009) of four young, Portuguese-Canadian men. My research is also a collective case study as I wanted to understand “an issue explored through one or more cases within a bounded system” (Creswell, 2007, p. 73). My research design, therefore, is an interview and collective case study because I have chosen to look at the early school leaving of four young men from the same cultural background, but have not explored the cases, “over time, through detailed, in-depth data collection” (Creswell, 2007, p. 73). The combined interview and collective case study design enabled the construction of knowledge between myself and each participant as their
personal stories allowed me to document, interpret, and share the lived experiences of these four young Portuguese-Canadian men.

My initial research design included one focus group, followed by three to six one-on-one interviews. This would have garnered rich and varied participant accounts. The decision to use a focus group was rationalized under a focus group’s power to go “well beyond listening to others, since they can serve as a basis for empowering ‘clients’” (Morgan, 1996, p. 133). I believed a focus group would offer the participants an opportunity to voice their experiences in a collective way. The focus group, however, was eliminated as a result of participants’ request to not be involved. None of the participants was particularly proud of his early school leaving and therefore did not want to discuss his experiences with others. The sentiment expressed by the participants evidences the inherent societal stigma attached to leaving school without a secondary school diploma and how these young men have internalized this stigma through a sense of shame and regret. As Warren (2002) writes, “one of the problems in seeking respondents for [a] study [is] . . . not being able to find anyone to talk to. This can be a problem, especially when the topic . . . is stigmatized” (p. 87). In order to assuage the participants’ sense of shame, I reiterated the research purpose, which was to provide a vehicle for male, Portuguese-Canadian early school leavers to voice their educational experiences, thereby leading to a richer understanding of those experiences. Emphasis was placed on providing an objective description of the participants and their unique experiences. My data collection, therefore, took the form of four one-on-one interviews to allow for a greater “understanding of an individual” (Fontana & Frey, 2000, p. 646).

As I wanted the interviews to be “relatively conversational and situational” (McMillan & Schumacher, 2006, p. 351) and yet be guided by pre-determined questions, a semi-structured interview approach was used. A semi-structured interview approach allowed me to specify certain key topics and questions while providing room for other topics to be explored as they emerged during the interview. Sample questions from the interview guide are to be found in Appendix D. This strategy offered the flexibility of probing, determining, and exploring certain
subjects in greater depth, or even to pose emerging questions about new areas of inquiry that were not originally anticipated in the initial interview questions. The semi-structured interview approach was especially beneficial when I considered the effect of “fractured subjectivities” on participant accounts. Fractured subjectivities, according to Warren (2002), not only encompass societal roles and hierarchies, such as race, ethnicity and gender, but are also relevant to social positions. From the information gleaned on the participants, it was expected that the participants would take on various social positions, including: (a) former students reflecting on their time in elementary and secondary school, (b) early school leavers and, (c) Portuguese-Canadian men. The semi-structured interview approach, therefore, offered the opportunity to steer the discussion so as to take into account the participants’ social positions. Using this perspective, the participants are seen to be active meaning makers, which allows me to document and deduce interpretations according to their various positions.

Research Method

Participant selection.

Research shows that approximately 33% of Portuguese-Canadians between the ages of 25–34 have not completed high school (Ornstein, 2006). Furthermore, research (Brown, 2006; Brown & Sinay, 2008) has found young Portuguese-Canadian students have: (a) lower achievement levels in the Intermediate/Secondary panels when compared to other ethno-cultural minority groups, (b) the highest percentages of Grade 9 at-risk youth according to credit accumulation and, (c) the highest dropout rate at 43 percent. Male participants were selected for the study given the research documenting that young men of Portuguese-Canadian descent have fewer academic credentials than young women in the same cultural group (Statistics Canada, 2001). Approximately 20% more young female Portuguese-Canadians have a secondary school diploma when compared to young, male Portuguese-Canadians. Nearly double the number of young, female Portuguese-Canadians in comparison to their male colleagues have a university degree (Statistics Canada, 2001).
I chose Toronto as the data collection site because it is the largest Portuguese-Canadian community in Canada—188,110 Torontonian residents claimed Portuguese descent (Statistics Canada, 2006a)—and, thus, provided a large pool of potential participants.

Using criterion sampling, participants were selected if they were: (a) male, (b) Portuguese-Canadian, (c) between the ages of 18–26, (d) residents of the metropolitan Toronto area, (e) previous students of either the Toronto District School Board or the Toronto Catholic District School Board, (f) not in possession of an Ontario Secondary School Diploma, and (g) not currently in school.

**Participant recruitment.**

Initial recruitment methods took the form of an online event advertisement posted through Facebook and a paper-based flyer (Appendix B) posted in the area of Little Portugal in downtown Toronto. Neither method attracted participants. Network sampling was then used (McMillan & Schumacher, 2006). As a member of the Portuguese-Canadian community, I made use of my personal network to locate potential participants. Four personal contacts, members of the Portuguese-Canadian community who did not meet the sampling criteria, were utilized as a means of recruitment. These contacts were introduced to the research: its purpose, its methodology and the sampling criteria. They were asked to nominate individuals who they felt would be willing participants. The personal contacts nominated five participants. Later, a sixth individual was recommended by a nominated participant. Participants were then contacted via telephone. The first telephone conversation outlined the purpose of the study and the participant’s role. Initially, all participants agreed to a one-on-one interview while declining to be involved in the focus group. It was then agreed that a second telephone conversation would follow in which arrangements were made to schedule a time, date and place for the one-on-one interview. All participants were contacted within one week of the first telephone conversation. However, two did not respond and never returned the second call. With the remaining four participants, arrangements were made to conduct a one-on-one interview at a time, date and place
that was most convenient for them. Participants were asked to choose a pseudonym for the purpose of maintaining confidentiality to the extent possible.

These four participants were my key participants. In the design of the study, I only intended to include these four. I had not planned to include other participants. As the study progressed, however, I held informal conversations with a number of people, and in some of these conversations information was passed along that I thought could highlight my findings. At the end of each conversation, I asked if the individuals would not mind if I used the information gleaned from the conversation if it was deemed to be relevant to my study. I obtained verbal consent from all the people. I took notes on these conversations in my reflexive journal. As it turned out from all these informal conversations, only information from four informants is used to shed light on the findings.

**Participants’ backgrounds.**

Despite my attempt to recruit six participants, only four volunteered. To off-set this, I attempted to get more detailed information from each of the participants. Although research has been conducted to highlight the voice of students who have left school prior to receiving their secondary school diploma (Alberta Learning, 2001; Ferguson et al., 2005), no research to date has focused specifically on male Portuguese-Canadian early school leavers. This research attempts to fill the lacuna by providing an investigation into the early school leaving phenomenon of four individuals while offering an outlet in which these men may voice their experiences, attitudes and beliefs. Below is a brief glance of each of the four participants.

**Jeff.**

At the time of the interview, Jeff was 23 years old. He is the son of a Portuguese mother who was born in the Azores, a Portuguese archipelago of nine islands, and a Canadian born father, a descendant of English newcomers. Jeff was born in Canada and had been educated in the Ontario school system. His parents, only one of whom had a college level education, had great academic hopes and expectations for him. Nonetheless, Jeff was 18 and in Grade 12 when he left school.
He was working full-time when the interview was conducted. His reasons for leaving, as detailed in the following chapter, are multifold and complex.

Joe.

At the time of the interview, Joe was 25 years old. He was born in Canada; both his parents were born in continental Portugal. His parents had immigrated to Canada when they were in their mid-20s and had not had the opportunity to obtain a high school education in Portugal. Joe left school when he was 17 and in Grade 11. Joe’s reasons for leaving are unique and complex. Joe was also working full-time when the interview was conducted.

Paul.

At the time of the interview, Paul was 24 years old. Unlike the other participants, Paul was not born in Canada. Paul and his parents had emigrated from Portugal to Canada in the late 1980s; he was only five years old. Paul’s parents were not high school educated and although “education was primary . . . in their minds” (Paul, p. 7, 194), Paul left school early at the age of 16 and had only partially completed Grade 9. Like the first two participants, Paul was also working full-time during the interview. More than all the other three participants, his reasons for leaving early evidence the ways in which the financial attraction of employment influences one’s academic decisions (Bushnik, 2003; Willis, 1977).

Johnny.

At the time of the interview, Johnny was 22 years old and was also working full-time. Like Jeff and Joe, he was born in Canada. His parents, however, were born in the Azores. Johnny’s parents’ experiences with the Portuguese education system were quite limited. His parents were not given the opportunity to be educated: “people wanted to go to school; they just couldn’t afford it” (Johnny, p. 3, 68-69). Although his parents were not “educated”, they did support their son’s educational path. He remembers that his parents had established an educational fund, and were determined that he go on to post-secondary education. Johnny, however, did not pursue
post-secondary education. He was 15 and in Grade 10 when he left school. His reasons for leaving, like those of the other participants, are unique.

The above four individuals: Jeff, Joe, Paul, and Johnny were my key participants.

Informants.

As previously mentioned, I also identified from my journal entries four individuals: Melinda, Beatrice, Sofia, and Lucy who I consider as informants, yet not key participants. A pseudonym was given to these individuals for the purpose of maintaining confidentiality to the extent possible. References are made to informal conversations with these individuals who are either members of the Portuguese-Canadian community or non-members of the community.

Melinda, who is not Portuguese-Canadian, was a former teacher in Jeff’s secondary school. Beatrice is also not Portuguese-Canadian. She was a former student in Johnny’s secondary school. Sofia, who is Portuguese-Canadian, attested to her experiences growing up in a working-class family and its impact on her educational outcome. Lucy, who is Portuguese-Canadian, is an executive member of the Portuguese-Canadian National Congress, a well-established Portuguese-Canadian not-for-profit organization. The informal conversations were unplanned and took place during incidental encounters. The conversations resulted from the individuals’ curiosity about my research. All these individuals expressed opinions regarding the early school leaving phenomenon among young Portuguese-Canadian men. Specifically, Melinda and Beatrice spoke of the social context of two schools which two participants attended, and Sofia spoke of her experiences in school and the lack of support she had from her Portuguese-Canadian parents. Lucy described the past initiatives taken by the Portuguese-Canadian National Congress in relation to the issue of education. When reference is made to an informal conversation, the citation includes the individual’s pseudonym and the corresponding page number in my reflexive journal. For example, the citation “Sofia, journal entry, p. 7,” indicates the location of my notes for the individual pseudo-named Sofia with the information being found on page 7 of my reflexive journal.
Data Collection

Data were collected through a number of sources: documents, questionnaires, interviews, and journal entries.

Document analysis.

In order to support interview findings and to augment validity, I analyzed numerous documents published by both the Ontario Ministry of Education and the Toronto Catholic District School Board. Understanding that “material culture [documents] is thus necessary [italics in original] for most social constructs [because they] transform, materially, socially, and ideologically” (Hodder, 2000, p. 706). I analyzed documents with the intent of exploring “multiple and conflicting voices, [and the] differing and interacting interpretations” (Hodder, 2000, p. 705) between documents published by the Ontario Ministry of Education and the Toronto Catholic District School Board relating to positive school climate and the experiences of the four participants. Specifically, two Ontario Ministry of Education policies: (a) the Provincial Code of Conduct and School Board Codes of Conduct (2007b), and (b) the Progressive Discipline and Promoting Positive Student Behaviour (2009a) along with the Toronto Catholic District School Board’s Violence Prevention Policy (1995) were analyzed in order to gain an understanding of the Ministry’s and board’s interpretation of school climate.

As free-flowing texts, these three documents were analyzed using word counts. I noted how often the words “positive”, “caring”, “safe”, “discipline”, “progressive” and “preventative” were used throughout the documents. Although this analysis did not consider the context in which the words were used, this analysis allowed me to gain a better understanding of the differences or similarities between how the Ontario Ministry of Education and the Toronto Catholic District School Board see social climate as a construct and the experiences of the participants.

Questionnaire.

A questionnaire (Appendix C) was given to each participant prior to commencing the one-on-one interview. The questionnaire allowed me to obtain demographic data including the
participants’ current age, the grade level in which they left school and their current employment status. At the time of the interview, participants were asked to choose a pseudonym for the purpose of maintaining confidentiality to the extent possible.

**Interviews.**

One-on-one interviews were conducted with each of the four participants between the end of October, 2009 and the beginning of November, 2009. All interviews were held near Little Portugal in downtown Toronto; three were held at a public library and one was held at a community centre. Prior to commencing the interview, the participant was provided with the Letter of Information (Appendix E), Consent Form (Appendix F) and a brief questionnaire. As mandated by the General Research Ethics Board protocol, the participant read both the Letter of Information and the Consent Form. He then signed two copies of the Consent Form. The participant retained the Letter of Information and one signed copy of the Consent Form. The researcher retained the second copy of the signed Consent Form. Prior to commencing the interview, the purpose of the study and interview were reviewed and the participant was notified of his right to decline to answer any question he found objectionable and to withdraw from the study at any time.

The objectives of the interviews were to obtain rich data on each participant around a series of topics: (a) his membership and identification with the Portuguese-Canadian community, (b) his parents’ experiences and dispositions to education and work, (c) his personal experiences during his time in the education system, (d) personal motivations leading him to not obtain a secondary school diploma, (e) his disposition to education, (f) his understanding of work, and (g) his concept of education. Before ending the interviews, the researcher gave a brief oral summary of the discussion, and the participant was provided an opportunity to make any additional comments that had not been fully elaborated or discussed throughout the course of the interview. Each interview lasted approximately one and a half hours and was audio-taped using Wave Pad Sound
Editor 4.27, an audio recording and editing software program, to fully capture participant accounts and to later ensure transcription accuracy.

**Journal entries.**

During the research process, a reflexive journal was maintained in order to support interview findings and augment validity. The journal allowed me to record, justify, modify, and trace my personal reactions to the research. Journal entries are used in Chapter 5.

Throughout the course of the study, I recorded and traced my personal reactions to the literature, the recruitment process, and after each one-on-one interview with participants. As well, I documented my personal interactions on a continuous basis with numerous individuals as the topic of my research came up in conversations.

**Organization of Data**

**Transcription.**

To remain connected to the data, I transcribed all four audio-taped interviews. According to Poland (2002), two possible challenges to transcription quality are (a) misinterpretation and, (b) the impulse to “tidy up” the transcript. To ensure transcription quality and remain connected to the data, I listened to each audio-taped interview on two separate occasions prior to beginning the transcription process. This was done to gain a general understanding of the participants’ experiences. Following the second listening, I transcribed the interviews verbatim into a Microsoft Word™ document. In order to easily organize, retrieve, and code transcript information, each transcribed interview was titled according to participant and continuous page and line numbers were inserted. After transcribing each interview, I re-listened to each audio-taped interview while simultaneously correcting errors within the transcript. This last phase enhanced transcript trustworthiness as it limited misinterpretations, thereby capturing participants’ statements. With respect to tidying up the data, I followed Poland’s advice by not editing the participants’ accounts while transcribing. For example, when pauses occurred during the interview process, I referenced these with ellipses. Furthermore, for the purpose of offering a
more readable text, some omissions, and lack in fluency were reflected in participant quotes. For example, speech disfluencies, such as “um” and “uh,” have been omitted from the quotations presented in this thesis.

**Interview notes.**

Following the transcription process, an interview note for each participant was written to capture ideas and document themes in the data (Corbin, 1986). Interview notes enabled me to not only see the evolution of my thinking process but also allowed me to record, verify, modify, and change data analysis. The interview notes also facilitated the coding and analysis process because it gave preliminary ideas on how each participant’s account reflected the existing literature on early school leavers and Bourdieu and Passeron’s (1979) theories of cultural capital and habitus.

**Developing a Coding Scheme**

Qualitative analysis is defined as “a relatively systematic process of coding, categorizing, and interpreting data to provide explanations of a single phenomenon” (McMillan & Schumacher, 2006, p. 346). As I was interested in studying each individual’s specific reason for leaving school, the unit of analysis was an utterance by a participant. I analyzed the participants’ answers to my questions. Thus, utterances by participants were analyzed as they allowed me to understand factors influencing the participants’ early school leaving.

Prior to coding, I parsed the utterances by participants. Each utterance by a participant was parsed according to the different themes that arose in the unit of analysis. That is, if a certain utterance discussed various themes, such as parental level of education and parental English fluency, the utterance was separated twice for each corresponding theme. Parsing of the data was used to disentangle different themes embedded in units of analysis. After having parsed the data, I re-read the participant’s transcript. Re-reading the participant’s transcript allowed me to develop a coding scheme.
Congruent with the ethnographic nature of the study, data were systematically coded in two ways. First, etic codes were derived from the existing literature on early school leavers and the theories of cultural capital and habitus. Second, emic codes were formed which corresponded to themes that although not in the literature, were nonetheless introduced by the participants. These emic codes emerged from my readings of the transcripts. The etic codes used were: (a) cultural capital, (b) habitus, (c) curricular diversity, (d) differentiated learning, (e) experiential learning, (f) student-teacher relationships, (g) school guidance, (h) school climate, (i) parental education, (j) parental involvement, (k) work attitude, (l) risk-taking behavior, (m) peer group, and (n) early school leaving stigma. Additional emic codes emerged from reading the transcripts. These codes represented the participants’ views, beliefs, words, explanations and values. The emic codes were: (a) parental English fluency, (b) father’s influence, (c) meaning of education, (d) early school leaving in retrospect, (e) success, and (f) Portuguese-Canadians and education. A colour was also randomly selected to represent each etic and emic code.

**Content Analysis**

After developing a coding scheme, I once again re-read each individual transcript. When a data segment corresponded to a specific etic code, I underlined the data segment and wrote the etic code in the margin of the passage using the chosen colour. When a data segment corresponded to a specific emic code, I underlined the data segment and wrote the emic code in the margin of the passage using the chosen colour. Appendix G and H provide examples of coded transcripts. Table 1 lists both etic and emic codes, their corresponding mnemonic code, provides a brief description of the code and offers an example from a transcribed interview. The table represents how each utterance by a participant was coded.
Table 1

Concepts, Codes, Definition and Examples in the Coding Process

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Concept</th>
<th>Code</th>
<th>Definition</th>
<th>Example</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cultural Capital</td>
<td>CC</td>
<td>An array of possessions such as cultural knowledge, educational credentials, linguistic fluency, access to resources, and information about institutional practices and policies.</td>
<td>I just think they couldn’t relate, because first off it’s not their language. So they don’t really speak the language, so they couldn’t really help me too much with any work I had.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Habitus</td>
<td>HA</td>
<td>Determined by one’s social context. It influences how an individual perceives and relates to his or her world.</td>
<td>I’ll just go work construction because that’s what I’m going to be anyways because that’s what all Portuguese guys do.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Curricular Diversity</td>
<td>CD</td>
<td>The need to incorporate various forms of learning both differentiated and experiential opportunities into the curriculum.</td>
<td>I think they should help kids actually get into the workforce before they actually get in.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Differentiated Learning</td>
<td>DL</td>
<td>Student centered approaches to learning and assessment.</td>
<td>If I got to choose exactly what I wanted it would be a lot better.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Experiential Learning</td>
<td>EL</td>
<td>Curriculum dealing with experiential learning opportunities.</td>
<td>That they would do some more hands-on, shop work. That they could work something like that before the kid even gets to college or university.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student-Teacher Relationship</td>
<td>STR</td>
<td>The interactions students have with teachers, both in the classroom and outside of the classroom.</td>
<td>Not one teacher really had my back.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School Guidance</td>
<td>SG</td>
<td>The support received by students in school from guidance counselors or other school personnel.</td>
<td>It seemed like everything she did for me, seemed like procedure. She didn’t get to me on a personal level.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School Climate</td>
<td>SC</td>
<td>The overall atmosphere in the school.</td>
<td>A bunch of chaos, people would just go crazy in that school. They would leave, we’d see fights.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parental Education</td>
<td>PE</td>
<td>The parents’ level of education.</td>
<td>They went to school, but it wasn’t too many years; they weren’t in school for too many years. It was a hard life and you had to learn quick.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parental Involvement</td>
<td>PI</td>
<td>Level of parental involvement.</td>
<td>My parents were never really involved too much with my school. My dad was mostly involved in his business and his work and my mom was too.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Code</td>
<td>Abbreviation</td>
<td>Description</td>
<td>Description</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--------------------</td>
<td>--------------</td>
<td>-----------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>-----------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Work Attitude</td>
<td>WA</td>
<td>Participants’ attitude to work.</td>
<td>It made me pretty happy because I was a contributing member of society.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Risk-Taking</td>
<td>RTB</td>
<td>Participants’ involvement in criminal activity, illegal substance use and truancy.</td>
<td>It’s just a whole lifestyle that was appealing at the time, but I feel like it was part of my downfall.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peer Group</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>The influence peers have on education outcomes.</td>
<td>Maybe the group of people that I was with. All my friends, that’s the main thing.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Early School Leaving Stigma</td>
<td>ESLS</td>
<td>The participants’ perspectives of the stigma attached to leaving school without a secondary school diploma.</td>
<td>I think there’s a very big stigma attached. But there’s a lot more to that than not finishing school.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parental English Fluency</td>
<td>EF</td>
<td>The parents’ English fluency. How it impacted involvement in social life.</td>
<td>I just think they couldn’t relate, because first off it’s not their language.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Father’s Influence</td>
<td>FI</td>
<td>The father’s occupation in influencing participants’ vocational interests.</td>
<td>You eventually gain interest [in] it because your father was interested in it.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meaning of Education</td>
<td>ME</td>
<td>What education means to the participants.</td>
<td>For me that doesn’t say anything too much about education. It says a lot, but it doesn’t mean that you’re completely educated just because you have 2 or 3 degrees. There are a lot of people who don’t have degrees, but they are very smart and they make a lot of money and they know what they’re doing just the same.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Early School Leaving in Retrospect</td>
<td>ESLR</td>
<td>The participants’ reflection of their early school leaving.</td>
<td>When I left school, I think I pretty much made the wrong decision.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Success</td>
<td>S</td>
<td>How the participants’ define success.</td>
<td>Them achieving their goals. They got to do what they got to do. They want to go somewhere; they want to be at a certain level.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Portuguese-Canadians and Education</td>
<td>PCE</td>
<td>How the community sees the benefit of education and whether the participants’ feel the community is educated.</td>
<td>No, I would think that society would think that they’re not educated because I would say at least half of them never graduated.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

After establishing the codes, as outlined in Table 1, all codes across interviews were compared. Comparing the codes was important to finding patterns within the data sets so as to
“understand the complex links among various aspects of people’s situations, mental processes, beliefs, and actions” (McMillan & Schumacher, 2006, p. 373). Comparing codes also allowed me to determine which classifications were most influential to the participants and to establish the basis for pattern analysis of the data as presented in Chapter 4. Patterns were established by lifting every participant’s verbatim description of each etic and emic category from the transcript. Each participant’s description corresponding to one code was copied into one definitional file on a Microsoft Word™ document. The document was then titled according to the respective pattern and contained all the participants’ data segments pertinent to the pattern. The process was repeated until all codes had a corresponding definitional file. These patterns were used to identify the themes that were pertinent to the participants’ experiences and beliefs, my theoretical framework, and past research. These themes then formed the basis for the discussion in Chapter 5.

**Ethics Clearance**

This research study was granted ethics clearance by the Queen’s University General Research Ethics Board (Appendix A). Participants received a Letter of Information and a signed Consent Form. In keeping with Queen’s University’s research ethics policies, all participant information continues to be kept confidential to the extent possible. Before starting the interview, participants chose a pseudonym. This pseudonym was used in all transcripts and reporting of the data. A list of the names and pseudonyms was stored separate from the data. Prior to an interview, participants were notified of their legal right to decline to answer questions they found objectionable and the right to withdraw from the study at any time. Only the researcher, thesis supervisor, committee member and independent coder—a fellow Master’s of Education colleague who coded the transcripts in addition to myself—had access to the data, which were kept in a secure and locked room at all times during the course of the study.

Hatch (2002) draws attention to the major ethical consideration of reciprocity, which sees researchers giving back to participants for their time. Consideration was paid to the issue of
reciprocity. As I was sensitive to the potential of causing emotional harm by revisiting the participants’ early school leaving, efforts were made to ensure that participants would gain from contributing in the study. For example, at the conclusion of each interview, informal discussions ensued regarding potential alternative educational routes. Some of these discussions centered on Independent Learning Centres while others led to information regarding apprenticeship programs.

Another ethical issue, raised by Creswell (2007), is the need to respect participants individually “by not stereotyping them, [and] using their language” (p. 44). I made a concerted effort to remain sensitive to these young men so as to not further marginalize them. I intentionally chose language that established supportive rapport by not using the label of “dropout.” Instead, I opted to use the label “early school leaver”, which was embraced by the participants.

**Trustworthiness**

The concern over substantive validity—understanding of topics derived from other sources—posed a limitation to my research. As a member of the Portuguese-Canadian community, my positioning with respect to my social, cultural and historical situations parallel, to a certain extent, those of the participants, thus creating an “insider perspective” (Johnson, 2002). It is such parallels that may introduce bias and reduce conclusion validity by limiting an objective approach to the data. As Johnson (2002) points out, however, insider status may foster a common sense of understanding and experience between interviewer and interviewee thereby leading to rich data and a deeper interpretation of the nuances in participant meanings. To limit substantive validity concerns and increase trustworthiness, a reflexive journal was used (Hatch, 2002; McMillan & Schumacher, 2006). This journal provided a vehicle for recording, justifying, modifying and tracing my personal reactions throughout the entire study. Throughout the course of the study, I noted the informal conversations with Melinda, Beatrice, Sofia and Lucy as data journal entries when they were relevant to my research.
In order to supplement the one-on-one interviews and maximize validity, policy documents published by an Ontario school board and Ontario Ministry of Education were analyzed with the intent of triangulating the data. I wanted to present, compare and contrast the idea of “multiple, refracted realities” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005, p. 6) between the participants’ experiences of secondary school and policies put forth by an Ontario school board and the Ontario Ministry of Education.

Trustworthiness of data was further augmented by using numerous strategies: (a) audio-recording, and (b) transcription procedures. Audio-recording the data ensured that participant accounts were accurately captured. I transcribed the audio-recorded interviews verbatim. To improve transcript quality, editing was not used during the transcription process.

**Inter-rater reliability.**

To further augment trustworthiness, a fellow Master’s of Education colleague ran an independent analysis of the data in order to ensure that the coding scheme developed reflected the literature on early school leaving and the theories of cultural capital and habitus. Prior to coding, a training session occurred in which the Master’s of Education student was provided an outline of the study and its objectives, was informed of the meaning of all codes in relation to the literature on early school leaving and the theories of cultural capital and habitus, and trained how to code the data. Following the colleague’s coding, a de-brief session occurred in which the independent coder and myself compared and discussed our respective ways of coding. During the session, a consensus was reached as to the coding of the data, thereby making the inter-rater agreement 100%.

**Summary**

In this chapter, I have provided a detailed account of the methodological approach to my study and the methods used to collect and analyze data. Collecting data using an interview and collective case study approach provided rich, in-depth, and varied perspectives. I also outlined details of my method: (a) participant selection, (b) participant recruitment, (c) participants’
backgrounds, (d) data collection, (e) organization of data, (f) developing a coding scheme, and (g) content analysis. A description of the procedure followed to gain ethical clearance for the study and the methods used to enhance trustworthiness were also outlined. The following chapter presents the findings resulting from the analysis.
CHAPTER 4

RESULTS

The purpose of this study is to understand the early school leaving process of four young, male Portuguese-Canadians. This chapter retells the experiences of Jeff, Joe, Paul, and Johnny. It is organized into four sections, each telling the story of one participant. Each section is subdivided into three or four thematic areas from the following as appropriate: (a) Curricular Relevancy, (b) Learning Community, (c) Family Influence, and (d) Peer Influence. Thick descriptions are provided in order to report the participants’ early school leaving. For the most part, the participants’ stories inform the findings. When the depth of the participant’s response is shallow, attention is drawn to the existing literature in order to offer a deeper interpretation. When reference is made to a participant’s story, the citation includes the participant’s pseudonym, the page number of the transcribed interview, and the corresponding line number(s). For example, the citation “Paul, p. 1, 31–33,” indicates an interview for the participant pseudo-named Paul with the quotation being found on page 1, lines 31–33 of his transcribed interview.

In order to present the findings resulting from data analysis, the unit of analysis—an utterance by a participant—was parsed, a coding scheme was established, and each transcript was coded etically and emically. Each utterance by a participant was parsed in order to disentangle different themes embedded in units of analysis. After having parsed the data, I re-read the participant’s transcript and developed etic and emic codes. A colour was also randomly selected to represent each etic and emic code. After developing the codes, I re-read each individual transcript. When a data segment corresponded to a specific etic code, I underlined the data segment and wrote the code in the margin of the passage using the chosen colour. When a data segment corresponded to
a specific emic code, I underlined the data segment and wrote the code in the margin of the passage using the chosen colour. Table 2 represents the frequency of codes among participants.

Table 2

Frequency of Codes Among Participants

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Etic Codes</th>
<th>Frequency per Participant</th>
<th>Frequency among Participants</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Item</strong></td>
<td><strong>Code</strong></td>
<td><strong>Jeff</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cultural Capital</td>
<td>CC</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Habitus</td>
<td>HA</td>
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<tr>
<td>Curricular Diversity</td>
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<tr>
<td>Differentiated Learning</td>
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<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Experiential Learning</td>
<td>EL</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student-Teacher Relationships</td>
<td>STR</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School Guidance</td>
<td>SG</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School Climate</td>
<td>SC</td>
<td>3</td>
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<tr>
<td>Parental Education</td>
<td>PE</td>
<td>3</td>
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<tr>
<td>Parental Involvement</td>
<td>PI</td>
<td>3</td>
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<tr>
<td>Work Attitude</td>
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<td>4</td>
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<tr>
<td>Risk-Taking Behaviour</td>
<td>RTB</td>
<td>5</td>
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<tr>
<td>Peer Group</td>
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<tr>
<td>Early School Leaving Stigma</td>
<td>ESLS</td>
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<th>Emic Codes</th>
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<td><strong>Item</strong></td>
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<td>Father’s Influence</td>
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<tr>
<td>Meaning of Education</td>
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<tr>
<td>ESL in Retrospect</td>
<td>ESLR</td>
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<tr>
<td>Success</td>
<td>S</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Portuguese-Canadians and Education</td>
<td>PCE</td>
<td>3</td>
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Table 2 does not tell us the respective weight of the impact of these factors, but it does tell us how often these factors came up in the participants’ conversations. Creating a definitional file for each code allowed for the quantification of codes and it also assisted in framing my findings chapter along the topics of: (a) Curricular Relevancy, (b) Learning Community, (c) Family Influence, and (d) Peer Influence. These topics then form the basis for the findings chapter. However, it is crucial to note that the last two topics were not relevant to all participants. That is,
Joe and Johnny found both Family Influence and Peer Influence to have affected their educational aspirations whereas Paul makes reference to Family Influence only and Jeff discusses Peer Influence only.

**Participant Voices**

**Jeff.**

At the time of the interview, Jeff was 23 and had not been in school for over five years. He was living with his girlfriend and was employed full-time in a position he did not enjoy. Jeff recalls that he had a stable family life. His parents were supportive and wanted him to do well in school. They were actively engaged in his education; they often attended parent-teacher interviews, but as he remembers he never received help with his schoolwork. He speculates it was because of his parents’ low level of education. Although his mother was college educated, his father had not completed high school: “When it comes to actually doing the schoolwork they were sort of helpful but not extremely helpful. I guess they didn’t know the material and stuff or they didn’t know what to do” (Jeff, p. 21, 637–639). Jeff’s speculation that his parents did not help him with schoolwork because of their level of education is evidence of Bourdieu and Passeron’s (1979) theory of cultural capital. It may have been that Jeff received “some help” with his schoolwork because his mother, having been college educated, had the requisite knowledge of curriculum and educational practices to assist him. Jeff, however, may still have been at an educational disadvantage as only one of his parents had graduated from secondary school and pursued post-secondary education.

Throughout secondary school, Jeff had been employed part-time at a grocery store and often helped his father in his auto body shop. As he recalls:

> It made me pretty happy because I was a contributing member of society. And then I also worked with my dad sometimes at his auto body shop. Helping him clean and stuff. Between those two jobs I was making quite a bit of money and I was doing school. Personally I don’t think it wasn’t too hard for me to work those two jobs and go to school. I think the more you do and the harder you work it makes you a better person. (Jeff, p. 15, 442–446)
Jeff’s experience of working while in secondary school contradicts the literature on early school leavers and working (Bushnik, 2003; Willis, 1977), which concludes that some students, particularly those belonging to working-class families, are driven to leave prior to obtaining a secondary school diploma because of the desire to be financially independent.

Early in Grade 9, Jeff began skipping school, engaging in illegal substance use, and became involved in criminal acts. He remembers that it “kind of went downhill” (Jeff, p. 8, 230). According to Jeff, his risky behaviour detrimentally affected his educational outcomes. When talking about illegal substance use and truancy, he stated, “it’s just a whole lifestyle that was appealing at the time, but I feel like it was part of my downfall” (Jeff, p. 9, 249–250). One incident, which did not occur on school property, led to the involvement of police and the Youth Criminal Justice system. According to Jeff, as part of his parole agreement, he was mandated to attend an alternative school for a period of one year.

The alternative school Jeff attended had been introduced on the heels of the Safe Schools Act (2000)\(^2\), which was a response by certain Ontario school boards to meet the educational needs of various students who had been placed on limited expulsion\(^3\). As the alternative program in a school that Jeff attended supported a small percentage of the school board’s student body, little information has been readily available. In order to fully understand Jeff’s unique secondary school experience, it is worth describing in detail the environment and curricula of this particular program.

In the year in which Jeff attended the alternative school, it catered to a diverse student population, ranging from Grades 9–12. Students had severe emotional, intellectual, and behavioural needs. Some students had mental health issues, others had extensive records with the Criminal Justice System, and others were students who had made wrong decisions, such as

\(^{2}\) Under the Safe Schools Act (2000), school boards were required to establish and maintain programs for suspended and expelled students.

\(^{3}\) As defined by the Safe Schools Act (2000), a student on limited expulsion is not entitled to attend the school which he/she attended when he/she committed the infraction and may not engage in school-related activities of that school.
engaging in criminal acts which may have led to minor theft charges. All these students had been given a limited expulsion from their school board. Although the program had a flexible intake period, there was a fairly rigid demission period. That is, students could be admitted half way into a semester, but were only demitted at the end of each semester. Staff and administration would meet on a weekly basis to appraise the performance of students and, on a monthly basis, students were made aware of their progress. In order to be recommended for demission, students had to have obtained three months of successful behavior—not have engaged in any inappropriate behaviours according to the board’s policies—within a five month period. The readmission procedure into the traditional secondary school system was highly structured as well. In consultation with the receiving school, a meeting was convened with receiving administrators, parents, staff, community support workers and students. The meeting was meant to be a reflection of the student’s progress rather than a condemnation for his or her time in the program. The demission and readmission process, therefore, was meant to be a signal for positive change.

The overall milieu was one of a genuine community of support. In order for the program to succeed, a behavioural intervention component existed. This component consisted of daily counseling sessions and was based on supportive relationships with other students and school personnel. The school was small enough to encourage positive student-teacher interactions so as to encourage a sense of belonging and trust.

The alternative school’s mandated programming was divided into two parts: (a) academic, and (b) counseling and intervention. The curriculum ranged from locally developed to academic courses. Students were admitted into the “Credit Rescue” program. Here, emphasis was placed on completing credits already started. Administrators negotiated with the student’s previous school to ensure that an appropriate Credit Rescue program was created. The daily programming consisted of two academic program periods, during which students in small classes of five to six students per class received individualized academic attention. Present in the classroom were one teacher and a number of community support staff, including Child and Youth Workers and
Educational Assistants. There were also a number of college students completing their placements in Child and Youth Diploma and Social Work diploma programs.

Sandwiched in between the two academic periods was a counseling and intervention period. Here, small groups of students were encouraged to share their experiences with one another. At times, administrators, teachers and guest speakers reflected on their experience, provided counseling sessions and attempted to foster reflective thinking that then led to a form of academic engagement. The intervention session encouraged students to reflect on their time in the alternative school.

When discussing the time spent at “Con Ed”, the term he used, Jeff expressed a positive experience: “Actually, that school was one of the best things that happened to me” (Jeff, p. 11, 303). Although Con Ed offered a positive and supportive environment, his early school leaving was an effect of multiple risk factors. Jeff describes the lack of curricular relevancy, a negative learning community and peer influence as major sources for his leaving school.

**Curricular relevancy.**

Although Jeff did not speak directly of his disengagement with particular aspects of the curriculum, there was an overriding sense that he believed schools and pedagogy to be static. When discussing his school, Jeff states, “it was institutionalized really. You know, you’re set to a schedule. They don’t give you that personal attention that you need” (Jeff, p. 12, 345–346). The institutionalized atmosphere reported is further extended into Jeff’s description of curricula:

> You know the teachers are trying to teach one thing and in your own head you might be saying you know that’s not the way it works. And you might disagree with the teacher and, unfortunately, schools don’t have contingency plans for things like that. They just go with what they’re taught and how they’re suppose to run things. (Jeff, p. 18, 560–563)

The structural makeup and regimented schedule were echoed in curricular approaches. When I further probed his statement that, “school is just so bland and so boring” (Jeff, p. 17, 530), Jeff argued that:
I don’t think school or the education system absolutely caters to everybody because it’s . . . one sided and obviously the world is so diverse . . . . We have a lot of people coming out of a lot of different situations. I think we need more options in the education system. (Jeff, p. 17, 527–530)

Jeff’s responses to his perceived “blandness” within the educational system concurs with the literature (Alberta Learning, 2001; Ferguson et al., 2005; Manning & Baruth, 1995; Satchwell, 2004, Vizard, 2009) on at-risk students and early school leavers, which emphasizes the need for differentiated and experiential approaches. This finding is important when we relate Jeff’s individualized experience in Con Ed where he describes how teachers “understood you. I don’t know how because they helped you a lot more; they got into your business” (Jeff, p. 11, 305–306).

Furthermore, corresponding to Riley and Rustique-Forrester’s (2002) thinking who support experiential learning as providing effective reengagement strategies, Jeff, with some difficulty, expressed the need for flexible, experiential learning that connects the school with the community: “I don’t know, some sort of community class or something to do with the environment . . . . Well we had sort of environment class, but more of . . . I don’t know . . . society” (Jeff, p. 23, 705–707). Jeff’s reference to society is quite important in light of the research (Ferguson et al., 2005; Hill & Smith, 1998) which promotes the establishment of community partnerships within schools in order to create a context-based learning atmosphere in which students are engaged in in situ learning.

Learning community.

Jeff had fond memories of elementary school and recalls, “I can remember being interested in a lot of stuff and being eager to learn” (Jeff, p. 5, 133). He also remembers the relationships he had with teachers:

I had a few teachers that were nice to me. I kind of felt they saw where I was coming from.
So I got a little bit more attention. You know, I’ll remember that forever. That little bit of attention that they gave me. That helped me a lot. (Jeff, p. 10, 279–281)

Jeff had fond recollections of his elementary school experience due to the positive and supportive learning environment established by his teachers. The caring environment of elementary school was later experienced in Con Ed:

Actually, that school was one of the best things that happened to me. It was a good school in a way that the teachers were more down to earth. They understood you, I don’t know how because they helped you a lot more; they got into your business. I did really good in that school. It was the best grades I ever got. I got 80, 90s in that school. (Jeff, p. 11, 303–306)

A caring environment provides students with the self-validation they need to see themselves as learners and to engage in learning and academic risk taking. The significance of a supportive environment is found in the literature (Freeman & Hutchinson, 1994; Newell, 2003).

Contrary to Jeff’s experience in elementary school and Con Ed, his time spent in secondary school was quite different:

High school was completely different. By the time I was 13 and going into high school I wasn’t as focused on school as I was . . . I had potential and I knew that a lot of the work I would go through was straight forward and easy, but there was just something that I didn’t feel like I wanted to be there. (Jeff, p. 5, 144–148)

Jeff attributed part of his “not wanting to be there” to a lack of positive relationships with teachers: “I never really got along with any one teacher really. Not one teacher really had my back. It’s as if those teachers cliqued together and they kind of watched each other’s backs more than they were helping us” (Jeff, p. 10, 277–279). Jeff’s perception of his relationships with his teachers reflects the findings of Alberta Learning (2001), Ferguson et al. (2005), and Satchwell (2004) which attest to poor student-teacher relationships among early school leavers. Nonetheless, Jeff never personally blamed the teachers for his early school leaving.
Part-and-parcel of a positive learning community, however, are relationships students develop with school support staff, such as guidance counselors. In Jeff’s case:

It seemed like everything she did for me, seemed like procedure. She didn’t get to me on a personal level. Everything she said to me, you know, I felt like she had to say that. You know, the options she gave me didn’t really work for me at the same time too, you know. So it didn’t really help me much. (Jeff, p. 6, 167–170)

Jeff’s interactions with both teachers and guidance counselors evidence his perception of a negative school climate and the belief that he was not wanted in the school. In fact, on numerous occasions, questions, such as “Why do you want to come to this school when it’s so far? There are so many schools in between.” (Jeff, p. 10, 274–275) posed by teachers made him examine the teachers’ dedication. To him, it was “almost as if they didn’t want me there” (Jeff, p. 10, 275).

Following the one year spent at Con Ed, Jeff was re-admitted into the traditional secondary school system. It was in the transition from the alternative to traditional secondary systems that Jeff was eventually “pushed out” (Soloman & Palmer, 2004). In Jeff’s case the process of early school leaving following Con Ed was due to his feelings of isolation in his new school and his continued use of illegal substances: “They didn’t want to talk to me . . . And on top of that, I was pretty much still doing drugs. I was pretty much the worse of the worse. Basically, you didn’t want to come near this guy” (Jeff, p. 13, 374–375).

Peer influence.

According to research, peers often exert much influence on the lives of young people with respect to their choices and academic outcomes (Kiuru, Nurmi, Aunola, & Salmela-Aro, 2009; Ryan, 2001). Jeff testifies to the power of peers during his time at Con Ed: “I think when I was there I was trying to be popular. I was doing things I probably shouldn’t have been doing, causing little problems for people, starting little fights. I wanted to be friends with the next biggest trouble maker” (Jeff, p. 12, 360–362). During his time at Con Ed, Jeff experimented heavily with illegal substances: “That school got me into heavier drugs that I shouldn’t have
gotten into. That’s when I got into weird drugs, like chemical drugs” (Jeff, p. 11, 310–312). He also continued to be involved in criminal acts while in Con Ed. Jeff’s account provides credence to what Cohen (1977), Ennett and Bauman (1994) and Kandel (1978) believe is the power of peers in respect to illegal substance use. Jeff’s risk-taking behaviour, according to Ryan (2001) may have been a result of pressure to have similar characteristics and frames of reference so as to belong. Although he does not discuss the pressure he felt by his peers to leave school, he did, at one point, make reference to the pressure he felt to please both parents and friends: “It was hard for me trying to please my parents and please my friends” (Jeff, p. 8, 217–218).

With respect to the influence of peers on Jeff’s educational aspirations and expectations, Jeff himself recounts how:

I never really planned on leaving school. Actually the people I hung around with there was a lot of people that would actually drop out. There was a lot of competition; it was basically just people around me. I’d see them not going to school, dropping out and see that that wasn’t the worst thing in the world. So I kind of followed in their footsteps. (Jeff, p. 10, 290–293) Jeff never “planned on leaving school” (Jeff, p. 10, 290) partly due to his parents’ involvement in his education. He remembers that his parents were not only supportive, but often times pressured him to do extremely well: “My parents pressured me to do well in school and always wanted me to be the best I could be. And I think their expectations might have been a little bit too high sometimes because when I wasn’t able to get the marks they wanted they’d get upset with me ” (Jeff, p. 21, 636–637). His attitude to education is reminiscent of Bourdieu and Passeron’s (1979) theory of habitus, which claims that social context influences attitudes and behaviours. Despite his parents’ involvement, Jeff’s peers were influential enough to have changed his attitude for school. Given that the majority of his peers did not have aspirations to graduate from secondary school, Jeff came to internalize and consequently adopt the attitudes and actions of his friends. His change in attitude contradicts Ryan’s (2001) findings from a study in which she concluded that peers do not alter students’ utility value for school.
Joe.

At the time of the interview, Joe was 25 and had not been in school for eight years. He was currently living at home with his mother and was employed full-time in his father’s carpentry business. He genuinely loved his occupation. Of all the participants, Joe was the only one to speak with passion about his career: “I love what I’m doing. I like what I’m doing, I like working with my hands, creating stuff . . . I like that feeling that I get of creating my own stuff” (Joe, p. 16, 454–456).

Joe recalls that he had a stable family life, but there were many times when his parents, especially his father, were absent. His parents were consumed with establishing and growing their carpentry business: “They were young still and I was a kid obviously and really I think that they were just really consumed with work. You know, always working, not thinking, trying to do good for their kids, trying to provide, but they didn’t think of the little things in life” (Joe, p. 4, 101–103). One of the little things Joe did mention throughout the course of the interview was the importance of parental involvement and how it was instrumental in his early school leaving:

A lot of kids, they don’t have the guidance or the push at home. And if you don’t have that little push you might not go ahead. For me that was a big one with me. I never really got pushed too much for school. (Joe, p. 12, 340–342)

Joe did not have the support at home. His parents did not attend school events and did not help him with his schoolwork. Joe, however, did not attribute this lack of parental involvement to his parents’ level of education. Joe’s parents had immigrated to Canada from Portugal at a young age. His father was only educated to a Grade 5 level and he was uncertain of his mother’s level of education. His parents’ educational experiences in Portugal were typical of many Portuguese-Canadian immigrants. Nunes (2003, 1998) and Ornstein (2006) note that many early Portuguese immigrants to Canada had very few educational opportunities in Portugal and many had low levels of education. Thus, although he does not indicate that his parents’ lack of involvement was a function of their own limited educational experience and knowledge of the school system, both
in Portugal and Canada—what Bourdieu and Passeron (1979) would term as a lack of cultural capital—Joe was at a heightened risk of early school leaving as low parental education is a determinant of low educational outcomes for their children (Bushnik, 2003, Reid, 2000; Smale, 2001).

Although the lack of parental involvement appears to be a contributing factor to his early school leaving, another reason for his disengagement with school was his lack of interest in what he was learning. Joe, as he admits, is a kinesthetic learner and the traditional, routine teaching method—characterized by standardization and memorization—did not capture his interest:

I really like hands-on doing stuff, creating stuff. I don’t really like sitting down . . . I didn’t like the routine of always doing the same thing over and over. In my line of work I’m always doing something different; I’m moving around. I just didn’t like sitting there listening to teachers. (Joe, pp. 5–6, 121–122, 143–145)

With disaffection an issue, Joe began to skip classes in Grade 10. Speaking about truancy, Joe admits: “One day you get to school and you just say, ‘We’ll just go tomorrow’. And then it happens again and again and then once you fall into a pattern it’s tough to get out” (Joe, p. 10, 260–262). Missing class was a frequent occurrence. He was suspended on various occasions and he eventually left school. Joe also experimented with illegal substances; it was not, however, the cause of his early school leaving. As Joe admitted, illegal substances “clouded me a little. But I don’t think that was the problem for me. The problem for me was that I just wasn’t interested in that” (Joe, p. 10, 270–272). For him, the process of early school leaving was much more a long course of disengagement which stemmed primarily from the lack of curricular relevancy. Joe, nonetheless, also discussed the role of his learning community and family and peer influence.

Curricular relevancy.

One of the strongest themes that emerged from Joe’s interview was the lack of curricular relevancy. Joe was disengaged from the schooling process because he was not interested in what he was learning and how he was learning: “When I went to school, nothing really interested me
like that. I really like hands-on doing stuff, creating stuff. I don’t really like sitting down” (Joe, p. 5, 120–122). He went on to say:

I didn’t like the routine of always doing the same thing over and over. In my line of work I’m always doing something different; I’m moving around. I just didn’t like sitting there listening to teachers. I just wasn’t very focused on that. (Joe, p. 5, 143–145)

Joe was not interested in school because he simply was not interested in what he was learning and how curricula were being presented. The emphasis placed on the routine teaching method was incongruent with his personal learning style and it was this conflict that contributed to his disaffection and early school leaving. In emphasizing how his disinterest in school was due to a lack of curriculum relevancy, Joe’s experience reflects the literature (Alberta Learning, 2001; Ferguson et al., 2005; Hill & Smith, 1998; Riley & Rustique-Forrester, 2002) where the importance of experiential and meaningful learning for disaffected students is documented.

When asked to recommend curricular options to re-engage students, Joe proposed curricular changes, all centered on experiential learning opportunities:

I think they should make some programs, you know, for kids that aren’t really too interested in school, class work. That they would do some more hands-on, shop work. That they could work something out like that before the kid even gets to college or university so that by the time they get there they actually have some skill in what they’re doing. (Joe, p. 7, 177–180)

In referring to experiential programs such as Broad-Based Technological Education, Joe highlights the utility of such programs through their context-based philosophy (Hill & Smith, 1998). Moreover, Joe also makes reference to vocational training programs, such as Cooperative Education and the Ontario Youth Apprenticeship Program (OYAP):

And I think they should help kids actually get into the workforce before they actually get in. In college you’re learning what you’re going to do, say you’re going to be a carpenter or whatever, you’re learning; they teach you what to do. But where you really learn is when you’re actually on the site. It’s when you actually do the job. (Joe, p. 7, 196–199)
Although reflecting on the significance of experiential learning for workforce skills, Joe implies that secondary schools do not do justice to students’ potential. There is a gap in the learning that occurs in school and the learning needed beyond school. Thus, if Ontario secondary schools are to provide “all students with the learning opportunities and support they need” (Ontario Ministry of Education, 1999, p. 6), an acknowledgement of the significance of experiential learning should be given consideration as a re-engagement strategy for students who are considering leaving school early.

**Learning community.**

As noted by Alberta Learning (2001), Ferguson et al. (2005), and Satchwell (2004), many early school leavers have negative experiences with teachers and often perceive their school climate adversely. Joe, however, had positive relationships with some of his teachers:

> Well, a lot of teachers liked me. I had a couple of bad experiences with teachers. Like me not obeying them too much or not listening when I should have been doing stuff or whatever, but a lot of the teachers liked me and I liked a lot of the teachers. (Joe, p. 6, 150–153)

Joe’s description of his relationship with teachers is quite mixed. He had good relationships with some teachers and “bad experiences with [other] teachers” (Joe, p. 6, 150). His relationships with teachers were positive and do not reflect a negative teacher-student dynamic. Joe’s positive relationship with teachers further substantiates the complex process of early school leaving in that certain causal factors affect students in numerous ways. That is, Joe was adversely affected by the lack of curricular relevancy, but not affected by “a couple of bad experiences with teachers” (Joe, p. 6, 153).

When further probed about his relationships with other school personnel, including guidance counselors, Joe admitted that he did not receive much help from a guidance counselor. When he left school, his parents were contacted by the school. Interestingly though, the school did not
provide Joe or his parents with other alternative routes to obtaining a secondary school diploma.

Nonetheless, Joe does not blame the school for his early leaving:

Well, we could always say that the school could have done something different, but for me, really they can’t do it for all the kids. They can’t look after every kid. I think it’s more up to the kid and the parents to really push the kid or to guide the kid through school. (Joe, p. 15, 403–405)

His statement corroborates the findings in the existing literature (Ferguson et al., 2005; Satchwell, 2004), which reports that early school leavers do not hold teachers accountable for their leaving. Joe is acutely aware of how the pressures placed on teachers and how their overburdened work schedule makes it extremely difficult for them to connect with all students.

**Family influence.**

Joe’s educational outcome attests to the significance of family on educational aspirations and expectations:

Growing up I was always around the shop and around my dad and working with my hands. And I always saw my dad doing that when I was really young and I was like, “I want to do that” and I was always fiddling with this and that. (Joe, p. 5, 119–121)

Joe’s father, in taking his young son to work exposed him to a world of learning and creating that was strikingly different from the “traditional” educational model. Over time this world became the norm. Thus, this social context shaped Joe’s educational aspirations as he internalized the educational and career paths of those also belonging to his social context as his own.

**Peer influence.**

Joe never directly spoke of the influence exerted on him by his peers. He did, however, reference the prevailing disposition to education within his peer group:

Talking to a lot of friends, their attitude about school was, for them, it wasn’t too important because they thought that, “Oh, if I don’t finish school, I’ll just go work with my dad or I’ll just go work construction because that’s what I’m going to be anyways because that’s what all
Portuguese guys do.” For me, I think it’s just that’s what they are going to do so they aren’t too interested in school. (Joe, p. 2, 41–44)

Joe’s friends believed and expected that they were destined for skilled labour. Their disposition to education was one in which they held low aspirations for obtaining a secondary school diploma. It is in this social context in which Joe’s attitude toward education partially developed. Although Bourdieu and Passeron (1979) believe that one’s habitus is constructed through socializing contexts, such as the family, Swartz (1997) argues that one’s habitus is also defined through peers. As Joe confirms:

To tell you the truth, yeah, I thought like that. I always just thought, “Oh, you know what, I know where I’m going to work after”. I liked working with my hands. And I never really liked the classroom. So I never really liked school. It was really tough to stay focused. (Joe, p. 2, 52–54)

Joe’s reason for having low educational aspirations corroborate Bourdieu and Passeron’s and Swartz’s developments around the concept of habitus and Kiuru, Nurmi, Aunola, and Salmela-Aro’s (2009) findings which indicate similar educational trajectories among peers. For Joe, his social context was one in which he was surrounded by family and peers who were either employed in the skilled trades or expected to work in the skilled trades and therefore did not see any utility in obtaining a secondary school diploma. As a young, Portuguese-Canadian man who grew up in a largely working-class family, whose father owns a thriving carpentry business and whose friends also identified with this milieu, Joe’s educational and career expectations appear to be a result of his social position.

Paul.

At the time of the interview, Paul was 24 and had not been in school for nearly eight years. He was employed in the construction industry and did not enjoy his job. Since the age of 22, Paul had been living with his younger brother. Growing up, Paul dealt with an unstable family life, which provided a reason for his early school leaving. As he recalls “I left school . . . because I wasn’t
too stable with my family life as well” (Paul, p. 13, 394). His unstable family left him unsure of the security of his personal situation, and not knowing the future made him question the ability to finish school. He left school, in part, because he could foresee having to leave school in the near future in order to support himself. Paul’s reason for leaving is illustrated in the literature (Bushnik, 2003) indicating that family instability and the need to independently support oneself as motives for early school leaving.

His parents, nonetheless, were involved in his education as “education was primary . . . in their minds” (Paul, p. 7, 194). However, Paul does qualify their involvement:

My parents supported me as much as they could. But the only form of support I didn’t receive was with homework because they didn’t understand the language. So with my schoolwork, that was out of the question because they didn’t understand. Their capability of solving questions and stuff was lower than mine, you know. Other than that, they supported me financially. They bought me whatever I needed. And in terms of being involved in my school, again, they didn’t really know the language too much so they weren’t maybe as involved as they would have [liked]. But yes, they were involved. They would watch over me. They’d go meet the teachers. They’d follow up on me making sure that I’m in line. (Paul, p. 6, 181–188)

What he describes is a situation in which his parents, being immigrants to Canada, were at a cultural loss. There was a clear linguistic barrier which impeded his parents’ ability to fully participate in his education. Paul’s recollection of his parents’ involvement reflects the importance of cultural capital. In this case, familiarity with cultural ways of being and of doing within “Canadian” culture. It also corresponds to past research findings on Portuguese-Canadians and their educational outcomes (Nunes, 2003; Santos, 2006).

However, Paul does intimate that his parents, in only possessing a Grade 4 education, were not able to support him with his academic work. He says: “Their capability of solving questions and stuff was lower than mine, you know” (Paul, p. 6, 183). What he refers to is not only the way in which the lack of linguistic fluency hindered his parents’ ability to academically support him, but also how his parents’ level of education might have been a further impediment. He speaks of his parents’ experiences with school while in Portugal. It is worth quoting at length to give a sense of the systemic educational deficits of early Portuguese immigrants to Canada:
When my parents were in school in Portugal it was revolution. The post-revolution era, which is me, I came over here. It’s really different. But at the same time, the idea that I get from what they tell me sounds like school there . . . it was more simple, but it was more basic. It was really basic. There the schooling was Grade 4 and you’re considered equivalent with what you are here with a high school diploma nowadays . . . So they can’t really relate too much in terms of education wise. But, ya, I’m sure that, you know, my parents would have taken advantage of the education system had they been educated here. Not just my parents, but a lot of the people in the Portuguese community with seniority. They always tell me had they had the opportunity I had, had they known the language like I do, had they had the chance to go to school, they would have done it. (Paul, p. 4, 124–128, 129–133).

Paul emphasizes the historical reasons for his parents’ low educational level. Military spending, a dictatorial government, burdensome International Monetary Fund interest rates, political instability and civil revolution severely impacted governmental spending on education, all these are reflected in the educational profile of early Portuguese-Canadian immigrants (Birmingham, 2003; Lloyd-Jones, 2001; Nunes, 2003, Ornstein, 2006). With a low level of education, immigrant Portuguese-Canadian parents could not completely participate in their children’s education. Participation was constrained due to several compounding factors: unfamiliarity with the English language, little knowledge of academic subject material and differences in educational systems. Paul’s account thus confirms the significance of cultural capital through socio-economic status as it relates to parental education (Bushnik, 2003; Finnie, Laporte & Lascelles, 2004; Lareau & Weininger, 2003, Santos, 2006; Schargel & Smink, 2001; Sirin, 2005).

Paul’s early school leaving, nonetheless, was not directly related to the lack of parental involvement, but was instead due to a series of factors. Once he entered high school, his attitude about school changed: “Well, going into high school, I was really focused on school. I was getting really good grades. My life was nothing but school. I was very dedicated and very serious. Then I’d say once I got into high school, my mentality changed” (Paul, p. 7, 199–201). Having worked with his father in the construction industry in the summer between elementary and secondary school, Paul quickly came to enjoy the money he was making. When he entered high school, his focus on academic achievement gave way to “making money in the moment” (Paul, p. 7, 201) a finding that has been established by Willis (1977). The majority of the school
year was spent between work and class, and eventually he left school because of his desire to earn money:

I’d say my biggest downfall was when I was in high school I was trying to make money in the moment instead of focusing on school which would then set me up so I could make money in the future. So I could have taken advantage of my opportunities. I could have gone further than I did. (Paul, p. 7, 201–203)

When he eventually left school, Paul was 16 and had only partially completed Grade 9. Paul’s early school leaving is, in part, because of his desire to enter the labour market. According to him, this desire outweighed the need to obtain a secondary school diploma. Paul discussed the lack of curricular relevancy, learning community and family influence as factors relating to his early school leaving.

**Curricular relevancy.**

Although Paul left school for multiple reasons, he did refer to the lack of diversity within the curricula:

It was like conscription. They forced you to take certain subjects. There was no freedom, really. There was mandatory courses that you had to take . . . that’s it; you have no other choice, because to get the high school diploma you have to take a certain amount of courses for a certain amount of subjects. (Paul, p. 14, 450–453)

Paul refers to curricula as static and immutable. There is an overwhelming sense of the failure to approach curriculum through a flexible and individualized philosophy according to Alberta Learning (2001), Ferguson et al. (2005), and Riley and Rustique-Forrester (2002). This failure leads some students to leave early.

Paul recommends curricular change along an experiential model focusing on authentic learning through curricular relevance to students’ lives and a balance between school and beyond:

Whatever you’re interested in or whatever you plan on doing in the future or whatever career you want to have maybe you should be taking more classes that relate to that. But it’s really people’s options. So what if we don’t have the same amount of classes in a certain subject? I
don’t want to go there anyway. Meaning whatever career choice you’re going to make, I think it takes too long for you to actually start focusing on it. (Paul, p. 15, 483–488)

Paul speaks to the importance of real-life contextualized and experiential learning as identified in the literature (Hill & Smith, 1998; Riley & Rustique-Forrester, 2002). According to Paul, there appears to be a lack of connection between curriculum and vocational education. In order to assuage this problem, he makes reference to experiential programs as a means of encouraging vocational education.

**Learning community.**

Paul’s discussion of his experiences in secondary school focus more on the interactions he had with his peers. For Paul, the lack of connection with peers was part of his academic disaffection:

I didn’t feel like a family . . . once I got into high school. . . . I don’t know why, but that was partly the reason I decided to dropout out of high school too. It didn’t feel the same. I didn’t feel like I belonged. (Paul, p. 7, 223–225)

As Freeman and Hutchinson (1994) indicate, students need to feel a sense of belonging, and without that students may feel devalued and alienated. Paul went on to say:

The interactions were just rough, you know, it wasn’t close friendships. There was the chance of friendships being there, but we didn’t have the opportunities or the time to get to know everybody a little bit better. You know, kind of help you form a unit and get to know your colleagues a bit better that would be good. (Paul, p. 14, 441–444)

Paul felt alone and isolated and for this reason he was unable to gain a sense of belonging within his academic context. Paul’s comments further illustrate how good bonds and relations between students and a cohesive school climate centered on supportive learning communities are vital to student engagement.

**Family influence.**

Paul did not make reference to the pressure he felt from his peers to leave school. However, he did speak about the effect his father’s occupation had on his early school leaving. Paul’s
father was employed in the construction industry and at the time Paul left school, he had been working on and off with his father on numerous construction sites since the summer of Grade 8. Paul’s interview reflects the influence of social context on educational and career aspirations: “I’d say the fact that my dad was in the construction industry influenced my decision to follow in his footsteps and go in that path too” (Paul, p. 9, 281–283). His account highlights Willis’ (1977) work with young men and the nature of family context in shaping educational and vocational trajectories. Paul grew up in a family and in a community where the expectation to enter the skilled trades was prevalent: “The main reason why a lot of Portuguese kids do end up working construction is because they just feel that school is not their future; they don’t see a future with it. They don’t even bother” (Paul, p. 2, 45–47). Paul also stated that he too believed that school was not in his future because regardless of whether he remained in school or left early “[He] just felt that if [he] were to stay in school, [he] was going to end up somehow, someway in the same field” (Paul, p. 9, 261-262).

Furthermore, the belief that a career as a skilled tradesperson is much more financially lucrative than any that one could get with a secondary school diploma or post-secondary education was widespread:

Everybody knows that there’s a lot of Portuguese guys that dropout of high school because they know that high school and university ain’t going to really offer them as much as the construction will. So, therefore, they don’t even continue with their schooling. They just simply jump into construction because that’s where the money’s at and most likely that’s what they’re going to be doing because they want to make as much money as they can. (Paul, p. 1, 29–33)

Paul’s analysis of why some Portuguese-Canadian young men leave school early to enter a skilled trade is based on the need to belong to the labour market. There is a drive to earn money and the prevailing belief among some young, Portuguese-Canadian men is that skilled trades, in particular the construction industry, offer instant financial benefits. Paul’s account illustrates aspects of Bourdieu and Passeron’s (1979) theory of habitus as it illuminates how certain beliefs and attitudes held by a particular group operate to influence an individual’s decisions.
Johnny.

At the time of the interview, Johnny was 22 and had not been in school for seven years. Johnny came from a stable family; his parents financially invested in his education. Despite having the cost of post-secondary education paid for, Johnny worked part-time while in secondary school. He does imply that working while in school and the money he earned changed his view on education: “I started receiving money and that’s it. It went from there. I wanted more and more and more. I wanted to climb up. After that, I left school and I started a full-time job and it went from there” (Johnny, p. 6, 157–158). Johnny’s account concurs with the findings in the literature (Bushnik, 2003; Willis, 1977) on how the financial gains of part-time employment partially influence early school leaving.

Although his parents had established an educational fund for him to pursue post-secondary studies, Johnny’s parents were not involved in his schoolwork. For Johnny’s parents, who had immigrated to Canada from the Azores, Portugal in their early 20s, the language barrier posed the greatest impediment when it came to assisting their son with his schoolwork: “Well . . . because they couldn’t really understand what was really going on, like reading and writing. They couldn’t really understand that type of stuff. Yes, they could understand the English language, but that’s pretty much where it stops” (Johnny, p.4, 90–92). Linguistic fluency greatly hindered his parents’ ability to fully participate in his education, a finding which had been previously discovered by Santos (2006). Although he did not know his parents’ level of education, he did believe that they had little formal education: “I know that they didn’t go far” (Johnny, p. 3, 77). Johnny, however, did provide a reason for low scholastic capital among early Portuguese immigrants to Canada: “No one had education over there as well. Everybody’s working hard. Same scenario as I just explained about people having a lot of big families. People wanted to go to school, they just couldn’t afford it” (Johnny, p. 3, 67–69). Clarified through Johnny’s explanation of his parents’ low educational level is the historical context from which early Portuguese immigrants to Canada came. Despite highly valuing education, a finding that had
been previously expressed in past research (Nunes, 1998), the financial burden of investing in secondary school or post-secondary education for Azorean Portuguese was nearly impossible. Nunes (1998) found that secondary schools were few and far in between on the Azorean islands and no post-secondary institutions were located on any of the nine islands. Students who continued on to post-secondary education had to travel to mainland Portugal thereby only further limiting the possibility of completing secondary education if one did not want to move far from home.

Johnny’s account of his parents’ involvement concurs with the findings in the literature (Bushnik, 2003; Reid, 2000; Smale, 2001) indicating that lower educational outcomes are associated with low parental involvement and educational levels. Johnny’s parents held varied cultural capital levels with respect to linguistic fluency and academic credentials (Johnny, pp. 3-4). This cultural level impacted his parents’ level of involvement and may have contributed to his early school leaving.

Johnny also made reference to having been pushed out. At a point in our conversation, Johnny interjected and stated that he had been “pushed out” (Johnny, p. 21, 568). The idea of “pushing out” students is a point that has been raised in the literature (Soloman & Palmer, 2004). In fact, Johnny had been suspended three times prior to being pushed out. Two of these were because of his truancy. He first started missing class in Grade 9 and by Grade 10 was frequently truant. Johnny was eventually pushed out as a result of a violent incident on school property and was not counseled on other forms of schooling. With a lack of choice, Johnny did not obtain a secondary school diploma. For Johnny, his early school leaving was a function of the lack of curricular relevancy, the learning community, and family and peer influence.

**Curricular relevancy.**

Johnny discussed the regimented nature of secondary school credit requirements: “When you’re in Grade 9 and 10 you got to do the standard classes that everybody does. I didn’t really have a choice; there weren’t any options” (Johnny, p. 18, 485–487). Johnny’s account is similar
to situations in the literature (Alberta Learning, 2001; Ferguson et al., 2005; Satchwell, 2004; Riley & Rustique-Forrester, 2002) attesting to the importance of flexible and individually based curricula.

Riley and Rustique-Forrester (2002) concluded that disaffected students are not interested in learning not because they are incapable, but because of a lack of curricular content appealing to their particular interests. When providing a reason for his truancy, Johnny substantiates this finding:

If I got to choose exactly what I wanted it would be a lot better. It’s like going to work in the morning and say you like what you do. Say you wake up in the morning and you go to work and you enjoy it. As oppose to waking up in the morning and saying, “Ah shit, I don’t want to do this shit.” And then you miss days because you don’t feel like doing it. It works both ways. You go to class, you wake up in the morning. “Oh, I got this class. Ok, I like mechanics; I like cars.” Or you wake up in the morning and say, “Oh, geography, countries this, countries that. I don’t care about that shit.” So I would just miss the class, kind of thing. So that’s how it works. (Johnny, p. 18, 494–500)

Emphasized is the importance of differentiated curricular approaches that are flexible and student-centered so to encourage engagement and motivation (Manning & Baruth, 1995; Vizard, 2009). Riley and Rustique-Forrester (2002) suggest that experiential learning best fosters motivation in at-risk students. As Johnny claims, “I was interested in that type of going out and working. I was interested in learning but I never got a chance to reach that level” (Johnny, p. 25, 672–673). Johnny was interested in learning; when asked what courses interested him, Johnny replied, “math . . . mechanics and woodworking” (Johnny, p. 19, 505). However, experiential programs, such as Cooperative Education and the Ontario Youth Apprenticeship Program, were only available to him in his senior years. Johnny’s exclusion from experiential learning opportunities while in secondary school evidences the heightened need to extend experiential programs into the junior years.

Learning community.

Much of the literature on school climate and the correlation to early school leaving (Alberta Learning, 2001; Ferguson et al., 2005; Satchwell, 2004) indicates that early school leavers tend to
have unfavourable impressions of their teachers and their learning environment. Johnny, however, had quite positive relationships with his teachers: “I had a good relationship with my teachers because I am open-minded and they like me for that. I guess because I don’t hold things back. I’d say what’s on my mind” (Johnny, p. 13, 338–339). What made these relationships so positive was a mutual understanding between student and teacher. He recalls that some teachers were acutely aware of his particular needs and were flexible in how they interacted with him during class time. Knowing that he had, “no patience to sit at a desk” (Johnny, p. 30, 831) certain teachers would allow him to take breaks so as to recollect himself: “Certain teachers already knew how I was. They would be ok, go for a drink of water whatever. I would come back a half an hour later. . . . Some people would work with me” (Johnny, p. 30, 837–839). In the classes in which he was not given breaks, Johnny would oftentimes “do something wrong so I could get sent to the principal’s office. That’s the only way I was able to leave” (Johnny, p. 30, 839–840). Johnny’s account of his interactions with teachers parallels what is found in the literature (Freeman & Hutchinson, 1994; Manning & Baruth, 1995; Newell, 2003; Vizard, 2009) in which the significance of supportive, caring, and individually based learning environments is emphasized.

In contrast to his relationships with teachers, Johnny’s view of the general school climate illuminates a destructive learning environment. He recounts that:

40% of the whole entire school when I was there had passed so that means that 60% of the school had failed. And they knew something was wrong. Something wasn’t being done properly. They decided to throw cameras everywhere, to boost up everything, hall monitors, all kinds of nonsense. It didn’t make sense to me because people were still doing the same thing (Johnny, p. 13, 351–355).

Johnny’s description of his school is one of surveillance, vigilance and distrust of students. He recalls that he was not trusted by administration: “I believed that [the principal] didn’t trust me. I believed that [the principal] thought that I was going to be the same old person” (Johnny, p. 16,
441–442), and felt that some teachers weren’t interested in his success: “The failures, he wouldn’t even help them. He would stare at them as if they were passing. You know what I mean. He wouldn’t care. He was just one of those. To me, that’s not good” (Johnny, p. 14, 379–381). He defines his school climate as chaotic and lawless: “A bunch of chaos, people would just go crazy in that school. They would leave, we’d see fights. It was a whole bunch of bullshit to me” (Johnny, p. 13, 363–364). Johnny’s experiences with his teachers and his account of his learning community only further reinforces the research (Alberta Learning, 2001; Ferguson et al., 2005; Freeman & Hutchinson, 1994; Manning & Baruth, 1995; Newell, 2003; Vizard, 2009) attesting to the link between positive learning environments and student engagement.

**Family influence.**

Johnny’s early socialization within his family context, especially his interactions with his father, affected his academic and vocational interests:

That’s all that was in front of me. I didn’t have anything else. He would work on cars; I’m there holding a light at five or six years old just watching him. So eventually when you grow older that’s a part of you. You eventually gain interest [in] it because your father was interested in it. (Johnny, p. 21, 558–561)

It may be possible to suggest that his early socialization with his father operated covertly. In Johnny’s case, assisting his father, who was a mechanic, from a young age worked to define his educational and vocational interests.

**Peer influence.**

Bourdieu and Passeron (1979) and Swartz (1997) argue that class-specific experiences of socialization both through family and peers influence attitudes and behaviours. For Johnny, his association with his peers and his cultural context greatly contributed to his early school leaving. The type of atmosphere in which he was operating is illustrated below:

Everybody skipping classes, doing drugs, you know what I mean. Everyone is going through the stage in their life that they just feel like doing what they want to do and they don’t care.
Like I said, no one is thinking about the future. Everybody was just thinking about today.

(Johnny, p. 8, 192–195)

Johnny was part of a peer group that held little aspiration for obtaining a secondary school diploma. He remembers, “as soon as I got into high school a bunch of my friends would always get together and we would always skip the same class. We weren’t in the same class, but we would skip the same period and get together and go do some drugs, hang out, play some video games” (Johnny, p. 8, 209–211). Johnny illuminates how involvement in risk-taking behaviour, such as truancy and illegal substance use is influenced by peer group membership. This concurs with the findings by Aloise-Young and Chavez (2002), Cohen (1977), Ennett and Bauman (1994), Gutierrez and Montalvo (1984), Kandel (1978) and Townsend, Flisher, and King (2007). Johnny went on to say, “[if] first period came and we haven’t even smoked anything yet. We’d look forward to that joint. We wouldn’t be looking forward to our future. We’d be thinking about being high” (Johnny, p. 9, 241–243), signaling how illegal substance use contributed to his disengagement. Johnny’s account supports findings in other studies (Bushnik, 2003; Fagan & Pabon, 1990; McCrystal et. al., 2005) indicating that drug use is seen to be a problem among early school leavers.

He recalled that most of his friends were expelled from school and none returned. When he spoke of changes that could have been made that would have resulted in him remaining in school, Johnny made immediate reference to his peer group: “Maybe the group of people that I was with. All my friends, that’s the main thing” (Johnny, p. 21, 575). Johnny’s habitus—the aspiration to continue with school—was impacted by his peers as he came to internalize and appropriate the actions of his friends. Johnny’s account of the influence of his peers in changing his attitude to education disputes Ryan’s (2001) findings indicating that students’ utility value for school is not altered on account of their peer group.

In addition to the influence exerted by his peers, Johnny recalled the educational aspirations of his peers: “In my case with all my friends who are younger generation and are Portuguese and
everything . . . they are following the construction path because they don’t want to go through the whole education process” (Johnny, p. 5, 128–130). When questioned on what he meant about the “education process,” Johnny elaborated:

To me it’s too long. You got to spend years and years and years. And in the end of the six or seven years . . . in the end when it’s all done maybe you don’t want to. And there go six years of your life. You know everybody? There’s one thing in common with everybody. Everyone wants to make money. That’s basically what it is. (Johnny, p. 6, 135–138)

Johnny highlights how the desire to enter the labour market may influence one’s disposition to remain in secondary school. However, Johnny also notes that this desire is prevalent among young Portuguese-Canadians as they believe that work in the skilled trades offers immediate financial security. Education, therefore, appears to be an impediment to active participation in the labour market.

**Summary**

This chapter reported the findings that emerged from the interviews with four young Portuguese-Canadian men: Jeff, Joe, Paul, and Johnny. The stories told by these young men support the findings in the literature (Alberta Learning, 2001; Ferguson et al., 2005; Satchwell, 2004) attesting to the complex early school leaving process. Jeff, Joe, Paul, and Johnny left secondary school for multiple reasons. Jeff’s main factors were the overall school climate and his peer reference group. Joe was affected by the lack of curricular relevancy and experiential learning opportunities. Moreover, Joe was also influenced by socialization within his family and cultural group. Paul, in comparison to the other three participants was persuaded to leave on account of his interest to enter the labour market. Johnny, like Jeff, was deeply affected by his peer group, but he also described how a lack of curricular relevancy contributed to his disaffection.

The following chapter extends the major themes described by the participants and examines their significance in relation to the existing literature and my theoretical framework.
CHAPTER 5
DISCUSSION

The preceding chapter tells the story of each participant and what he deemed to be the factors leading to his early school leaving. In this chapter, I explain how the major themes that emerged from the data relate to the literature and my theoretical framework presented in Chapter 2. I recapitulate the participants’ story and explain the participant’s early school leaving through his learning experience and social milieu in secondary school. With reference to the findings, I draw recommendations for school and non-school related programs to further support students at-risk of early school leaving.

Each participant’s early school leaving experience is unique and complex. Although the literature attests to the multiple factors associated with this process (Alberta Learning, 2001; Barr & Parrett, 1995; Bushnik, 2003; Ferguson et al., 2005; Newell, 2003; Satchwell, 2005; Tilleczek, 2003), it is believed that no one factor solely accounts for a student’s leaving. Instead, the process is a function of the integration of multiple risk factors. What emerged from the participants’ candid interviews was an integrative understanding of the early school leaving phenomenon. Table 3 represents the frequency of emergent themes.
Table 3
Frequency of Emergent Themes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>School-Related Risk Factors</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Differentiated Learning</td>
<td>4</td>
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<tr>
<td>School Climate</td>
<td>3</td>
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<tr>
<td>Experiential Learning</td>
<td>2</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Non-School Related Risk Factors</strong></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Cultural Capital (Parental Level of Education and Institutional Knowledge)</td>
<td>3</td>
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<tr>
<td>Habitus (Father)</td>
<td>3</td>
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<tr>
<td>Cultural Context</td>
<td>3</td>
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<tr>
<td>Habitus (Peers)</td>
<td>2</td>
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<tr>
<td>Cultural Context (Linguistic Fluency)</td>
<td>2</td>
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For the participants, the process of leaving secondary school was a function of both school and non-school related factors. As Table 3 indicates, differentiated learning was the most discussed topic. All the participants felt the curriculum to be static and immutable, which reflects findings in other studies (Alberta Learning, 2001; Ferguson et al., 2005; Satchwell, 2004) indicating that irrelevant curriculum is one of the most cited factors related to early school leaving. All four participants felt that the curriculum failed to offer individualized structure. Specifically, Joe and Paul believed there was a lack of experiential learning opportunities related to vocational education. What was further supported in the interviews was the significance of school climate on student achievement. Jeff, Paul and Johnny discussed the negative experiences in secondary school. They felt alienated and mistrusted. Jeff, however, emphasized the importance of a positive learning environment when he discussed his experience in Con Ed. Parental involvement was also raised in all four interviews. Although Jeff, Paul and Johnny believed their parents supported them in their academic endeavours, they also explained that their parents were unable to assist them with school work for a number of reasons. Jeff and Paul suggested it was due to
their parents’ low educational levels, and Johnny and Paul believed a lack of English language fluency contributed to low parental involvement. Their explanations add credence to the significance of cultural capital (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1979) and socio-economic status (SES) in relation to parental involvement and academic outcomes (Bushnik, 2003; Edgerton, Peter, & Roberts, 2008; Ferguson et al., 2005; Finnie, Laporte, & Lascelles, 2004; Reid, 2000; Schargel & Smink, 2001; Sirin, 2005; Smale 2001). Advanced in the interviews was the notion of how one’s social context, the association with one’s father and peers, constructed one’s habitus (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1979). What emerged was the role fathers and peers played in shaping the young men’s vocational and educational interests and trajectories. Joe, Paul and Johnny discussed how their fathers’ occupations affected their vocational interests. Peers, on the other hand, were instrumental in influencing Jeff and Johnny’s educational trajectories. Furthermore, Joe, Paul and Johnny highlighted the role of cultural context in shaping young Portuguese-Canadian men’s educational aspirations. Coming from a largely working-class context where the majority of male community members worked in the skilled trades, the participants believed that young Portuguese-Canadian men internalized the occupational roles of the older generation as their own and felt that a secondary school diploma was not needed.

In what follows, I explain the emergent themes in relation to all participants and how they fit within the existing literature on early school leavers and my theoretical framework.

**Differentiated Learning**

Although not all the participants discuss the impact of the school climate on their educational disaffection, all believed that the curriculum was static and inflexible. The participants defined the curricula as being “boring”, “routine”, or a form of “conscription.” Jeff believed that the curriculum did not allow for varied forms of learning; Joe made reference to a lack of hands-on learning. Paul and Johnny highlighted the lack of student agency in subject choices. They believed that opportunity did not exist for differentiated learning programs catering to their specific educational and vocational interests as the curricula and the secondary school diploma
requirements were highly regimented. They were interested in learning, but they simply did not have the opportunity to make active choices about their learning paths. Of all the participants, Johnny was the most forthcoming regarding the link between a lack of differentiated learning and student disaffection: “So, why did we miss classes? It wasn’t for the fun of it. We did it because we didn’t feel like doing it. So if we all had our own options and we all chose our courses we would all go to class” (Johnny, p. 19, 518–520). The participants were disaffected not because they did not want to learn, but because they were not motivated due to a lack of personally relevant educational experiences as is also evidenced in Riley and Rustique-Forrester (2002), Manning and Baruth (1995) and Vizard (2009). The stories present an alternative picture of early school leavers as young individuals who were capable and interested learners.

**Experiential Learning**

One of the major themes that emerged was the need for vocational education through experiential learning opportunities. The participants often cited abstract curricula which did not provide opportunities for career exploration and out-of-school, contextualized learning as reasons for their early school leaving. Their perceptions of curricula are similar to other findings (Chin, Bell, Munby, & Hutchinson, 2004; Ferguson et al., 2005; Hill & Smith, 1998; Riley & Rustique-Forrester, 2002) attesting to the power of in situ learning. Context-based learning such as broad-based technological education and vocationally orientated programs like cooperative education and the Ontario Youth Apprenticeship Program (OYAP) provide a network of engagement, general cognitive skills, career exploration and transition to the workforce. For disaffected students, experiential programs are most effective (Riley & Rustique-Forrester, 2002), as their substantial link with interest-based and vocational education provides for a more authentic learning experience.

According to Hill and Smith (2005) authentic learning exhibits four top qualities (mediation, embodiment, distribution and situatedness) and two supporting qualities (motivation and multiple literacies):
1. Mediation: students engage in authentic tasks using relevant cultural tools. Authentic learning exposes students to a wide range of cultural tools and their use in cultural tasks;

2. Embodiment: learning involves both the body and the mind and embraces all dimensions such as, cognitive, emotional, physical and social. It also involves the feeling of protectiveness and comfort in the learning community;

3. Distribution: encompasses the notions of cooperative learning and project-based learning (Newell, 2003) which recognize that authentic learning is achieved through cooperative structures that engage other students, school personnel and community members;

4. Situatedness: learning is centered on individual and community specific contexts. Hill and Smith (2005) suggest that distribution and situatedness through partnership initiatives with existing communities provide a real-life context for student learning by closing the gap between school and life beyond school;

5. Motivation: engagement in learning will occur when students become competent in matters that concern them. Student motivation may be achieved through recognizing and supporting students’ self-esteem and autonomy in learning. Motivation is enhanced through a significant change in teacher role. The teacher is no longer the transmitter of knowledge, but instead the facilitator of learning;

6. Multiple literacies: based on Gardner’s (1999) multiple intelligences theory where learning should be facilitated and assessed through a variety of contexts. Hill and Smith (1998), although focusing on broad-based technological education, show how experiential learning opportunities, such as cooperative education and the Ontario Youth Apprenticeship Program (OYAP) provide far richer educational experiences for disaffected students than the traditional classroom. These programs emphasize student interest,
interdisciplinary focus, use direct, primary sources, create in situ learning, emphasize self-directed learning and offer the chance to gain practical, vocationally-based skills.

The interviews with the participants emphasize that it is not only the level of student ability or interest that influences early school leaving, but instead the nature of the secondary educational system. As Paul stated, “I just think that they try to make us a certain way” (Paul, p. 11, 340). This “certain way”, which reflects an approach which argues that all students must go on to post-secondary education through either a college or university degree, neglects the reality that only just over 50% of secondary school students go on to college or university (King, et al., 2009, p. iii).

School Climate

It is crucial to note how the school climate affected the participants’ educational disengagement. Jeff, Paul and Johnny made specific reference to relationships with their teachers, peers and overall school climate. There were few student-teacher relationships based on the tenets of mutual trust, respect and support and their schools lacked a cohesive and supportive learning community and the overall climate was chaotic and lawless. For these participants, schools were sites where mistrust and a lack of interest and support between teachers, administration and students existed. Jeff and Johnny felt a general sense of mistrust and Paul experienced alienation from his classmates. Specifically, Johnny described his educational setting as overly controlling of student autonomy.

A typical violence prevention policy established by an Ontario school board in which both Jeff and Johnny may have attended school might have stated:

The aim of school discipline in a democracy should be to teach students that a degree of obedience and conformity is reasonable and necessary to productive and harmonious interaction with others in any social group. At the same time, it should encourage individuals to internalize the fundamental values that are essential to the well-being of both the individual and society, and to accept responsibility for the consequences of their actions. In this way, young people can develop a self-discipline that arises from a respect for themselves and others. (Toronto Catholic District School Board, 1995)
Although the policy outlines a disciplinary process that is fostered on the principles of mutual respect, responsibility and civility, the implementation of preventative measures centered on student surveillance which Johnny experienced worked to contradict one of the fundamental goals of enhancing student self-concept. In fact, Johnny, when discussing the preventative and retroactive measures taken to dissuade him from truancy, notes how he felt that he was not trusted among staff and administration: “I believed that [the principal] didn’t trust me. I believed that [the principal] thought that I was going to be the same old person” (Johnny, p. 16, 441–442). Johnny’s account supports the literature, which calls into question such practices (Deci & Ryan, 1992). These maladaptive practices, although intending to create a safe learning community, may actually decrease intrinsic student motivation and possibly exacerbate early school leaving.

Informal conversations with Melinda (journal entry, p. 88) and Beatrice (journal entry, p. 91) are in line with Jeff and Johnny’s accounts of the particular climates of their two schools. Melinda, a former teacher in Jeff’s school, remembers that the atmosphere was very negative. There was a general jaded attitude and an air of resignation among the teachers. There was a sense of mistrust and tension between staff; they did not appear to be interested in student success or the profession itself. Students were disengaged and many had no aspirations of obtaining a secondary school diploma (Melinda, journal entry, p. 88).

Similarly, Beatrice, who attended Johnny’s school as a student, recalls a sense of separation between students and teachers; many teachers were not interested in the academic success of their students, and students tended to disregard school policy. Teachers never academically challenged their students and they oftentimes failed to follow policy regarding students’ truancy. Student behaviour exemplified an overall lack of respect for school conduct policies. Many students smoked in the halls and in the washrooms; students purposely missed class, and there were constant disturbances (Beatrice, journal entry, p. 91).

Beatrice also discussed how seemingly engaged and motivated students were often affected by the negative school climate. She recalled observing the change in attitude and behaviour of some
students. Dedicated students who first entered in Grade 9 were often influenced to the point where their attitude toward education changed. By the end of Grade 11, these students were disengaged and had begun to engage in truant behaviour (Beatrice, journal entry, p. 91).

Although Jeff and Johnny acknowledged the lack of positive student-teacher relationships and the negative school climate, Johnny did note that teachers were not to blame for his early school leaving. He also believed that large class sizes and the numerous professional responsibilities and strains placed on teachers hindered their ability to fully support their academic engagement.

What emerged from the data was the impact of both student-teacher interactions and school climate on a student’s sense of belonging and, ultimately, his academic outcomes. Barr and Parrett (1995) recommend establishing a positive learning community through a “surrogate family atmosphere” (Barr & Parrett) so as to combat early leaving. The implementation of a surrogate family atmosphere ran through the interviews with Jeff, Paul, and Johnny. In contrast to their experiences in secondary school, Jeff, Paul, and Johnny made reference to their elementary school years. The school climate was caring, supportive and welcoming, and teachers espoused these sentiments. Participants indicated that they needed to feel camaraderie among administration, teachers and peers. Specifically, Jeff described how his time in the alternative school system fostered a sense of camaraderie with his teachers. He felt safe, supported, cared for, and challenged. In feeling part of a surrogate family, his academic achievement improved, as did his attitudes toward school. A positive and caring learning environment is central to combating the sense of alienation for many students. As the Ontario Ministry of Education (2007b; 2009a) has emphasized in more than one of its policy memoranda, a positive school climate is vital to the promotion of responsibility, respect, civility and academic excellence.

With a strong emphasis on bolstering student self-efficacy and self-worth, educational engagement is possible. Teachers and administration are the vehicle by which students come to define their school experiences and identify with the school and its members. When this is accomplished, educational engagement follows (Freeman & Hutchinson, 1994; Newell, 2003).
Cultural Capital

According to Bourdieu and Passeron (1979) individuals draw on certain resources to either enhance or maintain their location in any given social order. With respect to education, individuals who possess more resources are at an educational advantage. For Bourdieu and Passeron, the possession of resources is the amount of cultural capital one has. Cultural capital can come to mean an array of possessions such as scholastic credentials, cultural knowledge, linguistic fluency, access to resources, and information about institutional practices and policies. It is the interplay between economic and cultural capital that creates the ground for hierarchical power struggles and unequal educational outcomes.

Socio-economic status (SES).

Cultural capital, however, is intricately connected to socio-economic status (SES) as SES is a function of parental education, parental occupation, and family income (Rosenthal, 1998; Sirin, 2005). These three elements offer individuals different levels of cultural capital. Thus, according to Bourdieu and Passeron (1979), the lower one’s SES the more of an educational disadvantage one has. Given the data analyzed in this study, one may state that all four participants possessed low levels of cultural capital and were therefore at an educational disadvantage.

Parental education.

The participants did not attribute their socio-economic position to their early school leaving. Nonetheless, analysis of the parental education level of each participant shows the following (Table 4):

Table 4

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Mother</th>
<th>Parental Education Level</th>
<th>Father</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Jeff</td>
<td>College</td>
<td>Less than a secondary school diploma</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Joe</td>
<td>Unknown</td>
<td>Grade 5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paul</td>
<td>Grade 4</td>
<td>Grade 4</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Johnny</td>
<td>Unknown</td>
<td>Unknown</td>
<td></td>
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</table>
The level of parents’ education is significant given the correlation between parental education and student outcomes (Bushnik, 2003; Finnie, Laporte, & Lascelles, 2004; Lareau, 1987; Smale, 2001). Students whose parents are highly educated tend to achieve at or exceed provincial standards and are more likely to attend post-secondary education. Furthermore, Lareau (1987) found that parental involvement is an effect of parental education. Parents with higher academic credentials tend to be more involved in their children’s education than parents with fewer academic credentials. The four participants in this study identified their parents’ low level of education. Jeff and Paul made explicit reference to how their parents’ limited educational credentials hindered their ability to help them with their schoolwork. Interestingly, however, Jeff and Paul also discussed how their parents were active in other areas of their education; they attended parent-teacher interviews and pressured them to do well in school.

**Parental occupation and family income.**

Parental occupation and family income (Rosenthal, 1998; Sirin, 2005) are also functions of SES. The literature (Bushnik, 2003; Reid, 2000) shows that students tend to have lower academic outcomes and are at a heightened risk of early school leaving if their parents are in occupations with low educational credentials. Table 5 lists the occupations of each participant’s parents.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Parental Occupation (by Industry)</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Jeff</td>
<td>Educational Services</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Joe</td>
<td>Administrative and Support</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paul</td>
<td>Unknown</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Johnny</td>
<td>Accommodation and Food Services</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 5 lists the occupations of each participant’s parents.

4 Occupational categories are taken from Statistics Canada (Statistics Canada, 2006b).
The parental occupations of these four young men are reflective of community characteristics particular to Portuguese-Canadians (Nunes, 1998; Ornstein, 2006). Many members are involved in either skilled or non-skilled positions. Ornstein (2006) recorded a high percentage of Portuguese-Canadian men in manual labour occupations (27.6% skilled manual and 28.3% less skilled manual). Portuguese-Canadian women were employed in skilled work (21.5% in skilled non-manual and 47.4% in less skilled non-manual).

With respect to annual average income, it is much more difficult to estimate the average family income of the participants, although according to Pyper’s (2008) research, jobs in the construction industry pay above average salaries. Other research, however, (Nunes, 1998; Ornstein, 2006) points to Portuguese-Canadian salaries that are below the median.

In light of these three demographic characteristics: (a) parental education, (b) parental occupation, and (c) family income and the literature (Bushnik, 2003; Edgerton, Peter, & Roberts, 2008; Reid, 2000; Sirin, 2005) attesting to the correlation between SES and academic outcomes, one may suggest that the participants were at a substantially elevated educational risk as all of the participants’ parents have few academic qualifications, are employed in skilled or less than skilled occupations, and possibly earn less than the median annual income.

**Linguistic fluency.**

Although cultural capital is intricately connected to socio-economic status (SES), linguistic fluency is also a function of cultural capital, according to Bourdieu and Passeron (1979). While none of the four participants identified that their parents’ lack of English fluency was a factor in their early school leaving, two made reference to how their parents’ limited English language skills impacted their parents’ level of academic involvement. Paul and Johnny described how their parents’ inability to read and write English impeded them from helping their sons with their schoolwork. Their experiences reflect research by Santos (2006) who also discerned how low parental involvement levels among Portuguese-Canadian students is due to a lack of English

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5 The median income for a family of two persons or more is $61,800 (Statistics Canada, 2009).
language skills. Their parents’ lack of English language skills created a situation in which Paul and Johnny were forced to learn curricular content and navigate the educational system independently.

Johnny and Paul did not directly state the date on which their parents immigrated to Canada. Given Johnny’s and Paul’s ages, however, it is likely their parents immigrated sometime between 1970–1990. This timeframe is significant because of governmental initiatives in adult English as a Second Language (ESL) programming. Johnny’s parents immigrated at a time when the Canadian Job Strategies and the Secretary of State Citizenship and Language Training Program and the Citizenship and Community Participation Programs were in place. It may have been extremely difficult for Johnny’s parents to have participated in either of the three language programs as the first program restricted immigrants from participating and the other two programs did not provide financial incentives for participation. For these reasons, his parents may have either been ineligible to participate in language training or may have found it difficult to participate given the financial burdens placed on their family by having to pay for childcare. Paul’s parents, on the other hand, immigrated when the Settlement Language Training Program was in place. Paul, speaking of his parents’ lack of involvement in his school, explains that they were often times too busy with work to become involved in their own schooling. Thus, given the burdens of being newcomers to Canada with a family to raise, his parents’ priority may have been to enter the labour market as quickly as possible so as to establish financial stability. Although the Government of Canada mandated adult ESL courses (Fleming, 2007) the inconvenient course times and the economic strains involved in attending class made it almost impossible for some newcomers to take advantage of this integration program. As Nunes (1998) found, nearly half of his Portuguese-Canadian respondents answered that they had never attended adult English as a Second Language courses as the courses tended to be offered at inconvenient times. One participant claimed: “[How could I] arrive here, as I did, and go to school along with my wife . . . to learn English . . . if we don’t have anyone who will help us to survive in this manner? . . . [If]
we are going to learn English, how will we earn a living?” (Nunes, 1998, p. 24). Johnny’s and Paul’s parents’ lack of involvement in their son’s education was a direct reflection of their immigrant reality, and as Johnny rightfully expressed, “If you can’t speak the language, you can’t really do a lot of things because everything involved the English language. To me that’s a downfall really. You’re coming to this country and you can’t even understand what’s given to you. You can’t even put it to use” (Johnny, p. 5, 119–122).

**Institutional knowledge.**

Due to their limited educational experiences, Paul’s and Johnny’s parents’ may have lacked the political and social awareness to become actively involved in their children’s education. Sofia, a Portuguese-Canadian community member, recalling her experiences in the Ontario educational system, describes the limited institutional knowledge of her parents during a casual conversation with me: “It’s also about them [immigrant Portuguese-Canadian parents] not having the resources to help their kids. Now we have access to resources, scholarships, loans, but they didn’t know about that back then” (Sofia, journal entry, p.80). Sofia attests to the way in which her parents, who were new immigrants to Canada and had not been educated both while in Portugal or after immigrating to Canada, were unaware of certain programs directed at assisting students. This lack of knowledge is a form of what Bourdieu (1986) calls “embodied cultural capital” (p. 247). This type of capital is passively transmitted from parents to children. Given that Sofia’s parents had never had the opportunity to experience the educational system, her parents were left at a “cultural” disadvantage when assisting their children.

In addition to knowledge regarding supportive programs, a lack of parental involvement may have been an effect of cultural differences between Portuguese and “Canadian” parents. Joe explained:

I see it more in Canadian culture, with my girlfriend or whatever. Their parents are much more in tune with the kids and on the kids. My dad was never like, “How was your day in school?” They didn’t even think of it. (Joe, p. 4, 88-90)
As Joe’s, Paul’s and Johnny’s parents experienced school under a dictatorial regime, it may be that the cultural expectations for parents were different in regards to interacting with the educational system. In Canada, parents are encouraged to actively participate in their children’s education. In fact, the Ontario Ministry of Education (2005a) mandated the creation of Parent Involvement Committees in each school board. The aim of this policy is to provide parents with a direct participatory vehicle by which they make a contribution to both their children’s educational success and the success of schools. The expectations placed on the participants’ parents to be involved in their sons’ education may have been incongruent with their cultural reality. In Joe, Paul and Johnny’s case, their parents’ experience of growing up in a dictatorial regime may have worked to impart belief in the independence of teacher and school authority and an unwillingness to challenge any form of institutional power. Challenging the school system, especially when their sons were on the verge of suspensions and expulsions may not have been culturally acceptable or common place.

As Bourdieu (1986) claims, embodied cultural capital may be transmitted over time, usually from the family in the form of socialization. It is plausible to suggest that if parents are unaware of the educational resources to which they may avail themselves and believe that the onus to educate their children lies with the school, they may implicitly transfer these beliefs to their children. Bourdieu believes that the inheritance of all forms of cultural capital is a leading contributor to social reproduction. Johnny’s case exemplifies how a lack of school board assistance coupled with a low cultural heritage may have affected his educational outcomes.

Johnny’s experiences support Bourdieu’s (1986) belief of transmitted cultural capital. Prior to his expulsion, Johnny had been suspended on three occasions. During his final suspension, which led to his expulsion, Johnny was not allowed to attend school for a period of 40 days. Although this might seem excessive, The Education Act (1990) admits variation in the minimum (one day suspension) and maximum (21 day suspension) suspension period.
Surprisingly, Johnny claims that he never once visited the guidance counselor prior to his multiple suspensions and eventual expulsion. According to a typical violence prevention policy issued by a school board that Johnny may have attended, schools are to emphasize preventative measures which include the use of special programs and staff such as social workers, community liaisons and guidance and counseling personnel (Toronto Catholic District School Board, 1995). Although violence prevention policies have been adopted by numerous boards across Ontario and are still in effect to the present day, according to Johnny, the administrative and support teams in his school did not follow the Board’s policy. In addition to claiming that he never visited a guidance counselor, Johnny did say that he would have availed himself of this support system had he known about it. Johnny’s lack of knowledge regarding educational support staff may not just be a failure of the board to inform him of his rights, but also a reflection of the way in which embodied cultural capital operates and how it may affect a student’s ability to successfully navigate the educational system. Given that his parents had not experienced the Ontario educational system they did not have the requisite knowledge of the resources available to them and their son. The lack of parental involvement may be a function of his parents’ limited educational experiences. As they were not educated in Ontario, they had no opportunity to understand the institutional resources available to them and their children.

Johnny’s parents had been educated in Portugal. This fact may be a defining element in why his parents did not challenge their son’s expulsion and insist on another educational route. Johnny recounted the meeting with his principal and father a week prior to his expulsion:

The day that I got expelled or suspended they phoned my father. He came in. They explained everything to him that they had just finished explaining to me about why I was getting suspended. They went through the whole process. They told him that, “If this is not for your son, you should take him out of school and he should go to work or something”. . . . But then [his parents] realized, “Ok, I’m not going to force him. He’s going to stay in school, but why is he going to stay in school if he’s not going to learn anything and he’s just going to screw around?” So they decided to leave it on my shoulders. (Johnny, p. 11, 290–293, 296–298)

Having been educated in the Portuguese system, Johnny’s parents might have believed that they could not challenge the school board’s decision that Johnny be removed from school. It may
have been that the ethos of acceptance and obedience that was prevalent during Portugal’s
dictatorial regime created a frame of mind in which Johnny’s parents believed they could not
dispute institutional authority.

One may suggest that the relatively low cultural heritage of these four key informants is due
to the low cultural capital possessed by their parents. Their parents lacked linguistic fluency,
scholastic knowledge and were uninformed of policies, procedures and resources to support
disaffected students. As Bourdieu and Passeron (1979) suggest, individuals who have a high
cultural capital (i.e., experience, knowledge, educational credentials, contacts, resources) are
better able to negotiate and navigate the educational field because they may have access to such
things as: (a) white-collar contacts for career advice and role modeling, (b) knowledge of
secondary and post-secondary education, (c) assistance with schoolwork, and (d) greater financial
security.

The participants did not come from families with a high cultural capital. However, to blame
their parents for their low cultural knowledge is both an oversimplification of the Portuguese
socio-historical context both in the home country and the host country. Coming from rural
communities with few educational opportunities, many Portuguese immigrants to Canada were
relegated to manual labour due to lack of education, experience and linguistic fluency. Thus, it is
not that Portuguese-Canadian parents do not value education or do not want to participate in their
children’s education, but their socio-economic position creates a situation in which their low
cultural capital makes active parental participation difficult or not culturally common. As Sofia
commented during a casual conversation: “It’s a mixed thing. Families that were more well off
encouraged education, but other families were just getting by” (Sofia, journal entry, p. 80). The
data thus reflect researchers’ (Edgerton, Peter, & Roberts, 2008; Lareau & Weininger, 2003)
emphasis on the importance of relating cultural capital to aspects of socio-economic status and
how socio-economic status may translate into academic advantage or disadvantage.
Habitus

Although Bourdieu and Passeron (1979) note that cultural capital affects educational outcomes, they also note that habitus comes to influence one’s aspirations and expectations for educational investment. Habitus, which is derived from the word habit, is a way of describing how one perceives and relates to his or her world. One’s habitus, which is impacted upon by one’s social context, through association with family and peers, influences one’s ways of being and doing. For Bourdieu and Passeron, one’s habitus—aspirations and expectations for educational attainment—can impact one’s educational achievement.

Father’s influence.

The socio-economic position of all the participants was one in which their fathers had been employed or were employed in either skilled or semi-skilled manual labour. Joe, Paul and Johnny made reference to how their fathers’ occupation had influenced their vocational aspirations. Joe’s father was a skilled carpenter, Paul’s father was an experienced stone mason and Johnny’s father had worked various jobs in the semi-skilled sector. From a young age, all three participants had assisted or worked with their fathers. Joe and Paul worked with their fathers during summer breaks; Joe worked with his father in his carpentry business and Paul worked in the construction industry. Johnny acted as his father’s assistant when he was a mechanic. The process of participating in their fathers’ work engendered a learning situation in which these young men came to identify with particular social actions. The findings reflect those of Willis (1977), whose ethnographic study of working-class, young men supports the concept of habitus (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1979) in that individuals come to take on cultural themes (e.g., ideas, beliefs, and attitudes) that are familiar to them. In the case of the three participants, it may be that they came to “reproduce” the occupational characteristics of their fathers as the participants saw them as being normative.
Peer influence.

Jeff, Joe, and Johnny spoke of the disposition to education among their peer group; their peers held few expectations of obtaining a secondary school diploma. Many were often truant, used illegal substances, and engaged in criminal activity. Jeff, Joe, and Johnny believed their disposition to education was influenced by their friendship network. As they identified with their peers, they came to incidentally learn and adopt the behaviour and attitudes of their friends. Jeff, Joe, and Johnny noted how missing school to either drink alcohol or use marijuana was common among their group of friends. Jeff and Johnny discussed how they engaged in criminal activity, which negatively affected their educational outcomes. Jeff’s, Joe’s, and Johnny’s stories can be connected to the literature dealing with risky behaviour and early school leaving (Fagan & Pabon, 1990; Gutierrez & Montalvo, 1984; McCrystal et al., 2005) in that early school leavers tend to be regular users of alcohol and illegal substances and are more involved in criminal activity in comparison to students who remain in secondary school.

Furthermore, Jeff and Johnny acknowledged that they came to adopt the values of their peers regarding education. Witnessing the lack of consequences when their friends left school, they came to believe that not having a secondary school diploma would not be detrimental to their future. Jeff’s and Johnny’s explanation of the role played by their peers concurs with findings of various authors (Kiuru, Nurmi, Aunola, & Salmela-Aro, 2009) concerning similar educational trajectories among peers. However, Jeff and Johnny, in acknowledging that had it not been for their peers their educational outcome might have been different, contradict Ryan’s (2001) findings that suggest that peers are unable to alter an individual’s utility value for school. Jeff and Johnny were influenced by their peers on similar yet different levels. Although both participants engaged in risky behaviour with their peers, their accounts do not allow one to definitively state whether engagement in risky behavior with their peers affected their early school leaving or whether the educational aspirations and expectations of their peers influenced their leaving. What the data do suggest is that the change in utility value for school may be
derived, to a certain extent, from association with peers. As Jeff and Johnny noted, engaging in risky behaviour with their peers fostered disengagement, but also witnessing their peers’ early school leaving further contributed to their change in attitude to school. The participants’ discussions of peer influence provide a further analysis of the early school leaving phenomenon along a non-school related framework while further expanding Bourdieu and Passeron’s (1979) theoretical model of habitus as it allows for the inclusion of peers as an influential social group on educational expectations and aspirations.

**Portuguese-Canadian context.**

Although it may be that Johnny’s early school leaving was a partial function of the risky behaviour he engaged in with his peers, Johnny also made reference to the attitudes toward education held by his young, male Portuguese-Canadians friends. He believed that many of his peers held little expectation for obtaining a secondary school diploma because their vocational aspirations were such that they believed they would follow in the footsteps of other Portuguese-Canadians who were working in skilled trades. The sentiment was also expressed by Joe and Paul. Joe’s peers, like Johnny’s, were mostly of Portuguese descent, and Joe substantiated Johnny’s belief that his peers did not complete secondary school because they assumed they would “work construction because that’s what [they’re] going to be anyways because that’s what all Portuguese guys do” (Joe, p. 2, 43–44). Paul, although he did not specifically refer to the ethnicity of his peers, did say “a lot of Portuguese kids do end up working construction because they just feel that school [is] . . . not their future” (Paul, p. 2, 45–46). The educational and vocational aspirations of young Portuguese-Canadian men is corroborated by two other persons.

In an informal conversation with me, Melinda (journal entry, p. 88), who had worked as a teacher in Jeff’s school, recalled her experiences. She remembered that the student population was mainly of Portuguese descent and that many of these students were not motivated to complete secondary school. Although she did not provide a reason for a lack of motivation, she believed that many of these students did not value education (Melinda, journal entry, p. 88).
On a separate occasion, an informal conversation held with Beatrice, a former student at Johnny’s school, further confirmed Melinda’s and the three participants’ (Joe, Paul, and Johnny) perceptions regarding educational aspirations and expectations of young Portuguese-Canadian men. Beatrice (journal entry, p. 91) explained that a substantial number of the school population was comprised of students with Portuguese cultural roots. She remembers that many of her male, Portuguese-Canadian school peers had relatives who were employed in the trades. In her opinion, these young men never took education seriously as they believed that they would find employment in the trades just as their brothers and fathers had (Beatrice, journal entry, p. 91).

Furthermore, Paul and Johnny both agreed that many young Portuguese-Canadian men believed that education was a drawn out process that hindered their opportunity to enter the workforce. Specifically, Paul and Johnny discussed how the lure of financial security superseded obtaining a secondary school diploma. They stated that young, Portuguese-Canadian men had little expectations for a secondary school diploma because they believed that work in a skilled trade offered high financial rewards. Paul’s and Johnny’s explanations regarding the incentive to leave school early based on the desire to enter the workforce support Willis’ (1977) findings indicating that working-class young men’s disposition to education is undermined by their drive to earn money and Bushnik’s (2003) findings regarding reasons for male early school leaving.

Joe’s, Paul’s, and Johnny’s accounts regarding their vocational and educational aspirations and Melinda’s and Beatrice’s perceptions of the general disposition to education of Portuguese-Canadian students reflect the argument concerning the interplay among social context, habitus, and educational outcomes (McLaren, 1986; Noivo, 1997; Nunes, 1998) by suggesting a reproductive attitude toward education among Portuguese-Canadian generations. Joe’s, Paul’s, and Johnny’s assertions that young, Portuguese-Canadian men leave school to enter a skilled trade “because that’s what all Portuguese guys do” (Joe, p. 2, 43), is reflective of Willis’ (1977) belief in the influence of social class on educational attitudes. Having grown up in a largely working-class family and cultural community, it may be that Joe’s, Paul’s and Johnny’s social
context operated to create implied understandings of the limited benefit of education and normative vocational paths.

**Conclusions**

Attempts to understand the early school leaving phenomenon center on definitions, cause and effect, determining the population, and developing and implementing both reactive, and proactive management programs. Nonetheless, the perception of early school leavers is one which indirectly addresses cause versus effect. This definition of early school leaving leads to the conclusion that behaviours such as truancy, tardiness, substance use and unwillingness to learn, wholly influence an individuals’ academic disaffection and his or her early school leaving. This definition based on a model of effect, fails to acknowledge that certain causes lead to particular effects. In the case of all participants, no single cause led to their leaving secondary school. In fact, it was the dynamic interplay between causal factors. The causal influences of cultural capital, social context, school climate and curriculum affected each participant’s early school leaving differently. Jeff’s truancy, use of illegal substances and criminal activity which were an effect of his association with peers along with a negative school climate accounted for his leaving. For Joe, the causal factors of a lack of differentiated and experiential learning coupled with his social context (i.e., his father’s influence and the career expectations of young, Portuguese-Canadian men) influenced his early school leaving. Paul was much more influenced by the causal factors of cultural context, his father’s line of work and the lack of a positive learning environment in his secondary school. Johnny’s causal factors were his peer group, school climate and a failure on the part of the school to provide differentiated and experiential learning opportunities. These causes ultimately resulted in the participants’ early school leaving.

The interviews reflect the findings in the literature (Alberta Learning, 2001; Ferguson et al., 2005; Satchwell, 2004) attesting to how multiple factors lead to the phenomenon. Approaching early school leaving from an integrative perspective helps to provide measures to further prevent
disengaged students from leaving school early. In what follows, I offer some school and non-school related recommendations.

**Practice Recommendations**

Given that early school leaving is a function of school and non-school related factors, recommended intervention programs must then address the issue of cause. In order to reduce disaffection, preventative programs must accurately assess and reduce causal factors. The Ontario Ministry of Education has certainly put much effort into improving secondary school student achievement. Through the Student Success Strategy, the Ministry has implemented numerous teaching and learning strategies aimed at increasing student achievement and graduation levels. Specifically, the Ministry has spent $45 million to improve technological education and $18 million for Lighthouse projects and a further $18 million contribution to extend the Lighthouse projects (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2005b). Lighthouse projects differ depending on the Ontario school board, yet all offer flexible approaches for students deemed to be at-risk of not completing secondary school. A range of programs exists, but most focus on providing students with credit accumulation opportunities and experiential learning through enhanced cooperative education.

**School related recommendations.**

**Differentiated learning.**

Project-based (Newell, 2003) learning may also counteract the lack of curricular flexibility, experiential learning, and individual agency to which all participants made reference. In fact, Johnny noted that he would not have missed school had there been more of an emphasis on differentiated learning. Newell (2003) discussed the role of project-based learning on student engagement and achievement. Based on the notions of constructivist pedagogy, differentiated learning (Tomlinson, Brimijoin, & Narvaez, 2008) and negotiated learning (Boomer, 1992), project-based methodology emphasizes: (a) student interest rather than a fixed curriculum; (b) an interdisciplinary approach rather than a narrow, discipline-based focus; and (c) the use of real
materials collected and developed by students rather than teachers’ materials. The project-based approach also emphasizes a deep understanding of material based on a problem-solving, critical learning skills approach rather than a shallow knowledge of facts. However, project-based learning must be negotiated between students and teachers. That is, students take on an active, participatory role in their learning. They are given the agency to determine subjects, activities, ways of demonstrating knowledge, time management, and tasks. Working in close collaboration with their classroom teachers, students may negotiate the curriculum so as to devise a differentiated approach to their learning. Customizing the learning experience of disaffected students enhances student participation, engagement, and achievement (Newell, 2003; Riley & Rustique-Forrester, 2002).

**Experiential learning.**

Many of the recommendations made by the Ontario Ministry of Education for supporting those considering early school leaving are illustrative of remedial strategies targeted at raising literacy and numeracy (Ontario Ministry of Education & O’Connor, 2003). However, research by Riley and Rustique-Forrester (2002) noted that experiential forms of learning are better able to re-engage disaffected students and provide more “authentic learning” (Hill & Smith, 1998). Joe, Paul, and Johnny made reference to the need for experiential learning opportunities, especially those pertaining to vocational education. Following the Education Amendment Act (Learning to 18) (2006), which raised the school leaving age to 18, the Ontario Ministry of Education implemented the Student Success/Learning to 18 Strategy to support continued school attendance and engagement. The strategy saw a number of initiatives aimed at supporting student achievement and graduation. One strategy was the implementation of various program options based on experiential and vocational educational opportunities. These initiatives saw the creation of Dual Credit programs, Specialist High Skills Majors (SHSMs), expanded cooperative education, apprenticeships, and e-Learning. Dual Credit programs allow students to participate in apprenticeship training and college courses, which then count toward their secondary school
diploma. SHSMs allow students to focus on a specific career that matches their interests. There are numerous high skills and each focuses on classroom courses, workplace experience and sector certifications. E-Learning allows students to enroll in online courses that are not offered at their particular school.

*The Evaluation of the Ontario Ministry of Education’s Student Success/Learning to 18 Strategy Final Report* (Ungerleider, 2008) found that schools experience systemic implementation difficulties. These difficulties, which resulted in significant barriers to student success, stemmed from negative societal perceptions regarding the role and importance of cooperative education, apprenticeship programs, dual credit options and SHSMs. There was a general assumption that academically focused programs and courses were superior to experiential and vocational programs. Ungerleider (2008) also found that Student Support Teachers experienced difficulties and resistance to advocating for the benefits of such programs. *The Evaluation of the Ontario Ministry of Education’s Student Success/Learning to 18 Strategy Final Report* (Ungerleider, 2008) reinforces the findings of King et al. (2009), which demonstrated the lack of participation and completion in cooperative education and apprenticeship programs.

The findings contained in *The Evaluation of the Ontario Ministry of Education’s Student Success/Learning to 18 Strategy Final Report* (Ungerleider, 2008) are crucial to understanding the culture of the Ontario educational system. There appears to be an implicit and hegemonic understanding regarding the types of courses, subjects and educational trajectory deemed to be academically worthwhile. Further literature (King et al., 2009) also attests to a discrepancy between secondary school students’ course and subject enrolments and their educational paths. It was found that 46.1% were enrolled in University-Preparation courses, 26% were enrolled in College-Preparation courses, 3.2% were enrolled in Workplace-Preparation courses, and 24.7% had not completed high school. However, at the end of four or five years of secondary school only 34% of the students were enrolled in university, 20% enrolled in college and 40% had entered the workplace either with a secondary school diploma or no degree (King et al., 2009).
There is clearly a mismatch in the courses students take and their educational paths once they complete secondary school. One of the reasons for such a discrepancy may be the culture of the educational system. It may be that experiential and vocational forms of learning are faced with negative value-based judgments. These forms of learning may be considered less academically challenging and may be associated with unskilled, manual labour. Unfortunately, this perception fails to recognize the intellectually stimulating and diverse environments that experiential programs offer. Experiential programs in the form of broad-based technological education, cooperative education or Ontario Youth Apprenticeship Program (OYAP) offer an abundance of varied career and skilled-based approaches to student learning. For example, broad-based technological education includes communications technology, construction technology, hospitality services, manufacturing technology, personal services, technological design and transportation technology. Furthermore, the ill-perceived notions that experiential learning programs are not academically challenging and associated with unskilled, manual labour are injurious not only to student engagement, but to ensuring that the needs of the changing Canadian labour market are met. As recent research has shown, more than one-half of the existing skilled trade workers will retire within the next 15 years (Office of the Premier, 2008). Thus, breaking down the societal perceptions of a “valued” education and profession is an area that must be addressed.

Ensuring that the needs of the Ontario economy are met has been a top priority for the provincial government. Beginning in 2008 and ending in 2012, the Skills to Jobs Action Plan will invest $125 million into apprenticeship programs (Ontario Ministry of Finance, 2008). However, given that the educational culture is one which does not see the academic and professional value in experiential learning programs, government initiatives may be undercut. There must be a fundamental shift in perceptions among teachers, administrators, parents and students about what constitutes student achievement and success so as to better ensure that the
values and aspirations of all students are met and that the Ontario secondary education system, “is relevant to society’s needs and expectations” (Ontario Ministry of Education, 1999, p.6).

**School climate.**

The idea that “no one cared” about them was an overriding theme in the interviews with the four participants in this study. In particular, Jeff and Johnny implied how the school climate was detrimental to their learning. Their complaint is not unique. In past research (Bushnik, 2003; Ferguson et al., 2005; Satchwell, 2004) it was also noted that a lack of positive student-teacher relationships was a persistent complaint among early school leavers. The Ontario Ministry of Education and many Ontario school boards recognize the importance of positive student-teacher relationships and a safe school climate. The Education Act (1990) and *The Provincial Code of Conduct and School Board Codes of Conduct* (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2007b) note that a sense of security, trust and respect within schools is crucial to supporting the academic achievement of all students. For early school leavers, a positive climate and good relationships with school staff is vital to their engagement. Jeff, when speaking of his time in the alternative secondary school system, highlights how a surrogate family (Barr & Parrett, 1995) fostered academic engagement as he felt that his teachers truly cared for his well-being. However, Jeff did not experience a positive school climate while in the traditional secondary system. Despite feeling that they were not trusted, Jeff and Joe did not blame their teachers for their early school leaving; they recognized that teachers were often times constrained by organizational structures.

Jeff and Joe believed that large class sizes significantly impacted a teacher’s ability to evenly distribute his or her time equally between students. Joe, in fact, stated: “I think the main reason is because they can’t look at every kid. Sometimes the classroom is a little over packed and kids are going to fall through the cracks” (Joe, p. 7, 187–188). The effect of class size, which centers on whether or not smaller classes improve student outcomes has long been part of the debate on scholastic achievement. Researchers (Akerhielm, 1995; Pate-Bain, Boyd-Zaharias, Cain, Word, & Binkley, 1997) argue as to the effectiveness of class size. Some (Pate-Bain et al., 1997)
believe that class size has an impact on student achievement levels in the secondary panel. Others (Akerhielm, 1995) suggest that the effects of achievement due to smaller class size are limited when compared to the effects of students’ socio-economic status on student achievement.

The Ontario Ministry of Education attempted to improve secondary school student achievement. Through the Student Success Strategy (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2005b), the Ministry has implemented numerous initiatives to increase student achievement and graduation levels. In Ontario, government has spent $1.3 billion to support student achievement and success. Specifically, $51 million has been invested for Student Success Leaders (SSLs) and a further investment of $89 million has been made for hiring an additional 1,000 secondary teachers and 800 Student Success Teachers (SSTs). Student Success Leaders are designated teachers in a school who actively coordinate a team of teachers and school personnel in order to ensure the academic success of at-risk students. Student Success Teachers work directly with disaffected students. They establish and maintain positive relationships, monitor attendance, develop work strategies, work collaboratively with teachers to assist with behavioural and improvement plans, and advocate for students. Although these funding initiatives have greatly increased Ontario graduation levels\(^6\), Ungerleider (2008) found that certain deficiencies are still present. One major issue was staff attitude. Research (Ungerleider, 2008) found that school personnel believe that the implementation of Lighthouse projects, Student Success Leaders and Student Success Teachers would detrimentally affect the quality of education. However, the results must be carefully interpreted. Staff attitude did not reflect staff’s negative and jaded perceptions of students, but was instead indicative of staff insecurity regarding adaptive teaching strategies to support at-risk students. The difficulties exposed make reference to the continued system-wide approach of teaching versus learning. Instructional methodologies that transcend the traditional orientation toward teaching work best to support students considering early school leaving. There

\(^6\) According to Ungerleider (2008), the provincial graduation rates have increased from 68% in 2003–2004 to 75% in 2006–2007.
must be a shift from “teacher as instructor” to “teacher as facilitator” with an emphasis on student learning.

Newell (2003) emphasized how a project-based or task-based approach to learning encourages a supportive learning environment and student engagement by altering the student-teacher relationship. The relationship is one of mentor to novice rather than one of authority figure to antagonist. Teacher facilitators know the importance of self-regulation and assist students in establishing responsibilities, processes, roles, and routines. The emphasis is thus placed on how knowledge is negotiated between student and teacher. Through project-based learning, teachers are challenged to relinquish the role of transmitter of information and disciplinarian so as to facilitate the acquisition of knowledge through a constructivist approach. They transform how knowledge is gained by encouraging, supporting, and engaging student interest. Project-based learning works as an adaptive strategy to engage disaffected students.

Non-school related recommendations.

Linguistic support.

Paul’s and Johnny’s reasoning for their parents’ lack of involvement contradicts some past research (McLaren, 1986) on Portuguese-Canadian academic underachievement, which correlates parental ambivalence to education with low achievement. In fact all participants believed that their parents understood the benefit of education and oftentimes pressured them to do well in school. Paul and Johnny noted that their parents’ lack of English fluency led to their inability to be fully involved in the sons’ education. As Johnny noted:

If you can’t speak the language you can’t really do a lot of things because everything involves the English language. To me that’s a downfall really. You’re coming to this country and you can’t even understand what’s given to you. You can’t even put it to use. (Johnny, p. 5, 119–121)
The lack of English fluency rendered Paul’s and Johnny’s parents unable to dialogue with the educational system and thereby take advantage of educational resources available to them and their sons.

A recommended area of improvement is that of enhanced and extended English as a Second Language (ESL) programs to support parental language acquisition. Although the Government of Canada has made great strides to structure its adult ESL programs, the locations of such programs should be extended to include culturally-based community centres. In 1992 the Language Instruction to Newcomers to Canada (LINC) program was implemented. To date, it is the predominant adult ESL training within Canada. LINC is designed for any recently landed immigrant or refugee to Canada. LINC learners are eligible for approximately 900 hours (one year full-time and three years part-time) of instruction. They are assessed prior to class and placed in an appropriate proficiency level. Unfortunately, they are not eligible for allowances or subsidies. Some cities, however, provide childcare services. Many participants are thus left to attend night classes while working to support themselves during the day or are made to depend on the financial assistance of family members (Fleming, 2007).

Given that many new immigrants tend to settle in homogenous cultural communities, it is recommended that governmental funding be extended to cultural organizations so as to provide ESL programs and classes in cultural community settings. There are currently a number of Portuguese-Canadian not-for-profit organizations across Canada. The mission of most of these organizations is to establish and maintain links between new immigrants, settled Portuguese in Canada and community members back home. These organizations are often times small community centres run by volunteer staff. Currently, there are 25 cities within the province of Ontario that have running Portuguese-Canadian clubs and associations, with 34 clubs and associations operating out of the city of Toronto alone⁷. To further support the language

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⁷ Numbers were retrieved from http://www.portuguesecanadians.com/Clubs.html
acquisition of Portuguese-Canadian parents, funding for government run language programs should be extended to these centres. In addition to providing language training, these classes have the potential to offer a culturally relevant approach to language training.

At a school board level, further collaboration with cultural community centres is a must to additionally ensure that newcomer families are made aware of language programs and the educational resources offered to them and their children. According to the Ontario Ministry of Education (2007a), school boards are required to develop procedures and programs intended to receive new immigrant families through orientation initiatives. These initiatives should be based on collaborative work with community agencies, school staff and community representatives. Many Ontario school boards now provide a number of orientation and settlement services both with specific schools and through community agencies (Toronto Catholic District School Board, 2010). Boards offer interpreting and translation services, settlement services and orientation centres. In particular, the placement of settlement workers within certain schools in Ontario boards is crucial to ensuring relevant outreach and referral services to immigrant newcomer families. Nonetheless, given the social and economic strains placed on immigrant parents and guardians it may not be feasible for these families to take advantage of settlement workers. Many parents may be attending LINC classes or some may be involved in full-time employment and therefore unable to meet with workers during school hours. It is recommended that boards ensure that settlement workers within their schools work collaboratively with cultural community centres. Liaising with the directors of cultural centres will increase the likelihood that information of settlement resources within the community and at the school board level is disseminated to newcomer families. Ontario boards, however, should certainly be commended for the strides they have made in providing immigrant newcomer families with access to settlement resources.
Community support through tutor and mentor programs.

From a causal perspective, all participants noted how their cultural context had influenced their educational and vocational expectations and aspirations. Given that Joe, Paul, and Johnny believed that many young, Portuguese-Canadian men left school early because they followed the male community members’ vocational path, targeted programs should be implemented within the existing Portuguese-Canadian infrastructure to ensure awareness-raising of schooling opportunities for young men who are considering leaving early. Of the 34 Portuguese-Canadian clubs and associations in the city of Toronto, none has been more politically active in the educational arena than the Portuguese-Canadian Federation of Business and Professionals (FPCBP) and the Portuguese-Canadian National Congress.

Part of the FPCBP’s mission is to encourage academic excellence and to advocate for the prominence of Portuguese-Canadians. Currently, the FPCBP offers a range of scholarships for Portuguese-Canadian students who have achieved academic excellence. Scholarship recipients are then expected to voluntarily give up a percentage of their time to volunteer with the FPCBP. Although the FPCBP is to be commended for recognizing student achievement, the scholarship program perpetuates a unilateral understanding of educational and vocational routes. I recommend that the FPCBP not only award scholarships to young community members who have academically succeeded and plan to enter a professional or academic career, but also open scholarships to those involved in experiential forms of learning, such as the Ontario Youth Apprenticeship Program (OYAP).

Encouraging multiple educational and vocational routes creates a more open and realistic dialogue regarding student interest and success, encourages a commitment to remaining in secondary school, and pays homage to present contributions of young community members in all social and occupational fields.

As the FPCBP’s mission is to promote educational achievement and advocate for roles and contributions of members both within and outside of the community, volunteer hours should be
directed at preventive and intervention strategies for engaging young Portuguese-Canadians in schools. Targeting secondary schools with a large Portuguese-Canadian population, FPCBP recipients could volunteer their time as tutors or as guest speakers in the Career Studies classroom. As tutors, recipients could offer educational support for those community members experiencing academic difficulties or disengagement. As guest speakers, recipients bring a wealth of knowledge regarding scholarship information and application processes, personal experiences with post-secondary applications, and vocational options. These recipients also take on the responsibility of role models in that they illustrate to young community members how to aspire to educational and vocational goals. Furthermore, if the FPCBP expands the scholarship program to include those participating in experiential learning paths these recipients might also play a crucial role in reaching out to disaffected Portuguese-Canadian students. As a guest speaker in Career Studies, for example, these young community members may impart information regarding alternative educational and career paths. They are at liberty to speak directly of the connections between experiential programs and the workforce and how certain programs, such as OYAP, are a bridge between school and career as they are provincially funded, provide the opportunity to obtain an OSSD while engaging in paid work and lead to becoming a registered apprentice.

The Portuguese-Canadian National Congress further supports the educational attainment of all its members. Established by the Congress, the Portuguese-Canadian Educators Network (PCEN) which is still running today is composed of Congress staff and representatives, as well as educators and education professionals, representatives of community agencies and educational programs, and others with an interest in education. At its most active stage, the PCEN launched a nation-wide investigation into and assessment of the perceived academic underachievement of the community. However, in a casual conversation with the Congress’ project manager, I uncovered that the PCEN is not as active on the educational front as it once was (Lucy, journal entry, p. 105).
To target young Portuguese-Canadian male students who are considering early school leaving, the PNEC should reinvigorate its educational projects. One such program could be a full-running tutoring and career service for young community members. To recruit potential tutors the PCEN should work collaboratively with Portuguese-Canadian student-run associations within post-secondary institutions. As with the tutoring program suggested for FPCBP scholarship recipients, these voluntary participants would provide at-risk young community members with academic and vocational support.

The roles of both tutoring and mentoring services are to provide both academic and vocational support and counseling. These services, however, should not perpetuate a unilateral understanding of education and employment. Volunteers should come from all academic disciplines and vocational streams. The ultimate goal is to create a support network which acknowledges and champions the aspirations and achievement of students within all educational and vocational fields.

**Summary**

In this chapter I have explained how the major themes that emerged from the data relate to my theoretical framework and the literature presented in Chapter 2. I recapitulated the participants’ stories. With reference to the findings, I provided recommendations for school and non-school related programs to further support students at risk of withdrawing. In the following chapter, I discuss implications for future research, limitations to the study and make concluding remarks.
CHAPTER 6

CONCLUSION

The research reported in this thesis has examined the educational perspectives of four young Portuguese-Canadian men who left school prior to obtaining a secondary school diploma. The aim was to understand their unique reasons for leaving. In order to do so, participants were interviewed as it allowed for rich individual accounts. The preceding chapter examined the data with reference to the literature found in Chapter 2. It also provided the reader with school and non-school related program recommendations. In this chapter, I offer implications for future research, limitations to the study and concluding remarks.

Implications for Future Research

As the participants noted, their cultural context—particularly their fathers and peers—greatly influenced their educational and vocational aspirations. Although the majority of the research on early school leaving (Alberta Learning, 2001; Ferguson et al., 2005; Riley & Rustique-Forrester, 2002; Satchwell, 2004; Sirin, 2005) has focused on the effects of a lack of curriculum relevancy, school climate and socio-economic status, further research would benefit from an understanding of how social context through the influence of one’s father and peers affects students’ academic and vocational trajectories. To fully glean the factors affecting a young man’s early school leaving, I would recommend that research methodology be expanded to include interviews with family members and friends. These interviews could provide rich data by shedding light on social context and how it affects a student’s habitus. The interviews may also illuminate and expand the research on early school leaving so as to include socialization groups as either a risk or protective factor. In light of this recommendation, it would have been beneficial to have interviewed my participants’ fathers and peers in order to understand in greater depth their attitudes to education.
As this study was restricted to male participants for the reasons given, it might be worth examining the educational aspirations and expectations of young female Portuguese-Canadians. Although research (Ornstein, 2006) notes that individuals of Portuguese descent have fewer educational credentials, a higher rate of young women when compared to their male Portuguese-Canadian colleagues have graduated from secondary school and hold university degrees (Statistics Canada, 2001). It would be interesting to investigate the discrepancy in numbers. Doing so would further add to the research on Portuguese-Canadian underachievement.

The issue of protective factors—factors that encourage academic engagement—is something that has not been addressed in this research study. As was found in the literature, the early school leaving phenomenon is a confluence of multiple factors. An alternative approach to this research may be an analysis of the phenomenon through protective factors. That is, research may be conducted with students who have been “resilient” (Bernard, 1991) to multiple risk factors.

**Limitations**

My intent was to understand what school and non-school risk factors led to the early school leaving of four young Portuguese-Canadian men and whether their social context (i.e., membership and identification as a Portuguese-Canadian) informed their early leaving. Although the research (Alberta Learning, 2001; Ferguson et al., 2005; Satchwell, 2004) allows one to draw the conclusion that many school related risk factors lead to early school leaving, this study did not discuss all factors. For example, attention was not paid to whether the participants were negatively affected by academic streaming or whether their academic performance led to their leaving.

Despite all participants stating that they identified as being Portuguese-Canadian only three (Joe, Paul and Johnny) made reference to their cultural context as having coloured either their early school leaving or that of other young Portuguese-Canadian men. Jeff, however, who came from a cross-cultural background—his father was of English descent and his mother of Portuguese descent—did not refer to the role cultural identification played in either his early
school leaving or that of other community members. I believe my data on the interplay between social context and early school leaving could have been augmented had I had participants whose parents were all from the same ethno-cultural background.

Furthermore, the accounts offered by the participants cannot be generalized to the entire early school leaving male Portuguese-Canadian population as each case has differing contexts. The experiences of these young men, however, do reflect a set of common issues relevant to early school leavers.

**Final Remarks**

Throughout the course of my study, I have been guided by four research questions:

- How have school related risk factors experienced by young, Portuguese-Canadian men led to their early school leaving?
- How have non-school related risk factors experienced by young, Portuguese-Canadian men led to their early school leaving?
- How does membership within the Portuguese-Canadian community lead to early school leaving among young Portuguese-Canadian men?
- How does identification within the Portuguese-Canadian community lead to early school leaving among young Portuguese-Canadian men?

In an attempt to answer these questions, I analyzed the lived experiences of four young Portuguese-Canadian male early school leavers through Bourdieu and Passeron’s (1979) theories of cultural capital and habitus. The interview data not only support the research findings (Alberta Learning, 2001; Ferguson et al., 2005; Satchwell, 2004) that early school leaving is a function of school and non-school related risk factors, but the data also support findings in past research (Dumais, 2002; Wildhagen, 2009) attesting to the low correlation between cultural capital and academic achievement, while substantiating the link between habitus and academic achievement. In the case of my participants, their habitus was coloured by their social context; that is, their
educational aspirations and expectations were influenced by their fathers, peers or their cultural context. Peers were able to change the utility value for school, yet one’s cultural context also had similar effects. From this study, it appears that the cultural characteristics of the Portuguese-Canadian community function to create, reify and reproduce well-regulated objectives among young, male Portuguese-Canadians. Given that the majority of community members work in skilled or semi-skilled occupations (Nunes, 1998; Ornstein, 2006) where salaries are above the national average (Pyper, 2008) and have few educational credentials, the characteristics of male community members may impart subtle cues, embodied understandings and underlying assumptions regarding work and education. Young Portuguese-Canadian men may believe that a secondary school diploma is not necessary as they can easily follow in the footsteps of other male community members and obtain well-paying employment in the skilled trades. In this study, it was also found that early school leaving may be more a function of whether one has the habitus—the educational aspirations and expectations—to continue with school or not.

One could wonder if schools are complicit in directing different students into different educational and vocational routes. Bowles and Gintis (1976) called this the “correspondence principle,” which is an idea explaining that schools teach different hidden curricula to students of different social classes so as to prepare young people to take their places in a differentiated hierarchical class system. In effect, Bowles and Gintis imply that schools prepare working-class students in such a way that they enter adult life in working-class jobs. Willis (1977), however, would argue against the correspondence principle and the hidden curriculum theory. His research on the “lads,” the term given to his young, male participants, was an attempt to understand how the cultural dimensions of everyday life created behaviours and actions in reaction to these cultural dimensions. Willis believed that working-class students got working-class jobs on account of “cultural reproduction.” Cultural reproduction emphasizes the development of culture through the agency of actors. It is also created when actors refer to cultural themes that are familiar within institutional settings, families and communities. And as Bourdieu and Passeron
(1979) suggest, many themes are widespread throughout society, helping to coordinate activities on diverse social levels by influencing the beliefs, values and actions of groups of people. In the case of Willis’ lads, they drew upon cultural themes that were learned in their homes and communities. As Willis contends, the cultural themes adopted by the lads were borne out of “shop floor” culture through jobs that alienated working-class peoples.

Willis’ (1977) ethnographic study, however, demonstrated how the boys were active agents in the creation of their behaviours and attitudes as they created an anti-school culture of resistance and opposition to authority. The strength of Willis’ work is that he connects the lads’ culture to relations of production. The lads believed they were facing a future in manual labour. Their working-class culture, their family, peers and the community in which they lived reinforced their belief of their future in the labour market. Thus, cultural themes are created by students, their parents, and cultural context implying the fundamental agency of those who have most to lose from these relations of production as products of cultural activity. Workers may have developed cultures that reverse values of dominant culture, looking down upon those who have mastered “pen-pushing” (Willis, 1977) and live lives of the “posh” (Willis), or so they think. One might draw the conclusion that the participants in this study, like the ones in Willis’, are constrained within their cultural conditions. Although Willis notes the role of school structures on the lads, he does stress agency as the lads made active decisions about their future. The participants in this study, like the lads, therefore, through their own decisions reproduced their working-class culture and secured a position within that culture. Each meaningful act, however, even though it reconstitutes cultural structures is a new creation to a certain degree, hence the importance of re-directing these young people, as those in this study, to have them re-align along cultural themes they will observe frequently that are different from those they witness growing up within their working-class context.
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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

August 4, 2009

Ms. Susana Fonseca
52 Westroyal Road
Toronto, ON M9P 2C3

GREB Ref # GEDUC-451-09
Title: “The study/work dichotomy: Factors influencing young, male Luso-Canadians to not obtain a secondary school diploma”

Dear Ms. Fonseca:

The General Research Ethics Board (GREB), by means of a delegated board review, has cleared your proposal entitled “Exact Title on Application” for ethical compliance with the Tri-Council Guidelines (TCPS) and Queen’s ethics policies. In accordance with the Tri-Council Guidelines (article D.1.6) and Senate Terms of Reference (article G), your project has been cleared for one year. At the end of each year, the GREB will ask if your project has been completed and if not, what changes have occurred or will occur in the next year.

You are reminded of your obligation to advise the GREB, with a copy to your unit REB; of any adverse event(s) that occur during this one year period (details available on webpage www.queensu.ca/vpr/greb/addforms.htm#Adverse). An adverse event includes, but is not limited to, a complaint, a change or unexpected event that alters the level of risk for the researcher or participants or situation that requires a substantial change in approach to a participant(s). You are also advised that any adverse events must be reported to the GREB within 48 hours.

You are also reminded that all changes that might affect human participants must be cleared by the GREB. For example you must report changes in study procedures or implementations of new aspects into the study procedures on the Ethics Change Form that can be found at http://www.queensu.ca/vpr/greb/addforms.htm#Change. These changes must be sent to Linda Frid at the Office of Research Services or FRIDL@queensu.ca prior to implementation. Ms. Frid will forward your request for protocol changes to the appropriate GREB reviewers and / or the GREB Chair.

On behalf of the General Research Ethics Board, I wish you continued success in your research.

Yours sincerely,

Joan Stevenson, PhD
Professor and Chair
General Research Ethics Board

cc.: Dr. Shehla Burney, Supervisor
     Dr. Malcolm Welch, Chair, E-REB
     E-REB: c/o Graduate Studies & Bureau of Research, Attn: Celina Fréitas

JS/gi

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I am a Portuguese-Canadian Master’s of Education student at Queen’s University. I am conducting a study to investigate the reasons why young, male Portuguese-Canadians do not obtain a secondary school diploma. I would like to invite you to participate in a one-on-one interview to be held at location and time that is convenient for you.

Coffee, Tea, and Refreshments will be available.

If you are a young, male Portuguese-Canadian between the ages of 18 -26 and do not have a secondary school diploma please contact Susana Fonseca at:
susana.fonseca@queensu.ca
APPENDIX C

QUESTIONNAIRE

Losing Touch: The Early School Leaving of Four Young Portuguese-Canadian Men

Please take some time to complete the following questions:

1. How old are you?
   
   - 18
   - 20
   - 22
   - 19
   - 21
   - Decline to Answer

2. Which part of Portugal is your family from?
   
   - Continent
   - Azores
   - Madeira
   - Decline to answer

3. Were you born in Canada?
   
   - Yes
   - No
   - Decline to answer

4. Were your parents born in Canada?
   
   - Yes
   - No
   - Decline to answer

5. How old were you when you dropped out of high school?
   
   - Grade 9
   - Grade 10
   - Decline to Answer
   - Grade 11
   - Grade 12
   - 14
   - 15
   - 16
   - 17
   - 18
   - 19
   - 20
   - 21
   - Decline to answer

6. What grade were you in when you left school?
   
   - Grade 9
   - Grade 10
   - Decline to Answer
   - Grade 11
   - Grade 12

7. Are you currently working?
   
   - Yes
   - No
   - Decline to answer

Thank you!!!
APPENDIX D
SAMPLE QUESTIONS FROM INTERVIEW GUIDE

Attitudes toward school:

10. How would you describe your experience with school?
   • Teachers, principals, other students, support network, resources, the location of your school etc.

11. When you were in school, were you aware of the extra support given to students?
   • Guidance counselors, co-operative education programs, after school tutors etc., academic scholarships?

12. What did your teachers or principals say about post-secondary opportunities?

13. Were your parents ever involved in your education?
   • Did they ever attend interviews, help you with homework?
   • Why do you think they were or were not involved?

14. Why did you decide to leave?

15. When you look back on your decision, do you think the school could have done anything differently to have made you change your mind?
   • If so, what could that have been?

16. When you told your family members about your decision, what did they say?

17. Looking back on your decision to leave school, how do you feel about that decision?

Attitudes toward work:

18. Did you work while going to school?

19. Why?

20. Are you currently working?

21. How do you feel about your decision to leave school and enter the workforce?

22. How do you think education and work are related?
   • Do you think you need an education to get a good paying job?
APPENDIX E
LETTER OF INFORMATION

Losing Touch: The Early School Leaving of Four Young Portuguese-Canadian Men

I am writing to request your participation in research aimed at investigating the reasons some individuals may not obtain a secondary school diploma. The ultimate goal of our research is to help students and educational professionals better understand their roles in the educational system. My name is Susana Fonseca and I am a master’s student in the Faculty of Education, Queen’s University. I am researching under the supervision of Dr. Shehla Burney, an Assistant Professor, in the Faculty of Education, Queen’s University. This research has been cleared by the Queen’s University General Research Ethics Board.

I wish to document the views and factors influencing young, male Portuguese-Canadians to not obtain a secondary school diploma. To do this, I am planning to conduct several one-on-one interviews followed by one group interview. I am inviting you to participate in the one-on-one interview. You may choose to then participate in the group interview at the end of your one-on-one interview. The group interview, called a focus group interview, will involve about 6 to 10 people (all young, male Portuguese-Canadians who do not hold a secondary school diploma). One interviewer will lead the focus group, and one note-taker will be present. The one-on-one interview will be led by one person.

Both the one-on-one interviews and the focus group interview will be conducted at a location and time that is convenient to all who are being invited. The one-on-one interview will be approximately two hours long and will also be audio taped. The focus group interview will also be approximately two hours and will be audio taped. You are requested not to discuss the content and discussion of the one-on-one interview or the focus group interview. During the one-on-one interview the interviewer will take notes to record the discussion. During the focus group, the note-taker will take notes to make a written record of the questions and answers. The taped one-on-one interviews and the taped focus group interview will be written up and maintained as a computer file. The tapes will be kept for a period of five years and will then be destroyed. None of the data will contain your name. Your name will be identified using a false name only. Data will be secured in a locked drawer in a locked office and confidentiality will be protected to the extent possible. Only the researcher, the note-taker, and the research committee members, Dr. Shehla Burney and Dr. Marie Myers, will have access to the data. However, the note-taker will only have access to the data during the group interview.

Your participation is entirely voluntary. I do not foresee risks in your participation in this research. However, some questions may be personal and/or sensitive in nature. You are not obliged to answer any questions you find objectionable. You are free to withdraw from the study without reasons at any point, and you may request removal of all or part of your data.

In order to withdraw from the study, you may contact Susana Fonseca at any point during the study at susana.fonseca@queensu.ca and ask to be withdrawn from the research. If you wish to have your data removed, please also indicate this in the email. As you will be given a false name, your data will be confidential and, if you ask to have your data removed, the researcher will delete the data from both the group interview and the one-on-one interview that corresponds to the false name you were given. Your answers will, therefore, not be used in the research.

This research may result in publications of various types, including journal articles, professional publications, newsletters, books, and instructional materials for schools. Your name will not be attached to any form of the data that you provide, nor will it appear in any publication created as a result of this research. A false name will replace your name on all data that you provide to protect your identity. If the data are made available to other researchers for secondary analysis, your identity will never be disclosed.

Please keep a copy of the Letter of Information for your records. If you have any questions about this project, please contact Susana Fonseca by telephone at 613-530-7952 or by email at susana.fonseca@queensu.ca.
susana.fonseca@queensu.ca or Dr. Shehla Burney by email at burneys@queensu.ca. For questions, concerns or complaints about the research ethics of this study, contact the Education Research Ethics Board at ereb@queensu.ca, the Chair of the Queen’s University General Research Ethics Board, Dr. Joan Stevenson, 613- 533-6081 (chair.greb@queensu.ca), or the Chair of the Unit Ethics Research Board, Kathy Brock, at kathy.brock@queensu.ca.

Sincerely,

Susana Fonseca
APPENDIX F

CONSENT FORM

Losing Touch: The Early School Leaving of Four Young Portuguese-Canadian Men

I have read and have a copy of the Letter of Information concerning the study entitled Losing Touch: The Early School Leaving of Four Young Portuguese-Canadian Men and all questions have been fully answered. I understand that the purpose of this study is to investigate factors leading young Portuguese-Canadian men to not obtain a secondary school diploma. I am aware of the nature of participation and I am aware that I am agreeing to participate in either a group interview or a one-on-one interview. I have been informed that the group interview and the one-on-one interviews will be recorded by audiotape. I am also aware that both the group interview and the one-on-one interview will be two hours in length.

I have been notified that participation is voluntary and that I may withdraw at any point during the study. I may request the removal of all or part of my data without any consequences to myself. I understand that certain steps, such as the use of a false name, will be taken to ensure confidentiality of all information.

I am aware that if I have any questions about this project, I can contact Susana Fonseca by telephone at 613-530-7952 or by email at susana.fonseca@queensu.ca or Dr. Shehla Burney by email at burneys@queensu.ca. I am also aware that for questions, concerns or complaints about the research ethics of this study, I can contact the Education Research Ethics Board at ereb@queensu.ca or the Chair of the General Research Ethics Board, Dr. Joan Stevenson, 613-533-6081 (chair.greb@queensu.ca), or the Chair of the Unit Ethics Research Board, Kathy Brock, at kathy.brock@queensu.ca.

Please sign one copy of this Consent Form and return to Susana Fonseca. Keep the second copy for your records.

I agree to participate in a group interview or a one-on-one interview this study.
Please circle the interview you are agreeing to.

Participant’s Name: ________________________________
Signature: ________________________________
Date: ________________________________

I agree to being audio-taped during the group interview or the one-on-one interview.
Please circle the interview you are agreeing to.

Participant’s Name: ________________________________
Signature: ________________________________
Date: ________________________________

Please write your e-mail or postal address at the bottom of this sheet if you wish to receive a copy of the results of this study.
Joe:

Well….growing up I was always around the shop and around my dad and working with my hands. And I always saw my dad doing that when I was really young and I was like, “I want to do that” and I was always fiddling with this and that.

So when I went to school, nothing really interested me. I really like hands on doing stuff, creating stuff. I don’t really like sitting down. That’s my problem…can’t focus for too long. You know what I mean and I hate the smell of books. And for me, I felt pressure in school you know to do good. But I never was interested in it.

Susana:
You talk about this idea of sitting down. Can you think of a classroom? So when you think of a school, what comes to mind?

Joe:

Sitting down, in a classroom, at a desk. Using your head, like I use my head at work when I create stuff, but for me it’s a different kind of work. I don’t know….I just don’t like it. I don’t know why.

Susana:
You talk about this idea of a different kind of work and I find that really important. You make this distinction between using your head in school and doing stuff, making stuff with your hands. Is that what you’re talking about?

Joe:

Ya, that’s what I’m talking about. When I’m at work and I’m working and I’m actually doing something I like, it’s not so much pressure and it’s not like stressful. I like doing it and I like getting to the next step. You know what I mean. But when I was in school when I used to do projects and stuff like that I would detest it. I would hate it. That’s it.

Susana:

What do you think, why is it that you hated it so much?

Joe:

Well…for me, I didn’t like the routine of always doing the same thing over and over. In my line of work I’m always doing something different, I’m moving around. I just didn’t like sitting there listening to teachers. I just wasn’t very focused on that.
friends, or they would pay somebody if they had the money to give me some tutoring on the side. But education was primary in their minds.

Susana:

So if education was primary in their minds, I want to then turn to your experiences with school. Can you describe your experience with school, and in particular your experience at high school?

Paul:

Well, going into high school, I was really focused on school. I was getting really good grades. My life was nothing but school. I was very dedicated and very serious. Then I’d say once I got into high school, my mentality changed. I’d say my biggest downfall was when I was in high school I was trying to make money in the moment instead of focusing on school which would then set me up so I could make money in the future. So I could have taken advantage of my opportunities. I could have gone further than I did. Except that like I said, I dropped out because I wanted to make money at the moment and that money was really good money at the time and my parents let me decide and I made whatever decisions I wanted and I just decided to leave. And at the same time, I lost focus, but I realized that schooling, with schooling I’m going to end up doing whatever I’m doing right now so there no point in me going to school.

I wanted to make money; I wanted to be independent. I thought I was older that I really was.

I didn’t see the light at the end of the tunnel. I didn’t see the whole picture until later on in life. I realized that yes, you do need school in order to get certain jobs. I got sick of the construction business after because it’s hard work, but there’s really no going back. Ya, in high school I had more freedom, but I seen that it would take me too long and after that it would cost money. I wanted to offer something. I wanted to bring something to the table. My parents didn’t force me to dropout of school and go work.

My parents were supporting me and they would have paid for it etc

But I wanted to be the adult. I wanted to show them that I could produce. That I don’t need them. That I don’t need nothing from you guys because I’m more than capable of doing my own thing, making my own money. That’s why I left high school.

Susana:

I want to ask you about your experience with the teachers. Did you have a good student-teacher relationship?

Paul:

Uuummm… I had a really good experience when I was in elementary school, until grade 8. And then after grade 8 things really changed. I didn’t feel as close to my classmates. I didn’t feel like