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ABSTRACT

[illegible] the different types of cognitive, affective, and [illegible] conditions that constitute a school's learning environment, and explains how the learning environment can create and aggravate deviant behavior in some students. One element of the American school structure is group instruction: groups of students are taught by a particular teacher for short periods of time. The teacher's instructional methods may be favorable for some students and not for others. If there is a consistent mismatch between student and instructor (or instructional system), the student may feel inadequate as a learner and his aspirations for further learning may decrease. School administrators and teachers tend to accept low achievement from these students instead of remedying it. Once students have been labeled as low achievers, they may develop more deviant habits, such as cutting class or dropping out, in order to avoid the uncomfortable situation created by attendance at school. One solution to this problem would be development of multiple environment schools, where students can move among various learning environments created for specific goals and learning styles. In addition, schools must be aware of the level of their outreach to students, effectiveness of problem-solving mechanisms, limits for acceptable personal conduct, communication processes within the school, and possible discrimination. (AV)

[illegible] First, the meaning of learning environments is defined. Second, selected literature about learners in school settings is reviewed. This review provides a theoretical perspective for considering the educational problem of learners who are isolated in the margins of school environments. Finally, selected school conditions that are likely to foster marginality are described.

Learning Environments

Learning environments consist of a variety of cognitive, affective and physical conditions that influence individual behavior. In brief, the learner is confronted with a sequence of learning tasks, a [illegible] which are mediated by the influences of individual personalities and expectations. Supporting the determinant power of these conditions and happenings, John Dewey described environment as:

> . . . the particular medium in which an individual exists which leads him to see and feel one thing rather than another. . .it strengthens some beliefs and weakens others. . .it gradually produces in him a certain system of behavior. . . . In brief, the environment consists of those conditions that promote or hinder, stimulate or inhibit the characteristic activities of a living being.[1]

Analyzing the role of environment in selecting and shaping behavior, many other writers (Anastasi,[2] Bloom,[3] Pace,[4] Skinner,[5] Stern[6]) have defined environment as a powerful determinant of behavior. Getzels and Thelen[7] suggest that it is the learner's perception of environmental roles and expectations that guides individual behavior. The operant assumption in this approach is that student behavior in school is a function of the relationship between the individual and his/her school surroundings. As Benjamin Bloom summarizes the views of environmentalists,

> We regard the environment as providing a network of forces and factors which surround, engulf, and play on the individual. Although some individuals may resist this network, it will only be the extreme and rare individuals who can completely avoid or escape from these forces. The environment is a shaping and reinforcing force which acts on the individual.[9]

Reversing Bloom, it could also be said that the individual and group are shaping and reinforcing forces who act on the environment to create contexts for their own behavior. Systematic philosophical analyses of the determinant power of environments (Freire,[7] Sartre[10]) also stress with liberating hope the transformating powers of individuals over the environments they create and reincreate continually. With debts going back to William James,[11] "cognitive constructivist" psychologists (Harvey, Hunt & Schroder,[12] Kelly,[13] Piaget[14]) elaborate on the role of perception as an influence on behavior by stressing the conceptual systems individuals use to construct, anticipate and actively respond to environments. Thus, learning environments are mediated by the way people create and experience them.

It is assumed that human beings are "stimulus-seeking." They choose which features of an environment to respond to, and thus contribute to the worlds which determine their behavior. For this reason, information concerning the perceptions of learners toward the stimuli produced by school environments provides educators with important clues to the sources of variations in student behavior.

Deviance in School Settings

In 1895, Emile Durkheim perplexed and infuriated readers of conventional views by suggesting that crime and criminals were normal, necessary and even useful features of every human society. Observing

that every society contained criminals (although different societies chose very different types of behavior to label as "criminal"). Durkheim argued that crime provided a dramatic opportunity to publicize and reinforce the rules of society. To this way of thinking, criminals also provided apt targets for collective moral outrage. Further, Durkheim saw that criminal activity, by challenging outdated conventions, sometimes provided a catalyst for social change.[15] In addition, the mobilization of resources to suppress deviant activity (as Erikson[16] also noted in the treatment of witches and non-Puritans) contributed to the creation of administrative policies and bodies that insured right opinions and loyalty to the group. In sum, Durkheim's arguments paved the way for an "appreciative" approach to deviance that recognized its contributions to the maintenance and growth of the group, albeit at the direct expense of the deviant individuals.

Durkheim's perspective, and the functionalist approach to deviance it engendered, can be considered in the context of the prevalence of marginal students in schools. The following discussion of schooling processes, marginal learners and dropouts will suggest several functions that marginal learners play in maintaining school social systems. Further, the exposition here will identify dimensions of the school environment which keep marginal learners in their necessary, "useful," yet (for them) destructive place.

Group Instruction and Errors in Schooling

In every country in the world where schools dominate the formative years of most young people's lives, students are often taught in groups of ten or forty in such a way that some students learn well while others learn less well.[17] Benjamin Bloom[18] has argued that one of the most significant elements accounting for individual differences in school learning is the

centrality of group instruction in most learning environments. In most schools each group of students is placed under the guidance of a particular teacher for short periods of time. This teacher's instructional methods, which are favorable for some students, may be far from favorable for others. Typically, students move from one teacher to another on an hourly, daily, term and yearly basis, and the errors (and strengths) developed in the student's learning in one setting are compounded with errors (and progress) made in subsequent classrooms. Eventually, after the ten or more years of the schooling process in this and other countries, the flaws and virtues in a system of group instruction are built into the student.

In general, two sets of flaws in the educational system influence those whose learning styles and needs go unserved. First, a consistent mismatch between student and instructional system is converted into the student's feelings of inadequacy as a learner and affects his/her aspirations for further learning. Second, the failure to learn in classrooms becomes evident as an increasingly intractable handicap related to retarded cognitive development and information or skill deficiencies. As Bloom persuasively argues in his elaboration of the concept of "errors,"

> Group instructional procedures employed with individual students who vary in many characteristics must produce variations in the accomplishment of a learning task--both in the level of achievement of the task and the rate at which it is accomplished. Feedback and corrective strategies are necessary if this variation in achievement or rate of learning is to be reduced to any significant extent.[19]

The administrative efficiency achieved by grouping students saves money for the institution, but is quite costly for some of the students in most groups. Because group instruction is such a given, educators learn from this fact of their environments to rationalize their inability to reach some learners. As a consequence, the low achievement and

incomplete mastery of learning materials of many students is accepted, instead of remedied. Thus, group instructional methods which are unproductive for some students are likely to create and perpetuate the difficulties of learners who move to the edges of the school environment.

Institutional and Self-Evaluations of Academic Adequacy

School environments have multiple and ongoing ways to evaluate learner performance, ranging from teacher comments, peer relations and self-reflection to report card grades and parent/teacher conferences. These elaborate devices, whether expressed in the curriculum or latent in the classroom environment, combine to clarify for each individual a self-concept as a learner. For example, in a single school year, the student may study as many as five or six academic subjects and may encounter as many as 150 different learning tasks. From each encounter, the individual derives a personal sense of his/her adequacy or inadequacy, which is corroborated or altered by marks assigned by teachers, and reactions of peers and parents. As these various indices accumulate over many learning tasks and over a number of years, the student begins to generalize about his adequacy or inadequacy with school learning tasks. If the results are generally negative and learning is regarded as inadequate by the student, his peers, parents and teachers, the learner is likely to develop a negative view about school and school learning that generalizes to the entire institution.

Student responses to learning environments depend, in part, on the ways that they are being judged by the institution. When these judgments consistently assign a lower value to the learner's performance, the young

person must cope with massive criticism from an institution representing society's values and views.[20] Moreover, students realize that there is no legal escape from the school and its learning tasks until age sixteen. Necessarily, young people judged negatively by the school begin to develop perceptions and habits designed to reduce the amount of pain the institution can give them.

Student Responses to Unproductive Learning Environments

Research on conceptual systems suggest that learners employ two kinds of interpretive maneuvers and two sets of behavioral reactions to minimize the impact of environmental events which they perceive as threatening to their goals and self-concepts.[21] The first interpretive maneuver is called "Neutralizing": whereby an event is restructured in perception to directly minimize its impact. Some fail to perceive the troubling event--"Nothing happened." Some distort its meaning--"It wasn't that way." Some deny responsibility for the event--"It wasn't my fault." Finally, some assert a difference between their own and others' standards by offering an alternative interpretation for the event--"Look at it this way."

A second general interpretive maneuver is called "Bolstering": whereby the positive elements of one's own conceptual system are reaffirmed to indirectly minimize the possible refutation of self-inherent feedback from threatening experiences. For example, some reaffirm themselves by claiming that their undesirable behavior was in some way their duty--"I had to do it." Some reaffirm their own competence--"I'm smarter than they are, anyway." Others reaffirm their social acceptance--

"My friends know the difference." Still others reaffirm themselves by treating the negative feedback as useful but not necessary: "I knew I needed to know that." The four examples following these two general interpretive maneuvers characterize the reactions of learners at each of the four stages of conceptual development described by Harvey, Hunt and Schroder.[7]

In addition, learners whose accumulating experiences at school teach them their own relative inadequacy also act to resolve the painful situation in two general behavioral ways. First, some directly attempt to remove the [illegible] environmental event: by dropping out, leaving the classroom, by failing their homework, by seeking support from classmates, or by researching the source's interpretation of a charge brought against them. Second, other learners change the organization of their conceptual systems so that the event will not be so refuting: by submitting to authority, by acting hypocritically, by changing their self-evaluation due to another's influences, or by provisionally agreeing to self-correction. Again, the four examples following each behavioral response to painful [illegible] situations differ according to the learners' stage of conceptual development.

In sum, a learner's involvement with a school environment depends, in part, on the multiple judgments the institution makes of the individual's performance. Further, learners in unproductive school environments often use specific interpretive and behavioral responses to mute the impact of possible negative environmental feedback. Both of these variables, institutional evaluations and student responses to them, are likely to influence a learner's interaction with the school.

Typology of Marginal Behavior in School

As the result, outward symptoms of psychological and behavioral responses to environmental conditions, the experience of marginality in schools can take many forms. Yet, several scholars[8] have noted the limited amount of research on deviance [9] or alienation in high schools. Most observers produce lists of character traits (cynicism, indifference, indignation, sullenness, ideological disagreement) that tend to locate the problem in the student, and downplay the influence of environment upon marginal behavior. Perhaps the best research sensitive to the impact of the high school environment on dissatisfied students has focused only on rebellion, or expressive alienation, which is only one form of marginal behavior.[10] To better understand the environmental conditions which influence marginal behavior in schools, it will be useful to consider one categorization of deviant responses to social systems, and then to apply this theoretical framework to a school setting.

Talcott Parsons[26] suggests a taxonomy of deviance in social systems based on three variables. First, the focus of deviant behavior may be on social objectives (persons, roles, groups) or on group norms (behavior patterns regarded as typical or appropriate to an environment). Second, people on the margins of an environment tend to be ambivalent about their relations to others and to norms, and their ambivalence may be expressed in terms of alienation or in terms of overconformity. Third, their alienation or conformity may be active or passive.

Building upon Parson's work, Hagstrom and Gardner[27] proposed the taxonomy of student deviation from school environments that is presented

in Figure 1. Perhaps the alienative responses to school environments are more familiar to observers of marginal behavior in schools, because these responses more directly challenge the norms and rules of the school. The "rebel," the "cheat," the "clown," the "truant" and the "apathetic student" increase the amount of time teachers must spend defining and reinforcing the rules of the school. Although schools are characterized by many and complex rules (about the central tasks of the school, about the coordination of the activities of many people, about standards of deference and demeanor),[28] school authorities only have limited rewards and punishments to offer for conformity. As a result, they are more easily baffled by the alienated students who resist or deny their authority. Nevertheless, the conforming student who manipulates authority figures, who tattletales, who demands constant attention, or who is a master at doing the minimum without really learning much is also cause for concern.

The purpose for presenting this typology was not to attempt to definitively categorize marginal learners. In fact, too little is known about these learners to confidently do so at this point. Instead, such a typology suggests that marginal student perceptions and behavior toward important "social objects" (like school authorities, teachers or counseling groups) and toward accepted school norms (for attendance, for participation in class, for behavior outside of class) will differ from the perceptions and behavior of their classmates. In other words, research on deviance in social systems implies that these environmental dimensions (social objects and norms) are likely to contribute to marginal behavior in schools.

Figure 1

Types of Student Formation

	Active		Passive	
	Compulsive Performance		Compulsive Acquiescence	
	Focus on Social Objects	Focus on Norms	Focus on Social Objects	Focus on Norms
Conformative Dominance	Dominance "Manipulators of authority figures"	Compulsive Enforcement (Probably an empty cell for students)	Submission E.g., the "teacher's pet" "overdependent students"	Perfectionistic Observance "Ritualism"
	General Rebelliousness		General Withdrawal	
	Focus on Social Objects	Focus on Norms	Focus on Social Objects	Focus on Norms
Alienative Dominance	Aggressiveness toward social objects: particularly school authorities. "The rebel" (failure of deference)	Rejection of values by demeanor: "fools," "clowns," regression in terms of age standards. Rejection of normal means, not ends: "Cheaters."	Withdrawal from social interaction "truants" "dropouts"	Evasion of rules the "lazy apathetic student"

Primary and Secondary Deviation

Most people have deviated from the norm in many various ways, particularly when as children and young adults, they were learning the expectations present in family, school and work environments. As noted previously, social systems like schools can be described by the way they continually monitor and seek to influence such behavior. In fact, one criterion often employed to judge a school environment is its ability to maintain discipline, which implies that the school's responses to the temporary deviations of individual students are effective at upholding behavioral norms.

However, in the cases of some marginal learners, disciplinary methods often are not effective, and may actually aggravate the problem behavior. This observation raises questions over the difference between temporary marginal behavior and more ongoing, seemingly intransigent marginal behavior. For example, how do participants in a school environment reach the judgment that someone is a "marginal learner?" Also, why are some people considered marginal for activities that others also perform without being so labelled? A complete answer to these questions is not in the scope of the present discussion. However, consideration of the differences between temporary and permanent deviation will help to identify environmental dimensions influencing marginal conduct.

To begin with, marginal status in a school is a matter of social definition. Deviance does not arise when a person commits certain kinds of acts, but when other people define those acts and their agent as deviant. In other words, social groups create deviance by making rules whose infraction constitutes deviancy, and by selectively labelling transgressors of the group boundaries.

Non-conforming individuals negotiate their possible labels in different ways. As Goffman[29] points out, people in groups spend much time maneuvering to earn certain labels and negotiating to lose other labels. For example, stigmatized individuals may try in future circumstances to display the behavior that denies the label. This is exactly the effect produced by reprimands or punishment on many pupils. However, other individuals may eventually give up the effort to disavow their differentness, and begin to protect and sustain their marginal identity. For them this identity has become a means of adjustment that must be preserved.

Lemert[30] is followed by many researchers in distinguishing between primary deviation and secondary deviation. Primary deviation refers to a transient or episodic aspect of a person's life in any environment. Most environments where people spend long periods of time have ways of regulating temporarily marginal behavior so that the status and psychic structure of the individual is only peripherally affected, and the temporary transgression has little enduring effect on social relationships. This is what happens in instances of primary deviation. More seriously, when a group's authorities--in Becker's[31] phrase--consistently react to a person's behavior by labelling it deviant, and when this individual comes to accept the labelling, the marginal behavior will become a more stable aspect of his role and personality in that group. This is what is referred to as secondary deviation.

A limited amount of research in school environments relates to this distinction between primary and secondary deviation. Licta and Willower investigate "student brinkmanship," which they define as "assertive student behavior which attempts to challenge the school's authority structure

while avoiding its negative sanction."[32] Their research clearly refers to the primary form of deviation. Examples of student brinksmanship include the "class clown" who is quick to mimic a robot when told by the teacher to stand straight, or the "mock enforcer" who jumps at the opportunity to repeat a teacher's reproof to a classmate. Comparing perceptions of brinksmanship of 291 junior high students and their teachers, this research viewed acts of student brinkmanship as a means of adjusting to the subordinate student role in the authority structure of the junior high school. Licata and Willower argued that brinkmanship may be seen as a safety valve and in the long run may foster stability--a conclusion which points to the function and necessity of marginal individuals in an environment.

Cicourel and Kitsuse examined secondary deviation in school by looking at the vocabulary and syntax used by teachers to identify "adolescent problems." They noted three types of enduring student problems and related vocabulary: (1) academic problems (e.g., "over-achievers" and "under-achievers"); (2) infractions of rules of conduct (e.g., "troublemakers" and "delinquents"); (3) emotional problems (e.g., "nervous" or "withdrawn"). They found that the typing of students in the three problem categories provided the basis for a variety of "careers" within school--the academic, delinquent and clinical careers respectively.[33]

The point here is that the type of identification accepted by individuals is likely to reflect their social environment. The labelling of a learner in school, when consistently reinforced, acts in the nature of self-fulfilling prophecy. Learners tend to respond with the expected behavior, as in the research of Rosenthal and Jacobson.[34]

Becker has postulated the sequence of steps leading to a deviant "career."[35] To become a certain "type" of marginal individual, one must be labelled as such, accepted this label, and gravitate toward a group of others with similar behavior and labels. The final step in the career is to move into an organized "deviant" sub-culture, much like a homosexual would do when "coming out." This move cements one's new identity, so that participation with similar significant others is a natural and rewarding final step in the labelling process.

In sum, the ongoing evaluations of student performance characteristic of school environments solidify into different, commonly-held "labels" describing individual student behavior. Much of the conversation in faculty lounges and in student peer groups could be described as a search for descriptive categories that are useful for predicting and understanding the conduct of other people whose activities have an immediate, sometimes threatening impact on one's own welfare. Unfortunately, since young (and older) people depend so crucially upon the recognition of other people to define themselves, negative labels, even those inconsiderately applied by others, too often are accepted and even defended by individuals. Even a negative label offers an individual a reliable way to locate himself and to be accepted by a group, when it has been seemingly impossible to earn recognition in other, more desirable ways. As the following discussion of school dropouts will also make clear, the labelling of individuals in terms of primary and secondary deviation is one powerful way that school environments create marginal behavior.

School Dropouts and Secondary Deviation

The weight of the evidence concerning high school dropouts establishes that secondary deviation in school has its roots in early school failure and longstanding negative attitudes toward school. For example, Stoller[36] in a study of 270 high school dropouts found that by the end of the second grade, over 50 percent of those who would do poorly or drop out of high school had already had their initial subject failure. By the fourth grade, 75 percent had initial failures; and 90 percent had earned a failing mark by the seventh grade. Similarly, Bloom[37] notes that academic self-concept is clearly defined by the end of the primary school period, particularly for the extreme students (upper-fifth and lower-fifth on academic achievement) where the relationship between academic self-concept and school achievement is unmistakeably strong.

Much of the dropout literature tries to identify characteristics of dropouts which can be used as early predictors of later withdrawal or difficulty in school.[38] Perhaps the most revealing list of "significant causes" (among many such lists) was produced in a comparison of dropouts with graduates of Bloomington, Minnesota Public Schools. The school-related causes make the general behavioral patterns of secondary deviations quite clear.

- Almost two-thirds of the dropouts have been retained at least once.
- Over one-third of the dropouts return to school only to drop out again.
- Absenteeism was nearly three times greater among dropouts.
- Participation in extra-curricular activities was over four times greater among graduates.
- The tested reading abilities of the graduates were substantially better.

- The IQ scores of the graduates were considerably higher.
- The results of standardized achievement tests of graduates were considerably higher in all subjects.
- The average report card grades received by graduates were at least one letter grade higher.[39]

Finally, despite the widely attributed correlation between lower class, minority cultural background and school leaving, Blake presented evidence that the school's mechanisms for assignment of success and failure exert the strongest influence on the dropout's lack of educational attainment. In this study, social class background, as measured by father's occupation and level of education, was found to have little influence upon school dropouts when school status was controlled. The study does not note, however, the influence of class and race on attribution of school status.[40]

Consideration of the dropout problem suggests that powerful, systematic forces at work in school social systems create and contribute to secondary deviation. In separate reports released in 1977, the New York State Board of Regents and the Queens Lay Advocate Service (a group of professionals interested in education) confirmed this view. Both found that the dropout rate from New York City high schools had risen so high that more students were dropping out than graduating. The plain facts are that less than half of the students who enter the New York City public high schools graduate. Apparently, this city's "mechanisms for assignment of failure" work more broadly than the school system's capabilities to help young people achieve.[41]

The Functions of Marginal Learners in School Social Systems

This exposition makes it clear that learners confront in schools a powerful latent curriculum which is uniquely taught and differently learned by each individual. This is the curriculum which teaches each student who she/he is in relation to others. It may also teach a person his or her place in the world of people, of ideas and of activities.[42] In a sense, learners on the margins of school environments are used, often unwittingly and unconsciously, as an important aspect of the school's efforts to define its group structure and purpose. While their presence in schools is frequently visualized as a product of organizational failures, there is a sense that learners on the margins are a product of the school organization itself, through its system of group instruction, through its absorption of and failure to correct a multitude of learning errors, through its ongoing evaluation and labelling of learners, through its norms and through the overall impact of its latent curriculum.

This argument is presented most clearly, on a theoretical level, by Dentler and Erikson.[43] They advance three propositions concerning the function of deviance in groups. First, they argue that groups tend to induce, sustain and permit deviant behavior. By inducing deviance, they refer to the process by which a group channels and organizes the range of behaviors presented by its members so that some behaviors are deemed acceptable and others not. In other words, an ongoing group establishes normative boundaries defining acceptable behavior. Like an article of common law or a system of fortifications, norms and boundaries are meaningful only when tested by people on the fringes of a group or by outsiders, and when defended or upheld by the group leaders.

The group sustains and permits this newly defined deviance when it institutionalizes and absorbs counter-productive behaviors, instead of eliminating or altering them. Indeed, leaders are partly valued for their ability to articulate and enforce the group's norms, and thus they depend on marginal people in part for their power.

In their second proposition, Dentler and Erikson refer to the ways in which "deviant behavior helps a group maintain its equilibrium."[44] Customarily, a reward structure closely linked to group norms is constructed by a group as an incentive for conformity and a punishment for deviance. However, conformity is "rewarded" only in comparison to other possible reinforcement responses, so that the presence and treatment of a marginal person by a group provides the continual contrast which gives the rewards their meaning. In this sense, a group norm becomes especially evident in its occasional or ongoing violation. Thus, a group is distinguished partly by its characterisitic ways of handling deviance, and partly by the forces it is able to absorb and contain. In plain words, a marginal person is someone a group can organize to do something about, and the group, when expressing its concern for marginal behavior, affirms its purpose and cohesion.

This leads to Dentler and Erikson's third proposition: that groups resist any trend toward ultimate alienation or expulsion of a member whose behavior is deviant. According to this point of view, the testing of limits is the lot of certain individuals labelled as deviant or marginal. The group exercises subtle pressures to secure the marginal person in his/her "testing" role, yet also tries to assure that this deviance will not become pronounced enough to make rejection necessary.

Commonly, the group adopts a paradoxical approach to marginal people consisting of ambivalent elements of nurturance and outrage. This combination can be observed in political leaders' attempts to rationalize their inability to resolve problems of people on welfare in a society organized around production and work. As political economists argue, a welfare population is created by systematic forces in a capitalistic economy (the need to maintain a reserve army of laborers, for example). The elimination of the welfare problem would require such a restructuring of the organization of production and contradict so much of the rationalization that supports the status quo, that it is far easier to blame the victimized people for the problem, while providing them with only the minimum needed to survive.

Similarly, to connect with the needs of marginal individuals in schools would require such a restructuring and rethinking of the organization of schooling that the school prefers to make efforts to keep marginal children in school without providing them with the services they need. The literature on dropout prevention is replete with tricks to seduce potential dropouts into remaining in school: credit for work experience, vocational programs with limited academic and occupational promise, educational TV programs, involvement in the school newspaper, exposure to the community college, revision of graduation requirements, the mystification of the high school diploma. Further, some institutions permit a constant stream of innovative projects designed to reduce discipline problems and improve basic skills, so long as these proposals do not alter the existing organization of schools. In part, alternative schools in many large cities, created for discipline problem children and for low achieving students, serve this function.

In sum, every school seeks to fit their marginal individuals into ongoing organizational structures, but few schools, including alternative ones, fundamentally change basic organization tenets (like group instruction of widely divergent individuals) to fit the characteristics and needs of their marginal learners. The maintenance of the institution is revealed, then, as the real end of most attempts to deal with deviance.

Dentler and Erikson's three propositions concerning the function of deviance in groups have been illustrated in direct and indirect ways by several authors for varying sizes of groups.[45] However, it would be premature to indicate that they have been thoroughly established by the present store of empirical work. Rather, consideration of these propositions leads to a theoretical perspective useful in investigating the problem of marginal learners. Educators need to better appreciate the ways that school environments contribute to the problems and difficulties of learners who have been pushed to the margins of schools. Ignoring the role of the environment and blaming the individual child for marginal behavior has permitted school improvement practices that unsuccessfully attempt to reintegrate the person into an environment that is directly responsible for learning and behavioral problems.

Institutions Designed for Marginal Learners

One delicate theoretical issue pertinent to alternative school environments remains to be touched on before summarizing the aspects of a school environment which influence the interaction of marginal learners. This is the troubling question: do social systems designed to serve marginal individuals actually work to confirm them in their marginal ways? It is a curious and commonplace observation that deviant forms of conduct

(like criminal behavior) are nourished by the very agencies devised to inhibit them (like a prison). Reform schools, hospitals and other "total institutions" providing needed services to marginal people typically segregate them in tightly controlled groups. Here, marginal individuals have an opportunity to teach one another the skills and attitudes of a deviant career. Normally, the institution seems to provoke its clients into the use of these skills by reinforcing a sense of differentness and alienation from society.[46]

If one assumes that the alternative schools were created in part for individuals who chose to leave traditional schools because of dissatisfactions there, then one could ask what forces are at work within the new social structure where many previously marginal people are gathered for a "different" form of education. Does the education they receive there represent an improved, more personal and more effective way of learning and personal growth, providing the kind of critical marginal people who serve as catalysts for social change? Do alternative schools tend to bring together teachers and learners who were marginal in previous schools in such a way that refining and confirming an alienative marginal identity becomes an important socializing function of the school? These questions could best be answered by longitudinal research on the "careers" of alternative school students and teachers. They should be raised and clarified because of the possible theoretical parallels between alternative schools and other institutions for marginal individuals.[47]

These parallels cannot be extensively explored in the present paper. However, the theoretical perspective developed here implies that no single learning environment is appropriate for meeting the various learning needs of diverse individuals. Instead of isolating the

people who don't fit in one environment into another segregated environment, educators will need to learn how to create multiple environment schools, where students can move among various learning environments created for specific goals and learning styles and intelligently matched with pupils' emergent learning needs and interests.

Identification of Specific Environmental Conditions

This review of the literature on deviance in school provides a theoretical perspective for approaching the problems of learners on the margins. In particular, five aspects of a school environment related to the involvement of marginal and other learners in a school deserve close attention in the present study. First, a brief rationale identifying these five aspects of a school will be presented. Following this, the five environmental dimensions will be specifically defined.

To begin with, a school environment can be characterized in part by the way it reaches out to group members with difficulties. The first step for alleviating the negative impact of group instruction methods occurs when teachers are responsive to student feedback and observant of student difficulties. For this reason, student perceptions of the outreach efforts of teachers would provide useful information about the ways that a school environment encourages participation in learning.

Second, the school environment must become effective at solving problems of learners by altering specific conditions in the school

environment which contribute to their problems. Thus, student perceptions of the institution's ability to resolve its own organizational problems, particularly those problems which impede learning for some pupils, are a second important source of information for educators concerned about increasing student involvement in learning.

Third, research on deviance in schools suggests that students become involved with different levels of participation in a school depending in part upon their perceptions of school norms. In fact, every act labelled as deviant can be said to exert a pressure on the normative structure of an institution by testing school policies and rules and exploring their meanings. Thus, student perceptions of the limits for acceptable personal conduct in a school deserve close attention.

Fourth, some learners may exist on the margins of the school because they do not receive the cues and information they need to negotiate the learning environment successfully. For example, students who attempt to avoid or deny negative evaluations of themselves in school may also miss important instructions about academic content and work assignments. Lacking needed information, these pupils would continue to experience frustration and difficulty. Therefore, student perceptions of the effectiveness of communication processes established by the school would provide important information about the way school environments influence both peripheral and core members of a learning group.

Finally, in any situation where ongoing evaluation of performance occurs, the possibility exists that people are being labelled and judged by criteria not directly related to their specific roles and tasks. For example, a school environment may respond differently to students on the

basis of their academic or demographic characteristics, and thus contribute to their success or difficulty in school. For this reason, student perceptions of possible discrimination in their treatment at school would provide useful feedback to educators about the impact of their evaluation and labelling activities.

Operationally, these five aspects of a school environment which are likely to influence the involvement of learners in school (Outreach, Problem-Solving, Limits, Communication, and Discrimination) can be defined in the following manner as independent variables for inclusion in a model to unterstand associations between school environment and student behavior.

OUTREACH: This variable describes student perceptions of the degree to which the school makes special efforts to involve a pupil in learning. Outreach attempts in a school include:

1. affirmative actions to identify student needs;
2. the practice of seeking information useful in altering existing learning conditions to better respond to pupils;
3. the practice of noticing and determining reasons for fluctuations in a pupil's involvement with the school.

PROBLEM-SOLVING: This variable describes student perceptions of the school's ability to solve its own organizational problems, particularly those which contribute to the school-related problems of its individual members. Problem-solving begins with Outreach efforts. To problem-solve, a school must be effective at:

1. defining concerning situations as problems;
2. organizing to analyze the situation and to propose alternative approaches to solve the problem;
3. choosing possible solutions, implementing them and assessing their impact.

[illegible] Specifically, [illegible]

[illegible] written rules and [illegible]

[illegible] the application and enforcement of rules and policies.

COMMUNICATION: This variable describes student perceptions of the degree to which the school provides pupils with information necessary to full and satisfying involvement in school. An effective school communication network includes:

1. well-planned communication structures which directly reach the intended audience;

2. efforts to carefully identify and stress the most necessary information;

3. multiple opportunities for receiving and clarifying important information, aimed especially to accommodate groups or individuals who are likely to miss or need the information the most.

DISCRIMINATION: This variable describes student perceptions of conditions where individuals or groups receive conditions, where individuals or groups receive negative treatment from people who respond unfavorably to a person's social class, cultural background, gender or academic ability. Discrimination may exist when:

1. school groups are closed to new members on the basis of class, race, or sex;

2. ability groupings, once set, make vertical or lateral movement between levels difficult;

3. disproportionate numbers of one social group cluster into a school program;

4. pupils who drop out or accumulate discipline referrals are disporportionately from an identifiable social group.

[illegible] the review of [illegible] seeking." Learners are not simply passive recipients of an environment to respond to, and thus contribute to the [illegible] behavior. Information, then, about the perceptions of learners toward the stimuli provided in school environments provides educators with important clues to the [illegible] in student behavior.

One major type of variation in student behavior is deviance with [illegible] the student belonging. In the last two centuries, a review of research about deviance in school settings provides a good conceptual approach for considering the persistent problem of learners who are alienated by school conditions. These learners can be found on the margins of school environments, living and learning a life of disconnection. The marginal learners give witness to the need for a link among environment, individual, and learning. The five variables described in this paper can assist educators to identify and eliminate conditions and happenings that might be alienating students from the very environments established to assist and stimulate learning. Further, the variables are a start to creating physical, social, and intellectual school conditions that are likely to correct the problem of marginality. When the associations between school environment and variations in student behavior are better understood it will be possible for the prescribed medicine of schooling to be part of a solution rather than part of the problem.

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[illegible] Alternatively, the student who succeeds must also cope with a expectations and personal doubts over the validity and importance of those judgments.

[illegible] Harvey, Hunt and Schroder, Conceptual Systems.

[illegible] Ibid.

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[illegible] In this discussion, the terms "deviance" and "marginality" ar used interchangeably. Deviance can be defined as any behavior within a designated social system that violates the norms of that system an is objected to by members of that social system. This also describe the situation of learners identified as marginal to a school environment.

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[47]One student at a wealthy suburban alternative school, who had been identified by the director as a marginal learner who refused to complete the survey questionnaire, related to the researcher a thought-provoking story about a friend of his who had been counseled by the alternative school staff to drop out of school altogether. In referring to the personal power exerted by the school staff over adolescents, especailly in a situation where honesty and youth advocacy were norms, the marginal subject remarked: "If our high scho l was like a prison, this school is something like a mental hospital. Before, I knew where I was with teachers who acted like my guards and my superiors. Here, I can't be sure where I am with teachers who act like doctors, so willing to help but offering such strong medicine."