

## **Appendix A**

### **Project Proposal**

#### **Classroom Culture: Working Together**

##### **Letter of Information**

As part of a cohort-based program formed by Brock University in partnership with the Grand Erie District School Board I will be engaging in an action research project. The action research process focuses on answering the question, "How can I improve my professional practice?"; therefore, my research primarily involves reflection on my own teaching/leadership practice.

Written records, videotapes and audiotapes:

In my position as a classroom teacher with the Grand Erie District School Board, I collect information/data about my own professional practice for the purpose of improving it on a regular basis. As part of my research project, however, it is necessary to collect data, solicit information from students, which may go beyond usual classroom practice and may be used for publication. Audiotapes, photographs and video samples will be collected for research purposes.

All written records, video/audiotapes, transcriptions and questionnaires will remain in the possession of the researcher and will not be made available to any other person, group, or organization without the express written consent of the participants (or their parents or guardians, in the case of minors) who might appear in such records.

Following the conclusion of the project, all records will be kept securely in the possession of the researcher for a period of three years, after which time they will be destroyed by shredding or erasing.

The anonymity, confidentiality, and privacy of the student will be ensured in that a pseudonym will be used in place of their name, unless written permission is given to use the name. Since the focus of this project is on improving teacher/leadership practice, data collection involving students will only be used as a measure of teacher/leadership growth. Data will be used to assess ourselves as opposed to assessing (evaluating) students.

Geoffrey Suderman-Gladwell

Revised Sept 1999  
Expedited Review \_\_\_\_\_

File # \_\_\_\_\_

Full Committee Review \_\_\_\_\_

**Brock University Research Ethics Board**  
**Application for Ethics Review of Research with Human Participants**

**A. GENERAL INFORMATION (PLEASE PRINT)**

1. Title of Project:

" **Classroom Culture: Working Together**"

2. Faculty Investigator(s) Department Ext. # Email

**(None)**

3. Faculty Supervisor(s) Department Ext. # Email

**Michael Manley-Casimir Education**

4. Student Investigator Department Home#/Ext # Email

**Geoffrey Suderman-Gladwell Education**

5. Nature of the Research (please check all that apply):

- Ongoing track of research ( ) Independent Study ( ) Masters Thesis ( )  
Single study (one-time only) ( ) Faculty Research ( ) Honours Project ( )  
Doctoral Dissertation ( )  
Class assignment (course # and name) \_\_\_\_\_  
Other (please specify) **Masters Project** \_\_\_\_\_

6. Funding Status:

Is this project currently funded Yes ( ) No (X)

Details of funding: Agency \_\_\_\_\_

If no, is funding being sought? Yes ( ) No (X) Agency \_\_\_\_\_

7. Has this application been submitted to any other Institutional Research Ethics Boards?

Yes ( ) No (X)

If yes, provide name of Institution, date and decision. Attach a copy of the protocol (and approval if available). \_\_\_\_\_

8. Expected project commencement date (YY/MM/DD): **Upon approval** and expected project completion date: **01/06/30.**

## **B SUMMARY OF PROPOSED RESEARCH**

### **1 PURPOSE AND/OR RATIONALE FOR PROPOSED RESEARCH**

See attached proposal

### **2 METHODOLOGY/PROCEDURES**

I am involved in self-study. Although the study question has been defined, it will, as this is an action research study, by necessity change. It should therefore be seen as an emerging study. Nevertheless, the essential nature of the study will not change. I am reflecting upon the effect that my actions have on my class. The research participants are not doing anything that they would not do in the regular course of the year in my class. They will, however, be asked to evaluate both the class and my teaching, and that evidence will become part of the project. Observations that I make as part of my job will also form part of the evidence that I gather to document my influence within the class. The class members are participants inasmuch as they are participants in my class and have no real choice but to be there just as I have no real choice but to observe them and draw conclusions. I will be observing what I do to enable students to work together productively. The primary focus of any questioning guides will be to determine how students feel about the classroom environment. These guides will take the form of open-ended questionnaires throughout the year(see attached) and the possible use of videotape responses made without the researcher present. Again I stress that these are normal parts of my classroom practice. Videotapes will also be used to passively record the classroom environment. The purpose of the tapes will be to determine what I as the researcher am doing to facilitate group interaction. Any further use or display of that videotape evidence would come only with the express written consent of the class members.

### **3 PARTICIPANTS**

The participants in the study (apart from myself as the researcher and focus of the study) are the students in my class. They range in age from 11-13yrs old, including both males and females, and they are my 24 students. They are not recruited but assigned to me, and I am their teacher. In a very real sense, they are only participants in that they validate, through their feedback to me, whether I have achieved the educational goals I have set for myself.

### **4 RECRUITMENT PROCESS**

The study will take place with the grade 7 class at (location removed)

**5 COMPENSATION FOR PARTICIPANTS**

The students will not be compensated for their participation.

**6 FEEDBACK TO PARTICIPANTS**

At the end of the year, I thank students for taking part in my class. I make the purpose of my research transparent to my students in that I am studying how I teach. Therefore, when I explain my expectations to them, I am allowing them to enter into the research.

**C POTENTIAL BENEFITS FROM THE STUDY**

- 1 By participating in my research, they benefit by being able to evaluate their teacher, negotiate the nature of the learning environment. In my belief, substantiated by previous self-study, a social constructivist classroom results in improved learning by students. If they are able to interact with all students in the class, then the potential for learning is increased.
- 2 I am sharing my insights and purposeful reflections on my practice with other teachers. As more teachers make their methods and practices transparent to others, we as a society will benefit from better teaching.

**D POTENTIAL RISKS FROM THE STUDY**

- 1 There are no risks to the participants in this study that are created because I choose to purposely reflect upon what I am doing. There are risks associated with any learning situation, but they are not, in this case, created by the research. I believe that the fact that I am reflecting on what I am doing in the classroom will in fact minimize many of the risks inherent in learning environments.

**E FREE AND INFORMED CONSENT**

- 1 (See attached letter)

**F PRIVACY AND CONFIDENTIALITY**

In the reporting of the research, the school district and particular school will not be named. One ethnic group in the school is generally found only in specific areas of the province, and therefore the group will not be identified. Names will be changed both to prevent identification as well as hide association with any particular ethnic group.

**Form # 02****To Expedite or Not Expedite**Researcher's Name: **Geoffrey Suderman-Gladwell**

File #: \_\_\_\_\_

Title: **Classroom Culture: Working Together**

In order to apply for an Expedited Review, the Researcher must be satisfied that the proposed studies involve no more than MINIMAL RISK. Minimal risk means that the probability and magnitude of harm or discomfort anticipated in the research are not greater, in and of themselves, than those ordinarily encountered in daily life or during the performance of routine physical or psychological examinations or tests.

The purpose of this checklist is to facilitate the review process and to identify the ethical issues with which the Committee is concerned. It is meant to be an aid for the researcher and for the Committee.

**CHECK HERE:**

- [ **X** ]            THIS IS A NEW PROPOSAL.
- [   ]            THIS IS A RENEWAL OF A PREVIOUSLY APPROVED PROPOSAL.
- [   ]            THIS IS A CONTINUATION OF A PREVIOUSLY APPROVED PROPOSAL.

Please check YES or NO to each of the following questions:

YES    NO

7.     **X**    \_\_\_\_\_    Will the populations studied be defined as consisting of any of the following: **Minors (under 18)**, pregnant women, prisoners, mentally disabled? (If YES, underline all that apply.)
8.     **X**    \_\_\_\_\_    Will it be possible to associate specific information in your records with specific participants on the basis of name, position, or other identifying information contained in your records?
9.     \_\_\_\_\_    **X**            Will persons participating or queried in this investigation be subjected to physical discomfort, aversive stimuli, or the threat of any of these? (If YES, underline all that apply.)
10.    \_\_\_\_\_    **X**            Will the investigation use procedures designed to induce participants to act contrary to their wishes?

11.    \_\_\_   X      Does the investigation use procedures designed to induce embarrassment, humiliation, lowered self-esteem, guilt, conflict, anger, discouragement, or other emotional reactions? (If YES, underline all that apply.)
12.    \_\_\_   X      Will participants be induced to disclose information of an intimate or otherwise sensitive nature?
13.    \_\_\_   X      Will participants engage in strenuous or unaccustomed physical activity?
14.    \_\_\_   X      Will participants be deceived (actively misled) in any manner?
15.    \_\_\_   X      Will information be withheld from participants that they might reasonably expect to receive?
16.    \_\_\_   X      Will participants receive any type of compensation for their participation?
17.    \_\_\_   X      Will a penalty result if they decide to withdraw from the study or not participate at all?
18.    \_\_\_   X      Will participants be exposed to any physical or psychological risks not indicated above? (If YES, explain.)
19.    \_\_\_   X      Does the research involve recording of data from subjects (18 years or older), using invasive procedures routinely employed in clinical practice? (including exposure to electromagnetic radiation outside visible range, x-rays, blood sampling, microwaves, etc.)
20.      X   \_\_\_    Does the research require voice readings or **recordings** made for research purposes?
21.    \_\_\_   X      Does this research require study of existing data, documents, records, pathological specimens, or diagnostic specimens?
22.    \_\_\_   X      Can the investigation be reasonably expected to induce stress?

Considering the above, are you applying for  
Expedited Review   X   Full Review \_\_\_\_\_

***If the committee decides that Full Review is necessary, you will be informed by e-mail immediately.***

## **Information Letter to Participants: Classroom Culture: Working Together**

**Researcher:** Geoffrey Suderman-Gladwell, Graduate Education Dept., Brock University

**Faculty Advisor:** Michael Manley-Casimir, Dean, Faculty of Education, Brock University

As part of my effort to improve my teaching, I will be examining and reflecting upon my actions within the classroom this year. This year, these reflections will be written into a report that will constitute a project for my Master of Education degree through Brock University. It is very important to note that I will not be doing anything that I would not do as a normal part of my teaching in any year. However, I will be examining my teaching more thoroughly this year. I will be including your child(ren) in my research because I will be asking them to evaluate my performance as a teacher. I may wish to use some of the students' responses as part of my project. This will only be done with your consent. Some responses will take the form of videotape recordings made by students. These tapes will be for my and my supervisor's viewing only. If I want to use them in any other situations, I will ask for your written consent again. Any parents who do not give their consent at that time will not have their children's portions shown.

I will also be making observations of the classroom. Again, I will not be doing anything that I am not required to do as part of my job as a teacher. No information about our school or community will be included in the report. I will change the names of all students so that no-one can be identified. Following the conclusion of the project, all records will be kept securely in my possession for a period of three years, after which time they will be destroyed by shredding or erasing. There is no reason to believe that any harm will come to your child as a result of this study. However, I believe that the process in which I am participating will make me a better teacher, and make your child(ren)'s experience of my class more enjoyable and productive. Also, I feel that sharing this information with others will allow other teachers to learn from my experiences.

Students will not be paid for their participation in the study, and there will be no negative consequences for students who choose not to participate.

This research has been approved by representatives of the Grand Erie Board, and by the Brock University Research Ethics Board. If you have any questions you are free to contact the Director of the Office of Research Studies at (905) 688-5550 ext. 4315.

Geoffrey Suderman-Gladwell

**The potential harms and benefits of this study and the alternatives to participation have been explained. I have read the information provided, and I understand that I am free to ask questions about the research at any point. I therefore freely consent to allow my child to participate in this study.**

**Name of child** \_\_\_\_\_

**Name of Parent/Guardian** \_\_\_\_\_

**Signature** \_\_\_\_\_ **Date** \_\_\_\_\_

**BROCK UNIVERSITY DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION**

**Informed Consent Form**

Title of Study: **Classroom Culture: Working Together**

Researcher: **Geoffrey Suderman-Gladwell**

Supervisor: **Michael Manley Casimir**

Name of Student: (Please print) \_\_\_\_\_

**I understand that this study in which I have permitted my child to participate will require that they respond to questions about the nature of our classroom and of the teacher. They may also be asked to record their responses on videotape. I understand that the Mr Suderman-Gladwell will be examining how he teaches, and that he may videotape the classroom for his own purposes. These responses and observations made by Mr Suderman-Gladwell will be included in the report.**

**This research is approved by the Brock University Research Ethics Board, and the Grand Erie Board.**

**I understand that my child's participation in this study is voluntary and that I may withdraw him/her from the study at any time and for any reason without penalty.**

**I understand that there will be payment/no payment for my participation.**

**I understand that there is no obligation to answer any question/participate in any aspect of this project that I consider invasive, offensive or inappropriate.**

**I understand that all personal data will be kept strictly confidential. I understand that only the researchers named above will have access to the data.**

Parent/Guardian Signature \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

This study has been reviewed and approved by the Brock Research Ethics Board. (File # \_\_\_\_\_)

If you have any questions or concerns about your participation in the study, you may contact me at school 875-2291 or Professor Manley-Casimir at (905) 688-5550, extension 3710.

Feedback about the use of the data collected will be available during the month of December, 2001. A written explanation will be provided for you upon request.

I have fully explained the procedures of this study to the above volunteer.

Researcher Signature \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_



**Research Question**

**Geoffrey Suderman-Gladwell**

**Department of Graduate and Undergraduate**

**Studies in Education**

**Professor Michael Manley Caismir**

**Faculty of Education, Brock University**

**St. Catharines, Ontario**

**October 2000**

**Question: How can I get students to work together?**

I would like to study the nature of influence in terms of my personality and the personalities of my students and how we exert pressure to create a culture of change and learning.

**Background**

The circle begins 13 years ago at seminary in Indiana where I first read about the hermeneutic circle that liberation theologian Juan Luis Segundo appropriates from German theologian Rudolf Bultmann. This is described as the “continuing change in our interpretation of the Bible which is dictated by the continuing changes in our present-day reality, both individual and societal.” (Segundo, 1976) In other words, we understand the text through our experience— we are unabashedly subjective. The preconditions and factors necessary for fashioning such a circle are:

...(1) profound and enriching questions and suspicions about our real situation; (2) a new interpretation of the Bible that is equally profound and enriching. These two preconditions mean that there must in turn be four decisive factors in our circle. *Firstly* there is our way of experiencing reality, which leads us to ideological suspicion. *Secondly* there is the application of our ideological suspicion to the whole ideological superstructure in general and to theology in particular. *Thirdly* there comes a new way of experiencing theological reality that leads us to exegetical suspicion, that is, to the suspicion that the prevailing interpretation of the Bible has not taken important pieces of data into account. *Fourthly* we have our new hermeneutic, that is our new way of interpreting the fountain head of the our faith (i.e., Scripture) with the new elements at our disposal. (Segundo, 1976 ital. in original)

To understand this, is to understand the ferment from which Paulo Friere emerged, to understand the core of action research and its place in the halls of academia. I, as a teacher, ask questions about what those outside the profession, and those that would dictate my work-life, really know about what it is to teach. I do not accept the definition of my life that others would put on it. I begin with my experience as a teacher, and it doesn't match with what is deemed important by those outside the profession. Second, I apply that suspicion to the bottom-line economics that drives our country now and the ramifications that it has for teacher education and renewal more specifically. I come to the realization that much of what is driving our economy and our education system has missed out on the very heart of teaching— the teachers and our lives. Shoenfeld (1999) speaks of the necessity of creating theories of teaching but it does not seem to occur to him to *ask* teachers what their theories of teaching are, and how they “*learn* from their teaching.” I interpret my life, not through the theories and words given by others, but through my reflections on my life in the classroom and the relationship that I have with my students and with their learning. And thus the hermeneutic circle became a spiral and I begin action research.

I believe that our world operates in a non-structural way. This is to say that although we have structures (and they are necessary), the structures do not operate apart from the people within the structures. The structures only operate inasmuch as they are dependent on the people who effect the structure. The individual "I's" are of paramount importance to any process. People are "whos" and not "whats." A teacher is a person first, not simply a warm body in front of students. My job is dependent upon *me*. Only *I* can do *my* job. I can therefore study who I am by examining the influence that I have on the people around me because I make the assumption that their actions are in some small or large part dependent upon me. In a learning context, the quality of the learning is dependent upon how I choose to share my self in the classroom. In a supervisory or consultant context, the nature of the influence I have is dependent upon how I am perceived and interpreted by those within my sphere of influence. In short, I believe that a classroom is a reflection of the personality of a teacher (for good or bad) and the personality of a school is a reflection of the personality of the principal.

However, the question goes further than simply exerting my personality upon the classroom. The students also exert a force on the classroom, and if their voice is silenced then they "speak" in subversive ways. Also, the students, teachers, and the community exert an influence on the school. Therefore, the culture of a classroom, and the culture of a school is primarily dependent upon the staff of the school, but also dependent upon the willingness of those individuals to accept the influence of parents, community and students. As a classroom teacher, my primary focus will be on the classroom culture and the ways in which I enable students to create a learning culture. I value the voice of the students in the classroom, and I want to allow them to say "I want to learn." Through past action research I studied the process of enabling that voice. I found that I was establishing a social constructivist methodology within my classroom practice. Central to the social constructivist model is the notion that knowledge is negotiated in social contexts. Now I would like to address the specific issue of racism and how it negatively affects the classroom culture.

One of the "pillars of education" is "learning to live together" (Delors, 1996) My job as a teacher includes enabling my students to live with each other. When ethnic bias (or any other bias for that matter) intrudes into a learning environment, students are no longer free to make the best learning decisions for themselves. A student may choose not to work with a certain individual simply because that individual is a member of a particular group. Whether or not the individual in question can help the student is removed from consideration. Students may also deny help to members of particular groups. Therefore, ethnic bias or racism is counter to education on two counts. First, it shows evidence that students have not learned to live together, and second, it limits the learning opportunities of students in the classroom. In this study, I am not attempting to eradicate racism, ethnic or gender bias. I simply want to enable students to make the best choices for their education without having to consider race, ethnicity, or gender as well. In a sense, I want to create a "voice of conscience" that speaks out of a sense of membership in the classroom culture.(Green, 1985) That voice of conscience speaks to the students and calls on them to work together.

## Research questions

Within the main question there are contained the following questions.

- What is the effect of negative bias?
- Do I focus on behavior, attitude, or both? Which, if either, precedes the other?
- What are the limits of my influence?
- Where is the balance between the rights of students to choose working partners, and the expectation that they work with others.

Nevertheless, the bottom line in any enquiry revolves around the question: **Does this action improve student learning?** I must therefore find evidence that I have somehow changed the attitudes or the behaviours and skills of my students. This involves asking additional questions.

- How can I get students to share of themselves in a classroom context?
- How do I know that sharing improves student learning and engagement?
- How can I measure students' working together?
- How can I measure the effect that the enquiry focus has on student learning?

## Data Collection Process:

As with my previous action research project, my primary data will be the voices of the students themselves. These include:

- “Start Stop continue” teacher evaluation sheets
- video tape responses (open-ended, and perhaps also with scripted questions)
- observations of student choices (level of completion and polish in assignments; level of independent work; speed of completion of well-produced work; level of peer teaching; awareness of, and adherence to expectations; quality of self and peer assessment)
- surveys and questionnaires on specific experiences in the classroom (start and end of the year)
- Use of TAP groups to effect and gauge student sharing
- student journals
- personal journal

### **Alternate methods**

- voices of colleagues (Principal)
- outside examination of video evidence

### **Testing the validity**

Validity has always been the sticking point for me with respect to self-study. I believe that what I do makes a difference, but does my knowledge make it a reality? I lean toward the empirical when I ask the question: How do I know that my way is a better way of doing teaching? I have come to accept that the “I” in my research means that the validity and relevance of my research starts and to some extent ends with me. I am examining the best way for me to teach. I am trying to teach in a way that best exemplifies the values that hold in life. My findings are valid because they lay bare the intricacies of my life as a teacher, and my relationship with my students. If, by entering into my life, someone else can find a meaning that speaks to them and their practice then my work has achieved a greater end. However, it is enough that my research enable me to say: “I believe that I teach as the best teacher I am.” To me, this is the highest standard to which I strive. If my research enables this goal, it is valid.

More specifically, however, issues of validity address the questions (McNiff, Lomax, Whitehead, 1996):

- Do my explanations make sense?
- Is there sufficient evidence to make these claims?
- Have I communicated my values to the class and to the audience?
- Is the research authentic by which I mean does it answer a question worth asking?

Further, issues of validity address questions such as those raised by Eisner (1996).

- How will I display what I have learned? What evidence will be taken as showing that the students shared in creating the culture? How will such evidence be presented?
- What forms can I trust? Which data is too “tainted” by my influence to truly show what students feel and not what they feel I want to hear? How can I remove some of the barriers to objectivity by students? How much objectivity is necessary?
- What modes are legitimate? Is quantitative data significant in the study? Questionnaires? Is only qualitative data legitimate?
- How shall I know? Do I need to know the performance indicators before the study or will they emerge with time?

*These questions will be taken up with a validation group through the course of research.*

### Future Plans:

- Continue with the process of using the social constructivist methodology in my classroom
- implement monthly “Choices into Action/ TAP” meetings revolving around issues of knowing and sharing oneself
- Student of the day presentations to foster a deeper sense of knowing and sharing among students (I would model for them as well)
- continue implementation of responsibility building methods (washroom procedures, homework checking)
- Survey attitudes toward classroom culture throughout the year.
- Making the research explicit to the class, not as research, but as a way of inviting the students to act with me in creating a new culture.
- classroom meetings

### References

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