HOMECOURT: A NONDIRECTIVE STUDENT SUPPORT GROUP

DISSERTATION

Presented to the Graduate Council of the University of North Texas in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements

For the Degree of

DOCTOR OF EDUCATION

by

Robert E. Nelson, B.A., M.S.
Denton, Texas
August 1994
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The purpose of this study was to describe and analyze how Homecourt, a nondirective support group at a public high school in the Dallas/Fort Worth area, operates and how it affects students.

Homecourt met one period each week. The participants were students from the high school and participation was voluntary. Homecourt was developed under the auspices of a local Student Assistance Program to combat a growing community concern about drug use and suicide. Following the model of nondirective teaching developed by Carl Rogers, Homecourt was different from other support groups in education which are usually curriculum-driven.

This research was conducted during the spring semester of 1993. The seven-semester history of Homecourt preceding the research semester provided the context for this study. The study was descriptive and it utilized the techniques of qualitative research. Data were collected daily and included field notes and journal entries. The data were then coded to facilitate analysis. Interviews and Likert evaluation scales were used to supplement the field notes. This study focused upon and was guided by the following research questions:

1. How does Homecourt foster bonding between students who have a wide variety of interests and who come from diverse backgrounds? 2. What happens in Homecourt? In other words, is there a pattern to the Homecourt experience? 3. How are students impacted by Homecourt outside of Homecourt? 4. How enduring are the effects of Homecourt? 5. How does the
positive feedback from former students compare to the perceptions of students enrolled during the target semester Homecourt?

The study found Homecourt to be a positive program worthy of continuation. It appeared to benefit students classified as "at-risk", as well as students who demonstrated no particular need for a support group beyond the usual feelings of alienation and loneliness associated with adolescence. However, more objective research needs to be conducted to support these conclusions.
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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Homecourt is a support group in a public high school in the Dallas/Fort Worth metroplex. Since its inception, Homecourt has been guided by the nondirective model of teaching (Joyce & Weil, 1988). With nondirective teaching, the creation of a "psychologically safe environment" (Rogers, 1961) becomes the only identified goal. Learning objectives, as usually stated, are not the goal. That students will discover their own objectives is the primary assumption underlying nondirective teaching. Consequently, Homecourt was created without any learner outcomes in mind. Homecourt attempted to create an environment that would manifest three characteristics, the ones Rogers theorized as the significant characteristics of a productive helping relationship. These characteristics are an environment marked by empathy, unconditional positive regard and genuineness, or congruency, sometimes called honesty, on the part of the teacher. The goal is to model these traits with the belief that the students then will be able to identify their own personal goals. It is a very important cornerstone of Homecourt to communicate that the teacher has no preconceived notion of the direction in which students should grow or how they should "be".

Homecourt also differs from other models because of the absence of any common denominator among the members. For example, a support group for eating disorders would concentrate on supporting its members in avoiding their
specific eating problems. In Homecourt there are no common problems; therefore, there are no common goals. Each member has to develop his or her own objective and purpose whether consciously or subconsciously. The greatest power of Homecourt comes from the absence of specific learner outcomes. Because the program does not delineate an end target, the student is free to pursue personal objectives; therefore, any change is owned by the student. In other words, by not providing a direction, Homecourt empowers students to determine their own growth. To the students this lack of direction is called "freedom" and is considered one of the most positive aspects of the program.

In the past, efforts to evaluate the effectiveness of Homecourt centered upon a survey given to all the students at the end of a Homecourt. The survey was a Likert scale involving seven statements (see Appendix A). The seven statements centered around Rogers' model of the conditions needed for psychological growth. There were two statements on each of Rogers' three criteria: empathy, positive regard, and honesty. Each statement was to be rated from "strongly agree" (5) to "strongly disagree" (1), one statement for each of the criteria as it applied to the other students and one statement for each of the criteria as it applied to the teacher of Homecourt. The other statement was a general assessment of the desirability of the Homecourt experience. An open ended opportunity to elaborate or to add to the answers was provided at the bottom of the page.

The reliance upon a purely subjective evaluation method was consistent with the nature of Homecourt. To have designed a more objective research instrument would have required defining the learner outcomes at the start of the
program. This concept was the antithesis of Homecourt. Homecourt was designed to impact the subjective perceptions of the students. No other criteria had been articulated. If the students valued the experience, then there was value by definition, and the program had met its stated goals. The student perception of the program was the primary issue of concern in the early attempts to evaluate the program.

The results of these surveys, particularly the remarks at the end of the survey, were almost universally positive. The responses went beyond expectations and clearly indicated that Homecourt was a very important and meaningful experience for the students involved. It was never clear, however, if the student feedback was an example of the socially desirable response, a sort of “halo effect”. To answer the question of what was causing Homecourt to become a positive influence in students' lives, an analysis of what exactly was happening in Homecourt was required.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to describe and analyze how Homecourt, a nondirective support group at a secondary school, operates and how it affects students.

Research Questions

This study focused on and was guided by the following research questions:

1. How does Homecourt foster bonding among students who have a wide variety of interests and backgrounds?
2. What happens in Homecourt? In other words, is there a pattern to the Homecourt experience?

3. How are students impacted by Homecourt outside of Homecourt?

4. How enduring are the effects of Homecourt?

5. How does the positive feedback from former students compare to the perceptions of students currently enrolled in Homecourt?

Significance of the Study

Homecourt began in the fall of 1989. Its creation was the culmination of an evolutionary process that began four years earlier. A public high school in the Dallas/Fort Worth area was interested in expanding its drug education program to attack the drug problem more aggressively. The school has a declining enrollment and a growing reputation for excellence, particularly as a college preparatory school. It has received national recognition over the years and has won numerous awards and scholarships. For example, the school year of 1992-1993 produced 21 National Merit semifinalists. During the past 25 years, over 90% of the student body has attended college after graduation.

In the spring semester of 1986, as a reaction to a very visible and critical local organization, an intervention team under the directorship of health education was charged with the task of reporting students suspected of drug use to their parents in order for the students to receive professional help. By 1988, full-time personnel were employed to supervise the intervention teams in the four high schools throughout the district. The intervention team followed a model of a Student Assistance Program which had evolved from drug education programs. Student Assistance Programs (SAPs) have reported a great deal of
success throughout the nation (Anderson, 1987; Milgram, 1989; Pellow & Jengeleski, 1991; McGovern & DuPont, 1991; Moore & Forster, 1993). With the creation of a Student Assistance Program, the intervention team began to expand to other services. Support groups are a particular emphasis in SAP models.

An issue of particular concern at the campus used in this study was suicide. On the weekend before Thanksgiving of 1988, a sophomore girl committed suicide. Her death marked the fifth suicide in an eighteen-month period at this high school. When her friends were informed of the suicide, a counselor was called to meet with some of the students on an emergency basis at the home of a student. The students at this meeting formed a survivors' group that continued to meet during that academic year. However, the counselor in charge felt that he could not continue the group the next year. Homecourt emerged as a substitute for this group. In short, Homecourt was created out of the merging of two threads of concern. First, drug education through the intervention team and the Student Assistance Program produced an atmosphere ripe for the creation of a support group program. Second, the recent history of suicides provided a vehicle for the emergence of Homecourt.

Limitations of the Study

Grounded in the theories of nondirective teaching, Student Assistance Programs, and suicide research, this study focused on a particular school and a particular support group within that school. Generalizability was not the objective of this research. True to the nature of qualitative research, this study concentrated on descriptive data. The goal of the study was to create a
direction for further research and to generate theories to explain the data.

Research Design
This study revolved around the interactions and relationships that resulted from involvement in Homecourt. Because the study was descriptive in nature, observational case study methodology was the appropriate research mode. This method has historical precedent in educational literature (Borg & Gail, 1983). Marshall and Rossman pointed out that a case study examines a system in a program, an institution or a population (1986), while Bogdan and Biklen (1982) emphasized the role of the participant observer as the primary source of data. That research on Homecourt lent itself to a case study approach is best illustrated by Borg and Gail (1983) when they wrote that observational case studies are concerned with ongoing groups and have as their focus a group of individuals who interact over a period of time.

Participant/Informants
In a qualitative study, the term “population” is inappropriate. “Participants” and “informants” are more accurate terms, because, certainly in Homecourt, all participants are informants. Furthermore, in Homecourt, all participation is voluntary. A Parental Consent Letter (see Appendix B) was included with Homecourt Permission Slip (see Appendix C). This letter informed the parents and students of the purpose of this research project.

Data Collection
Data collection began on January 26, 1993, the first day of Homecourt for
the spring semester of 1993, and concluded on April 29, 1993, the final day of Homecourt. The primary source of data was extensive field notes. After each session of a Homecourt, field notes were taken to detail who was in attendance, the topics discussed, and the order and rate of participation; in short, the researcher recorded the objective details about the behaviors and the actions of the participants. At night, in a journal to supplement the field notes, entries by the researcher (as the main participant/observer) were made to capture the emotions of the preceding events, the subjective details. The need for this intensive introspection by the participant/observer is in keeping with Spradley’s (1980) guidelines for maintaining objectivity. The checking of researcher bias was an ongoing, never-ending part of the research process.

To further achieve the goal of objectivity, students enrolled in Homecourt were interviewed randomly during the semester concerning their perceptions and memories of Homecourt. Furthermore, events in Homecourt were discussed with the students’ counselors. These interviews and conversations served as a check on the objectivity and as an evaluation about the perspective of the researcher.

Another source of data was the interviews of the participants upon their completion of Homecourt. Both guided interviews and informal interviews were conducted at the end of the program. These interviews, as well as some open-ended questions on the bottom of the evaluation sheets, supplemented the Likert scale.

In the field of ancillary informants, counselors were interviewed concerning their beliefs about the benefits of Homecourt, both on an ongoing basis and at the end of the program. An effort was made to contact many former
participants of Homecourt and to furnish them with the Likert scale evaluation instrument as well as an open-ended questionnaire to create a longitudinally more complete perspective on the subject.

To summarize, data were collected from field notes taken shortly after each Homecourt and were supplemented with nightly journal entries. Ancillary informants supplied objective data regarding effects of the experience to supplement the more subjective data of the participants.

Data Analysis

The analysis of data was not confined to a position at the end of the collection of the data. An iterative process, data analysis began on the first day of data collection and was in a constant state of change. Theories and hypotheses evolved from this process. This gathering and reforming is consistent with the theory behind qualitative research (Bogdan & Biklen, 1982; Miles & Huberman, 1984; Spradley, 1980).

In order to facilitate analysis, the field notes were coded. The use of codes is an organizing device which helps in the analysis of data (Miles & Huberman, 1984). The codes used letter and number designations. Students enrolled in Homecourt during the time period of the study were represented by numbers rather than names; past students were designated by letters. Other categories that were coded were attendance, seating arrangements, and subject matter discussed by students. Self-disclosure by students was another important subject for codification. The evolutionary nature of this coding is in keeping with the flexible nature of qualitative research (Marshall & Rossman, 1989).
The sorting and reduction of data were a part of the ongoing research. Data reduction is "the process of selecting, focusing, simplifying, abstracting, and transforming the raw data that appears in written-up field notes" (Miles & Huberman, 1984, p. 21). The sorting was the process of compiling all of the data for the various codes into an organizational whole. After the sorting was completed, an analysis was made to determine patterns or themes. Thereby, conclusions for each research question were reached.

The validity and reliability of the analysis was an ongoing process involving the triangulation of data, which is the collection and comparison of data from several sources (Miles & Huberman, 1984). Throughout the study, the coded field notes were compared to the interviews with the ancillary informants, as well as with the participant/informants. A further source of data was past participants of Homecourt. Evaluations by former participants of Homecourt were yet another yardstick by which to measure current perceptions of Homecourt. Student participants from past Homecourts completed the Likert scale, providing another source of comparison. The final analysis concentrated upon the data collected during the spring semester of 1993; however, other Homecourts surrounding this time frame certainly impacted the study.
CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Homecourt exists in an intellectual context. This review summarizes that context. This chapter is divided into three sections: (1) drug education with an emphasis on Student Assistance Programs, SAPs, (2) suicide prevention, and (3) support groups within an educational environment.

History of Drug Education

Homecourt grew out of a specific school district’s drug education program, but the impetus for support groups came as the latest step in a history of drug education reaching back at least 40 years. In the United States, drug education has gone through three distinct stages prior to its current state of development. During the first stage, which lasted until the mid-1960s, scare tactics were the prevailing strategy. During most of this period, alcohol was treated differently from other drugs and was not included as a major part of most drug education curricula. Relying mostly on alarmist misinformation, drug education tried to prevent students from trying drugs. Very little documentation existed on the effect of these programs, because few people questioned them. However, during the 1960s there was a demand to evaluate these programs, and they were found to be ineffective except in the very short term. The behavior of using drugs was not impacted, although the credibility of drug educators suffered irreparable damage when the level of misinformation
became apparent (Ray & Ksir, 1990; Texas Education Agency, 1989).

The second phase of drug education centered upon an attempt to correct the misinformation and present only supported, researched, valid information. The assumption was that students would be less likely to use drugs if they were armed with good information. This approach viewed drug use as a purely cognitive decision, if not a particularly rational one. The reliance on information alone proved to be as ineffective as the reliance upon scare tactics. In fact, several studies indicated that information alone may have actually increased drug use (Bernard, Fafoglia & Prone, 1987; Botvin, 1987; Hawley, 1987; Gerne & Gerne, 1986; Pickens, 1985; Sheppard, Goodstadt & Willet, 1987; Texas Education Agency, 1989; Van de Kamp, 1987). During this second phase, the objectives of drug education subtly shifted, usually covertly, along the lines of responsible use. Teaching students to avoid problematic use became the goal rather than preventing all use (Ray & Ksir, 1990; Hawley, 1987). This modification of goals was perceived to be a reaction to the reality of drugs and alcohol. Drugs were not going to go away.

The third phase of drug education centered on affective issues. The premise was that drug use was caused more by emotional reasons than by cognitive decisions. Studies attempting to correlate poor self-concept with drug use dominated the research of this period. “There is no drug problem,” one would hear, because “drugs don’t have problems; people have problems, and drugs are but one symptom”. However, no significant decrease in drug use has been demonstrated by programs which have centered upon the connection between self-esteem and drug use (Bernard, Fafoglia & Perone, 1987; Botvin, 1987; Hawley, 1987; Gerne & Gerne, 1986; Pickens, 1985; Sheppard,
Goodstadt & Willet, 1987; Texas Education Agency, 1989; Van de Kamp, 1987). Of the three general approaches in drug education—scare tactics, information alone, and affective education—none has proven to be very successful.

The current status of drug education rests on two firmly validated ideas. First, effective drug education programs contain both an affective and informational component (Bernard et al., 1987; Goodstadt, 1986). Second, effective programs must be long range, cutting across all disciplines and all years in school (Bernard, Fafoglia & Prone, 1987; Texas Education Agency, 1989; Van de Kamp, 1987). Gone is the one-unit health class model. Now drug education begins in kindergarten and continues through high school. Both of these ideas have been supported by numerous research projects. The objectives of these approaches are still prevention.

Current drug education has expanded beyond prevention and into the field of intervention. Student Assistance Programs (SAPs) have become the cornerstone for many school districts' drug policies. Out of 503 school districts in Pennsylvania, for example, 450 have SAP programs (Pellow & Jengeleski, 1991). At the state level, many states are implementing intervention programs. In Minnesota, SAPs are mandated by law (Minnesota Statute 12603, 1987). It is becoming an accepted axiom that SAPs are the single most effective weapon against drug use (Anderson, 1987).

SAPs are an outgrowth of Employee Assistance Programs that developed in the business world (Milgram, 1989; McGovern & DuPont, 1991; Moore & Forster, 1993). EAPs were developed in the early 1970s to provide medical and psychological treatment for needy employees. Derived from the Johnson Institute Alcoholism Intervention Model (Moore & Forster, 1993), EAPs
focused on the alcoholic employee "who feared job-related reprisals and also experienced the alcoholic symptomology of problem denial" (Moore & Forster, 1993, p. 327). This model was a five-step procedure that led to an intervention which resulted in treatment. In a classical intervention, the family confronts a member with his or her drinking behavior and the consequences of their drinking. Thus inundated, the member will consent to treatment, and before a change of mind can occur, treatment is immediately initiated. With an EAP intervention, the employer plays the role of the family, and in an SAP, that role is taken on by the school.

SAPs, therefore, were established to replicate EAPs in an educational environment. Since an EAP counselor was usually based in a community agency, the earliest SAPs involved substance abuse specialists who “operated outside the standard system of school counseling” (Moore & Forster, 1993, p. 327). An alternative organizational approach centered on student assistance teams rather than experts outside of the field of education (McGovern & DuPont, 1991). Referred to as a “Core Team”, this Core Team was composed of faculty members with special training. Other persons may have been members of the Core Team, parents and students, for example. This Core Team model was developed in Wisconsin and was promoted by Hazelden and the Johnson Institute (McGovern & DuPont, 1991). However, with either approach, intervention was the primary focus of the early SAPs.

SAPs have continued to evolve. Currently, intervention is not the only objective of an SAP. Aftercare, follow-up support, and case management have always been part of SAPs (Milgram, 1989). However, by the late 1980's, it became clear that services needed to be provided that were not limited to drug
and alcohol issues. Just as EAPs expanded to include dysfunctional families and other mental health issues, SAPs have experienced a similar broadening of their target populations. Suicide and eating disorders, for example, have become concerns of recent SAPs.

Furthermore, SAPs have provided the impetus for other services in addition to interventions. Support groups have become a cornerstone of many SAPs (Anderson, 1987; McGovern & Dupont, 1991). These support groups may center on drug rehabilitation issues, suicide survival, or other issues. As McGovern and DuPont state, “Most SAPs conduct a variety of groups, such as discussion groups in which youth troubled by their own use of alcohol or of other drugs can talk about their concerns and think more clearly about their choices, including the choice of getting help. SAPs are places for education, prevention treatment and support” (1991, p. 263).

To describe this newly expanded vision of an SAP using the most common denominator, SAPs attempt to identify students’ problems and facilitate their obtaining the appropriate help. In essence, the Core Team gathers information about a student using a checklist of behaviors of concern. Then the team decides if the parents should be informed and if an intervention needs to be made. Other options might also be pursued. Perhaps the best expression of this broadening of the SAP approach was stated by Barbara Waisman, SAP Consultant/Trainer, Student Assistance Services, Workers Assistance Program, Inc. Explaining SAP at a workshop for school personnel in Austin, Texas in January of 1993, Waisman proclaimed that the “P” in SAP has come to stand for philosophy. To Waisman, SAPs have become less a program than a set of ideas. Whether program or philosophy, the SAP approach has led
to Homecourt.

Although SAPs have existed since the 1970s, and, according to Moore and Forster (1993), have experienced two distinct periods of growth, there has been little research on the effectiveness of the SAP approach. Milgram (1989, p. 328) states "SAPs are experiencing tremendous growth, yet few evaluation studies exist; these predominantly use number of students (penetration rate) as a measure of success". Although SAPs are one of the country’s most rapidly growing school programs in the field of drug education, according to the Office of Substance Abuse Prevention, a component of the National Institute of Drug Abuse, no acceptable experimental or quasiexperimental outcome research from SAPs was available by 1987 (Klitzner, 1987). Smith’s research in 1988 came to the conclusion that SAPs have the capacity to reverse at-risk behaviors associated with adolescent substance abuse. However, Smith’s conclusion utilized a preintervention and postintervention assessment based upon Anderson’s checklist (1987) which describes symptomatic, correlative behavior. Moore and Forster (1993, p. 328) call Smith’s research "descriptive in nature". It is less than definitive. In fact, Moore and Forster call for more outcome-based research to guide future SAP developments (1993, p. 329).

Evaluation of the SAP in the district from which Homecourt was developed has been composed of anecdotal records and the numbers of students effected by the SAP intervention teams. A major question that has not been answered is whether or not the students impacted by the SAP would have received the same service from standard counseling services. In other words, there have been no control groups by which to demonstrate effectiveness.
Research on Suicide Prevention

Adolescent suicide is a growing problem in the United States. From 1955 until 1986, there was a 300% increase of suicides among young people (Hyde & Forsyth, 1986). In 1986, the Center for Disease Control in Atlanta, Georgia estimated 5,000 suicides each year, representing as many as 500,000 attempts (Kolehmainen & Handwerk, 1986.) In numerous surveys of adolescents in the United States, approximately 10% of the respondents reported a suicide attempt while about 25% of the males and nearly 50% of the females reported knowing a peer who had talked of suicide or actually attempted (Boggs, 1986; Harkavy-Friedman, Asnis, Boeck & DiFiore, 1987; Klagsburn, 1976; Ritter, 1990; Ross, 1980; Shaffer, Garland & Whittle, 1988; Smith & Crawford, 1986). Abbey, Madsen & Polland (1989) estimated between 50-200 attempts were made for every actual suicide, while between 8.5 to 15% of the population have actually attempted suicide. The statistics led Johnson (1985, p. 114) to conclude that "adolescence by itself seems to be a good predictor of whether or not a person will attempt suicide."

While it is easy to oversimplify a complex behavior such as suicide and while there does seem to be some truth in the old saw that "every suicide has its own story", Ray & Johnson (1983) summarized research on the subject by identifying three main causes of suicide among adolescents along with three other contributing factors. The three main causes were 1) depression, 2) loss of a parent, and 3) alienation within the family. Furthermore, the blurring of sex roles in today's society, the mystical concept of death that many adolescents endorse, and the increased mobility with the consequent lack of stability are other factors identified by Ray and Johnson (1983). Perhaps the best
explanation of adolescent suicide lies in the process of adolescence itself. Adolescence is a difficult period of life and may itself be a factor in suicide ideation (Haim, 1970; Weiner, 1970).

The effect of gender on suicide has been well documented. Simmons and Murphy (1985) stated that suicide ideation was higher among females than males, although males completed suicide more often. Also, they reported that emotional problems and delinquent behavior were important predictors for suicide ideation among females while employment problems were the most potent predictors for males. Harlow, Newcomb and Butler (1986) found that in reaction to psychic discomfort like depression and self-derogation, males were more apt to turn to alcohol and drugs while females commit suicide. However, in response to feelings of meaningless or of a lack of purpose in life, females turned to substance abuse, while males attempted suicide. In other words, they found a very direct relationship between depression, self-derogation, substance abuse, and suicide ideation; however, they found an indirect relationship of all of the above to the questioning of one's purpose of life.

While recognizing the individual nature of each suicide, nonetheless, Hyde and Forsyth (1986) identified nine patterns of suicide among adolescents: 1) manipulation of others, 2) magical thinking and attempts to punish others, 3) anniversary suicides, 4) accidental suicides, 5) drug abuse, 6) imitative suicides, 7) heroic suicides, 8) romantic suicides and 9) helplessness and hopelessness suicides.

Konopka credits suicide among adolescents to inexperience with life: “The pain experienced by the young may seem to them to be hopeless and unending, because they have not yet had the experience of living through and
conquering it" (1983, p. 391). Konopka identified eight factors that influence the increase in suicides in this decade: 1) the bleak view of the future predicted by adults, 2) the rejection of authoritarian cliches, which are then replaced by doubt and insecurities in response to life's big questions, 3) high expectations placed on the young, 4) our culture's lack of having learned how to help people deal with pain, 5) the lack of warm, giving friendships, 6) the lack of warm family ties, 7) prejudice based on race and background, and 8) the issue of physical punishment, which sometimes borders on abuse, being viewed as acceptable.

Orbach and Hannabar-Joseph (1993) point out that most suicide prevention programs concentrate on awareness and identification; however, several studies suggest that such prevention programs are ineffective. Shaffer, Vieland, Garland, Rojas, Underwood and Busner (1990) suggest that such programs might even have a negative effect, especially on high-risk students. Such programs "may also inadvertently enhance the chances of imitation, which the authors believe is especially likely if suicide is portrayed as an understandable response to stress" (Shaffer, Garland & Whittle, 1988, p. 68.). Imitative suicides may also be nurtured by media and television reports of suicide where exposure feeds identification (Phillips, 1989). At any rate, reliance upon awareness programs alone does not seem to be prudent, and may actually be counter-productive. These type of programs may foster some types of suicide.

Although awareness and identification, especially as the only objectives, may not be the best approach, peer groups should play a significant role in a successful prevention program. Ross (1985) called for programs that would educate students in order to rescue each other. In his portrait of childhood
alienation, The Loneliness of Children. Killinger (1980) echoes Ross' view by pointing out that three out of five teenagers reported turning to a peer for personal help rather than an adult. The American Association of Suicidology estimates that eight out of ten persons who complete suicide tell someone that they are thinking of attempting (Vidal, 1986). However, the majority of suicidal youths do not come to the attention of adults; it is their peers who are likely to know. Kalafat and Elias (1992) summarize several surveys which indicate that, although youths say they would report a friend's disclosure of suicidal thinking to an adult, actual data demonstrate that they do not do so.

When a list of specific advice for creating a successful prevention program is compiled, general communication skills are emphasized. The most important prevention methods are open communication, loving respect, provision of creative outlets, acceptance of strong emotions, and allowance for laughter and tears, according to Konopka (1983) who advises, before everything else, listen. Ray and Johnson (1983) also believe that successful prevention centers on listening, with the telephone becoming the most important tool in prevention. Perhaps the best summary of effective prevention programs was stated by Smith (1976) when he reported, simply and succinctly, that communication actually helps to modify the likelihood of a suicide attempt.

In conclusion, the suicide prevention element of Homecourt is congruent with the research. Suicide was not overly dramatized nor given undue attention. It was brought up only by the students when appropriate. However, Homecourt did utilize peers as rescuers for each other while tapping into the network of peer awareness. And the entire program centered on communication.
Research Specific to Support Groups

In the literature there is a clear distinction made between support and therapy. Group work can be viewed on a continuum. On one end of the continuum is group therapy, and on the other end is the support group. Between the two extremes are a variety of groups. Support groups "improve rather than cure" (Anderson, 1987, p. 252). "Strengthening the individual, providing information and enhancing general coping skills are more important than the complete resolution of problems" (Anderson, 1987, p. 252). Support groups' facilitators are usually trained in group dynamics but lack the license or credentials needed for therapy. To realize one's professional limitations is central to being a successful leader of a support group (Anderson, 1987).

However, most of the research is either on therapy (Berkowitz, 1972; Brandes, 1973) or specific exercises and structured activities (Canfield, 1976; Clarke, 1979; Gerne & Gerne, 1986; Texas Education Agency, 1989). Clearly the emphasis in support groups is for curriculum driven models rather than the nondirective approach. Anderson states: "support groups within a student assistance program are more structured than might be supposed" (1987, p. 252). His guidelines for support groups include: 1) defining the specific target population, 2) identifying the goals and objectives, and 3) developing a curriculum of specific objectives and activities. All of these should be done before the support groups meets. Watkins (1989) mentions that support groups exist to bring students together with common concerns and that every meeting should have a planned focus. Watkins outlines several curriculum programs for support groups. (It should be noted that both Anderson and Watkins center their respective discussions on support groups around chemical abuse issues with
The purpose of this study is to describe a nondirective support group which violates most of the guidelines set down for conducting support groups in a school setting. For example, there was never a target group of specified students. There was never a clear objective either for the students or for the group. Enrollment was not limited to six or eight students. There was not a cofacilitator. And there was a planned activity only for the last two meetings. There was, in short, no curriculum. This study will describe the functioning of Homecourt despite these violations.
CHAPTER 3

THE DESIGN OF THE STUDY

This study examined Homecourt, a nondirective support group in a public secondary school. This chapter will describe the design and research methodology. The chapter has three sections: (1) a description of the site, the school in which Homecourt operated (2) a description of the participants in Homecourt, and (3) a description of the methods used for data collection for the target semester of spring 1993.

Description of the Site

Homecourt began in the fall of 1989. Its creation was the culmination of an evolutionary process that began four years earlier. A public high school in the Dallas/Fort Worth area was interested in expanding its drug education program to attack drug problems more aggressively. This school has been experiencing a declining enrollment, currently 1650. Only 4.4 per cent of the students are members of minority groups, and over half of them are oriental. However, the school has an established reputation for excellence, particularly as a college preparatory school. It has received national recognition over the years and has won numerous awards and scholarships. For example, the school year of 1992-1993 produced 21 National Merit semifinalists, and during the past 25 years, over 90% of the student body has attended college after graduation.

Within the school is Homecourt. Homecourt is a gathering of students
with one teacher present at all meetings. A Homecourt meets for one period each week to discuss topics of general interest. These topics are neither determined by the teacher nor are they selected ahead of time. Homecourt is a type of support group. However, most support groups are based on common areas of concern and have an agreed-upon objective. For example, drug rehabilitation support groups, eating disorder support groups and suicide survivor support groups have become accepted programs in many schools (Anderson, 1987; McGovern & DuPont, 1991). Unlike these groups, Homecourt has no common denominator among its students. In fact, this diversity among its members is a defining characteristic, and it is considered one of the most positive elements of the program to many of the participants.

Homecourt also differs from other models because of the absence of specific objectives or defined goals. For example, a support group for eating disorders concentrates on supporting its members in avoiding their personal eating problems. In Homecourt there are no common problems; therefore, there are no common goals. Each member has to develop his or her own objectives and purposes either consciously or subconsciously. Because the program does not delineate any end-targets, each student is free to pursue personal objectives, and thus any growth or change is owned by the student. In other words, by not providing a direction, Homecourt empowers students to determine their own directions and growth. To the students this lack of direction is called "freedom" and is considered to be one of the most positive aspects of the program.

Each semester's Homecourts are completely different. Participating
students enroll in Homecourt for one period per week and start attending around the third or fourth week of a semester. Homecourt ends the week before final exams. Therefore, each Homecourt lasts about 12 or 13 weeks. After concluding each semester, students may elect to re-enroll in Homecourt for the next semester, assuming their schedules allow them to do so. Students who enrolled in Homecourt are excused from regular classes for the assigned period once each week. An attempt is made to enroll students during study halls and gym classes so that they have minimal academic disruptions.

A Peer Helper class at the campus was used as part of this study. This class is given state graduation credit as a social studies elective. Two days each week, the Peer Helpers are "on placement", usually going to work with students at local elementary schools or junior high schools. On the days of Peer Helper placements, Homecourts meet during the scheduled time for Peer Helper classes. The Peer Helpers may choose to enroll in Homecourt or they may choose a third day of off-campus placement instead. Prior to enrollment a permission slip must be signed by a parent and by the teacher whose class the student is missing. The permission slip includes a description of the program. (See Appendix C.)

The target semester for this study was the spring semester of 1993. Beginning on January 26, 1993, and culminating on April 29, 1993, a total of eight different Homecourts met each week, although three of the Homecourts actually functioned as one. Homecourts met on Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday during first, fourth, and seventh periods, while no Homecourt met during fourth period on Thursday. The three days that met first period were the
Homecourts that came to function as one Homecourt. A total of 55 students enrolled in Homecourt, although only 44 attended regularly.

Participants

An invitation to join Homecourt is based upon one or more of the following three criteria. First, if the student is perceived as being in need of the program, an “at-risk” student, he is told about Homecourt usually through the counselor. Second, if the student is merely interested, but has no particular behavior of concern, he or she is allowed to enroll. Third, if the student is perceived as a provider of nurturing and support to fellow students, he or she is asked to participate. The counselor referrals tend to be of the first kind while the Peer Helper program provides most of the third kind. The faculty is not informed into which classification each student falls, thereby avoiding any stigma attached to enrollment in Homecourt. In the past, honor graduates, class officers, cheerleaders, and other students in leadership positions have participated in Homecourt. With the exception of the individual’s counselor and the instructor, no one knows into which group each student falls.

Students enter Homecourt from one or more of six sources:

1. Students who are returning from past Homecourts,
2. Announcements made in psychology classes,
3. Word-of-mouth recommendations by other students,
4. Counselor recommendations,
5. Involvement in the Peer Helper program, and
6. Other sources, including recruitment by the instructor.
In the spring semester of 1993 Homecourt was scheduled during Peer Helper period when the Peer Helpers were on their placements off campus. Therefore, there existed a potential of three Homecourts per day or nine per week. On Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday, Homecourt met both first period, 8:30-9:25 am, and seventh period, 2:50-3:45 pm. Homecourt also met fourth period, 11:30 am-12:20 pm, on Tuesdays and Wednesdays. Thursday’s fourth period was the teacher’s only conference period, and it was set aside for meetings with the counselors and for other tasks. In the first period Peer Helper class, five students elected to have Homecourt as their placement. Therefore, they were enrolled in all three first period Homecourts. Consequently, there was room only for a maximum of seven other students in any of the first period Homecourts. On Tuesday, these positions were filled, but on Wednesday five of the Peer Helpers who had placements off campus elected to have Homecourt. This made Wednesday’s enrollment 10 students, all Peer Helpers. Thursdays Homecourt added two more Peer Helpers from a placement, No. 18 and No. 19, to the five core Peer Helpers already assigned to Homecourt. Consequently, Wednesday and Thursday Homecourt were completely filled with Peer Helpers who were enrolled in the first period Peer Helper class. In the seventh period class, four Peer Helpers, the entire seventh period class, had their placements in Homecourt.

Twenty-nine percent of the students who enrolled in Homecourt for the spring semester of 1993 were first-time enrollees who had never been in a previous Homecourt. One of the students who were “no-shows” and all three of the students who were “one appearance students” were also new to the
Still, 24% of the students who regularly attended Homecourt were first-time enrollees. Seven particular students, No.s 1, 3, 4, 7, 20, 21, and 14, combined to have been in Homecourt for a total of 24 semesters, or for an average of 3.4 semesters each. Of these, only Student No. 20 was not a Peer Helper. With the exception of Student No. 7 who was placed on homebound studies due to an illness, these most-experienced members of Homecourt averaged 95% attendance. The average of semesters experienced by students in each Homecourt is presented in the following:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>First Period:</th>
<th>Semesters per student</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Tuesday</td>
<td>1.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wednesday</td>
<td>1.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thursday</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Fourth Period:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Tuesday</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wednesday</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Seventh Period:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Tuesday</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wednesday</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thursday</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Homecourt averaged three girls for every one boy. Although accurate statistics have not been kept over the years, this figure seems to be consistent. Females tend to enroll in Homecourt more than males do. However, the numbers are somewhat misleading in that some Homecourts had no males. For the target semester, for example, first period had only one male and he was a Peer Helper who obtained a placement late in the semester; and the students who were no-shows were both male, as well.
Forty-six percent of the students enrolled in Homecourt were seniors while only 18.5% were sophomores. This is due to two factors. First, Homecourt attracts students with a more mature attitude, and second, psychology class is taken mostly by seniors. Sophomores are not allowed to enroll in psychology class, and psychology classes still serve as a source for many of the students who enter Homecourt. Although the Peer Helper program is the main source of students for Homecourt providing 37% of the students enrolled in Homecourt during the target semester, psychology classes was second providing 33%. The following chart illustrates this data:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gender:</th>
<th>Grade:</th>
<th>Source for entry into H.C.:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>M</td>
<td>F</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TUESDAY</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1st Period</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4th Period</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7th Period</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WEDNESDAY</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1st Period</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4th Period</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7th Period</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>THURSDAY</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1st Period</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7th Period</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Totals</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Per Cent:</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>75</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Data Collection

This study, using a qualitative research design, is descriptive in nature. The use of field notes provided the center of the data collection. However, the field notes were supplemented by several other sources of data. At the
conclusion of each separate meeting of Homecourt, brief notes taken on all of the events of the Homecourt were made. At night, following each day of Homecourt, journal entries were made that summarized the events of the Homecourts as well as the emotional components relating to the events. At that point, the subjective perceptions of the researcher complemented the more objective detailed reporting. Also during this process of reporting and analyzing, ongoing interviews with counselors and participants were conducted. Some of these interviews appeared casual, and they were seldom identified as part of the research model to the participants. For example, the interviews with the counselors often took the form of conferences about students. With students the researcher would often ask an innocuous question like, “What did you think about yesterday’s Homecourt?”.

The data were coded to reflect the pertinent research question as well as protecting the identity of the students. Students during the target semester were all given numbers which were used throughout the data collection and analysis. Former students were designated by letters of the alphabet. When all the field notes were transcribed into journal entries, they were coded to reflect the specific research question to which the events related. The notes were then sorted by each individual Homecourt, each topic discussed, and each individual member of Homecourt. Analysis sought to discover any patterns in the data.

At the end of the period of research, which was the end of the Homecourts for the spring of 1993, students completed an evaluation sheet using a Likert scale on Homecourt (see Appendix A). At the bottom of the Likert scale were two open-ended response questions which, besides being another
source of information, provided a starting place for the interviews. With the exception of a few students, each student who participated in Homecourt was interviewed at the end of the semester. These interviews centered on the research questions but were not limited to them.

Evaluation sheets were also sent to 40 past students. To substitute for personal interviews, five free-response questions accompanied the evaluation sheets (see Appendix A). This contact with former students was necessary to answer the last two research questions: How enduring are the effects of Homecourt? How does the positive feedback from former students compare with the perceptions and feedback of students currently enrolled in Homecourt?

Analysis of Homecourt was made both during and following the collection of data from the above sources. To summarize succinctly, this study is composed of an analysis of data from field notes, journal entries, casual interviews during the research period, evaluation sheets, and more focused interviews after the period of data collection.
CHAPTER 4

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

This study examined Homecourt, a nondirective support group in a public secondary school. This study is descriptive in nature. This chapter is a narrative discussion of the findings of the period of research, spring 1993. This chapter has four sections: (1) the context of the spring semester of Homecourt, (2) statistics on the attendance in Homecourt and the topics discussed during the target semester, (3) data relevant to the original research questions, and (4) analysis of additional research questions.

The Context of Homecourt

The 1992-1993 school year was the fourth year of Homecourt. At the beginning of each Homecourt, past participants are advised to experience each Homecourt as a separate entity and not to judge any Homecourt on expectations based from past Homecourts. Although it is true that each Homecourt is mostly directly shaped by the individuals attending it, making each one highly individualistic, the previous seven semesters impacted the evolution of Homecourt. Before careful, detailed analysis of the Homecourts of the spring 1993 semester can begin, an historical context is needed.

The First Year of Homecourt, 1989-1990

During the summer of 1989 the local SAP was encouraging each campus in the district to do some group counseling. A psychologist was hired to
conduct a training session in the summer of 1989. During the previous spring he had conducted a group on this research study's campus with mixed results. The training had presented the psychologist's own structured approach. The eventual instructor of Homecourt had attended this particular inservice. Earlier attempts to conduct group work on campus had also failed to elicit much success. An eating disorder group met during lunch one semester, but it produced controversy more than anything else. One parent even threatened a lawsuit, because he felt that this group nurtured his daughter's disorder rather than helping it. An attempt to have students who were enrolled in an AA program meet during lunch also failed to attract many students and was eventually abandoned for lack of attendance. There was the survivor group from an earlier suicide which had met regularly during the preceding academic year, but the counselor who had conducted it could not commit to another year. In fact, although the counselors supported the concept of group work, none felt that he or she had the time to direct any groups. Therefore, Homecourt seemed to fill a perceived need; it was an idea whose time had come.

During its first year, Homecourt met four times each week. On Mondays and Tuesdays it met first period during the instructor's conference period. On Wednesdays and Thursdays it met during fourth period, lunch. By the end of the year, most of the members of fourth period Homecourt ate their lunch in the classroom in order to begin Homecourt earlier.

During this first year, three lessons stood out as being particularly important in shaping future Homecourts. The first lesson centered around the fact that first period on Monday morning proved not to be a good time to have Homecourt. The students either forgot to attend or showed up very late. In fact,
no cohesiveness ever developed in this Homecourt due to the lack of consistency in attendance.

The second lesson centered on an event that happened late in the spring semester. During Homecourt III, the students were discussing some innocuous topic. The class period was almost over when the instructor turned toward one girl and asked her what she felt about the particular issue. Up until that time this girl had been rather silent. In past periods her input had been sociable and pleasant, but not particularly revealing. However, on this day she told of a betrayal by a friend which had caused her to be very guarded in her relationships with others. It was very obvious that this was an important and extremely intense subject for her. She was crying when the bell rang signaling the end of class. The lack of a policy for the instructor to be able to stay with the girl or to provide her with some sort of crisis intervention has colored many Homecourt interactions since. Fortunately, the girl was resilient enough to deal with her issue and resourceful enough to go to her counselor for help. However, the fear of putting another student in a similar position with no “safety net” has been a recurring theme in all ensuing Homecourts.

The third lesson from this first year concerned something that actually happened at a T.O.P.S. (Teens Offering Peer Support) meeting, although it centered upon a student from Homecourt, and it set a precedent that has impacted future Homecourts. Student C had been involved in the suicide survivors' group from the preceding year. He had also been in treatment for psychological reasons and for chemical dependency. Fresh from the hospital where he had experienced extensive, confrontive group therapy, he was eager to become involved with something similar at school. His reference point was
very different than most students. At an early T.O.P.S. meeting, his different perspective became apparent. On this particular occasion, there were perhaps 25 students in attendance. Some were there to see what T.O.P.S. was. Some would never return to a T.O.P.S. meeting again. There was not a high trust level nor was there any reason to expect there to be. The group was trying to decide on an issue to discuss. One girl suggested sex as an issue. This suggestion was greeted with laughter, and the instructor said that the group would have to decide if it really felt comfortable talking about such a private matter. Before the group had a chance to commit to a serious look at the issue of sex, Student C disclosed a very private experience from his childhood that left him in a very vulnerable position. The group was not ready to talk seriously on this subject, and Student C was left abandoned after risking himself publicly. This experience in T.O.P.S. was the first time an issue came up that would affect other Homecourts. The issue centered on the fact that many students would come into Homecourt with a preconceived notion of how Homecourt should be. This notion was created, often and most dramatically, by past experiences in personal counseling or hospitalization programs. To these students, Homecourt was a pale imitation of previous counseling and an ineffective form of group therapy. Of course, Homecourt was never meant to be group therapy, but the conflict between students with a highly confrontive background and Homecourt’s policy of lack of confrontation provided frustration at various times throughout the eight semesters of Homecourt.

Besides providing these three valuable lessons, the first year of Homecourt also brought several students who were very influential in the development of Homecourt. Student B began her first of six semesters in
Homecourt. A male sophomore, Student, D, was introduced to Homecourt as a way to make friends. He was a transfer student from a conservative fundamentalist religious school. He went on to attend six semesters of Homecourt and never missed a T.O.P.S. meeting for the next three years. Two of the senior class officers were enrolled in Homecourt, as well as several members of the National Honor Society; more than anything else, they helped to articulate the idea that one of the real values of Homecourt was getting to know people outside of one's normal circle of friends.

During that first year, Homecourt received its first emergency referral. One girl, a junior, had transferred to school from another city, and she was having great difficulty adjusting. Her family was undergoing tremendous economic distress, and it was affecting her in many ways. She was very anxious and reported hallucinating at various times. There was the fear that the girl was having some difficulty maintaining contact with reality. Based on the feedback she provided, Homecourt provided her a place to feel relatively safe, and it made an emotional impact. By the end of the year, she seemed more successful in her relationships with others and her academic performance benefited. During the next year, she maintained contact with Homecourt but seemed to need its services less and less. However, she avowed that Homecourt was still some sort of "saving place", an anchor. She did so in the form of several poems she wrote during the course of her senior year.

Another sophomore girl student was enrolled in Homecourt for only one semester before dropping out of school. She re-enrolled in school the next year only to drop out again. Her problems at school centered less on the curriculum than on her personal problems. She was involved with the "Skinheads" and
considered herself a common-law wife. Her family was as supportive of her as they could be without supporting her self-destructive life style. She eventually went on to receive a G.E.D. In 1993 she reported that Homecourt was the only thing good about her high school career.

With Student M, Homecourt had its first introduction to antisocial behavior. Student M managed to get a copy of the permission slip, had it signed by his parents, forged a teacher’s signature, and attended one meeting. Several students in the school were directed by their personal therapists to avoid any contact with M. Besides having the reputation of being a drug dealer, M had physically threatened several students in ways that were graphic and gruesome. The discovery of the forgery provided the reason for not allowing M to attend Homecourt.

Finally, Student E was a junior male student who had been attending T.O.P.S. regularly since his sophomore year. His counselor had recommended that he attend. Student E was very frustrating. He was very loyal to T.O.P.S. and to Homecourt and never missed either one; however, he never seemed to talk with any degree of openness. Other students would complain that they could not understand him. He would contradict himself and speak in a manner that was confusing, to say the least. Often times he would become very impassioned about a subject, but he never made clear what he meant. In short, he was inarticulate. When he did say something that made sense, he resisted considering any solutions. He talked about feeling helpless and trapped but was not open to other students' ideas about solutions. Several times he made vague references about a violent experience at his previous school; he seemed to indicate that he had thrown a student through a window. He also talked
about his utter frustration at having to move and having no control over the move. Any references to the past seemed to invoke fear masked as hostility; yet any reference to the future produced resignation and hopelessness. At Homecourt and T.O.P.S. he fidgeted and had difficulty listening to others. He always had something in his hands, twisting and turning and playing with it. At times it seemed that Homecourt served as a place to vent his rage, but the source of the rage never was revealed. In short, he was an enigma, and when he graduated neither his counselor nor the instructor of Homecourt felt that they knew him. He did not seem to have been impacted by Homecourt.

In 1993 Student E completed the survey on Homecourt. To the question, “Do you remember Homecourt as a positive or negative experience?”, he replied, “Positive, it let me feel not lonely. If only for a small/short amount of time.” To the question, “How did Homecourt affect you?”, he wrote, it “helped me to look at my own demons. Even though I didn’t bring up all of the crap that happened in my life, I started to look at it myself. Last year I went into therapy. I believe that if it wasn’t for Homecourt, I probably would have resisted getting help with my problems.” There were two conclusions that Student E’s experiences and feedback gave to Homecourt. First, the value of Homecourt to a student is not always apparent to the instructor, and second, the value is sometimes deferred to a later time.

1990-1991. The Second Year of Homecourt

There were 7 Homecourts during the second year, the 1990-1991 school year. During the fall semester, Homecourt met three times each week: on Monday and Tuesday during fourth period lunch and on Thursday during third
period. During the spring semester, Homecourt met four times: on Wednesday and Friday during fourth period and on Tuesday and Thursday during third period. Once again, Monday proved to be an ill-advised day for Homecourt, and by second semester efforts to attempt Homecourt on a Monday were abandoned.

The nature of Homecourt was irrevocably altered by one specific Homecourt. Homecourt VI became the dominant standard for future Homecourts. It has become increasingly difficult not to measure other Homecourts against this particular one. Up until this time, Homecourt had been a pleasant experience that made students feel accepted and comfortable. However, Homecourts had failed to generate much intensity. In short, they had been very superficial, even if positive. If Homecourt VI was anything, it was intense; and consequently, it produced much more bonding among the participants. This bonding displayed itself in several ways. By October the group was spontaneously sharing home phone numbers with each other so they could call each other between Homecourts if necessary. When Thanksgiving prevented the usual meeting date for Homecourt, the students organized a get-together at one of the student’s houses for a Thanksgiving barbecue chicken. Everyone attended. By the spring semester, most meetings ended with spontaneous hugging.

There was nothing special about the composition of this Homecourt initially that would lead one to expect such closeness to develop. The original ten enrollees included a student with a National Merit letter of commendation, two honor graduates, a special education student, two members of the gymnastic team, two members of minority ethnic groups, and one member who
identified with James Dean. This, however, was the first Homecourt to openly discuss suicide in any personal way. Four of the students admitted to attempting suicide and had received treatment. A fifth member never admitted to an attempt but had undergone psychiatric hospitalization for some undisclosed reason. During the course of the semester, one of the students confided privately to another student that she still wanted to die. The second student managed to get the first student to talk to the instructor outside of a scheduled Homecourt, and measures were taken to ensure that the girl ceased seeing suicide as an option. At least three of the students had a very unhealthy relationship with drugs and alcohol prior to enrollment in Homecourt, and one of them eventually underwent treatment after graduation. However, during this year in Homecourt, all of the students either abstained or severely modified their personal consumption. Two students, for example, confronted one of the students with their concerns about her drinking in a very supportive way, and they received a pledge from this girl not to drink, at least, for awhile. Another time, Homecourt was spent complimenting, praising, and supporting a student for resisting the latest shipment of LSD over the previous weekend.

An effort to answer the question of why this Homecourt evolved into such an intense and meaningful experience must focus on the events of the second meeting. That entire Homecourt centered upon Student F, a junior girl. She was an honors student and was respected among the other students in Homecourt. As one student told her, "I always thought you were Miss Perfect." On the second meeting of Homecourt, Student F discussed the fear that she was pregnant. The rest of that period was devoted to helping her decide on a way to confirm or relieve the fear. Two students offered to take her to the drug
store during lunch to get a home pregnancy test; one even offered to pay for it. There was much discussion about her boyfriend and the future of their relationship. There was a general consensus that Student F was lowering herself to date him, and everyone seemed to give her support in her decision to stop dating him regardless of the results of the pregnancy test. In the end, Student F was not pregnant, but a new tone had been established in Homecourt. This tone reverberated throughout the year in Homecourt VI. The precedent had been established that Homecourt was a place that one could share real concerns and get real support. The fact that confidentiality was not breached (Student F’s mother had not been called) was not lost on the rest of the students. Student F proved to be an important role model by displaying her vulnerability. A recurring theme in future Homecourts would be that risk-taking early in Homecourt, particularly by a respected student, would be the chief predictor of intensity and bonding.

Although the second year of Homecourt was dominated by the positive experience of Homecourt VI, two negative trends also appeared that have become intertwined with subsequent Homecourts. This was the first year where deception became an issue. Although Student F’s revelations proved to be very positive, she also displayed many incongruent or distorted revelations that seemed to be merely attention-getting devices. In fact, the reported pregnancy was viewed skeptically by the instructor. He never believed that she was actually pregnant. Furthermore, he felt that she knew she was not pregnant. He was convinced at the time that the pregnancy scare was a manipulation. It communicated to the other girls in Homecourt that Student F could attract adult males, and it let the boys know that she was sexually active. At other times,
Student F utilized other methods for getting the attention of the group away from other students on to her. She did not do this consistently to the extent that it interfered with the workings of Homecourt, but she did do it. On one occasion, for example, Homecourt ended after centering most of the period on another student. When the bell rang, Student F began to cry. When questioned about the tears, she reported that she was sad for the other student, although a point of closure had been reached for the other student’s problem. Even a very superficial and gentle probing revealed that what was really bothering her was that she did not get much attention from the other group members on that particular day.

These manipulations or distortions left the instructor in a quandary of how to deal with them within the context of a nondirective support group. To confront the dishonesty openly would violate the principle of nonconfrontation upon which Homecourt was established. However, to allow the manipulations to continue violated the principle of honesty which was also a foundation of Homecourt. The decision was made that the purpose of Homecourt was support and not confrontation; therefore, at this time, allowing lies, or at least, not confronting lies was considered more productive than confrontation. Besides, the fact that the instructor perceived dishonesty did not seem to have as much impact as the fact that the students did not perceive dishonesty. In the survey on Homecourt completed in the summer of 1993, one student from this Homecourt responded to the statement, "The other students in Homecourt were honest" by saying, "The cool thing is nobody needed to lie, but if they wanted to, it was OK". The issue of whether confrontation was in the best interest of the student who was the fabricator was really a therapeutic issue beyond the scope
of Homecourt. Still, it was difficult to ignore or legitimize falsehoods. This dilemma would haunt future Homecourts with varying degrees of intensity.

Another conflict that became increasingly apparent as the year progressed was the discrepancy between the vision of Homecourt by the teacher and the disruptive behavior of some of the students. For example in Homecourt VII three different students acted in ways that prevented any closeness or honesty from developing. These students talked only about superficial or humorous things and resisted any attempts to get serious. When other students tried to disclose important issues, these students refocused the attention of the group and changed the subject back to themselves. For example, on one occasion, a student was talking about a painful divorce that was going on in her household. One of the distracting students interrupted to say that she had experienced the same thing when her parents divorced and that she no longer talked to her father who lived in another country. The second distracting student then asked about the other country, and a general discussion about the winters in Canada ensued. Efforts by the instructor to return the focus to the original speaker failed. Both of these distracting students were involved with drug use, but neither ever revealed or discussed this as an issue.

To say that these distracting students prevented any progress was to compare Homecourt VII with Homecourt VI and to impose a particular objective. However, the stated objective of Homecourt was to allow each specific Homecourt to determine its own objectives. To measure one Homecourt against another Homecourt was to violate the principle of allowing each Homecourt to have a separate identity. To say that the students prevented
growth was to say that growth was the purpose of Homecourt and again to violate the integrity of each individual Homecourt. To say that these students caused the Homecourt to fail was to impose some external standard upon the Homecourt, a standard that was produced by the teacher rather than the students. The alternative view, that this Homecourt was as successful as others but in a different way, was borne out by the feedback at the end of the year. Students in this Homecourt were as positive in their view of Homecourt as any others, although they never expressed the loyalty and intense bonding of Homecourt VI. Apparently, the students received something of value to them, even if that value was not apparent to their teacher.

During the course of this school year, three particular events stood out as being especially significant to future Homecourts. The first event centered on an incident at another high school in the district. During the spring semester, a student on another campus took his own life by shooting himself in a classroom full of students. In another classroom down the same hall, one of the students enrolled in the high school where Homecourt originated was taking another class. When this student returned to her home school the period after the suicide, she was very distraught and upset. She had heard the shot and had seen the bloody and hysterical aftermath. Her teacher sent her to Homecourt for the rest of the period. This marked the first time Homecourt was used as a crisis center by a teacher.

The second event centered upon another emergency of a sort. A student not enrolled in Homecourt asked to speak to a Homecourt about an important issue. Knowing the student from his psychology class and sensing a need for support, the teacher allowed the student to address Homecourt. The student
had come to clarify rumors going around the school about his friend. His friend had been arrested for the sexual molestation of minors. By court order he was staying in another community and could not leave the area. It was important for the student to make others realize that his friend was feeling very guilty and had attempted suicide. Although he was in no way condoning the activities of his friend, he was filled with ambivalence. A sense of loyalty and a sense of pity were balanced against a sense of personal repulsion. The students in Homecourt listened and were supportive to the student. They were also shocked and stunned by the revelations. The teacher and some of the students knew the convicted student, but none had known the details of his departure.

The third event centered upon Student H who enrolled in school during the spring semester of 1990 and began hanging around a few Homecourts during his first semester. During the fall of 1990 he enrolled in Homecourt. Student H had enrolled in school to be near his dying mother who was in a local hospital. The father could afford to enroll the student and to pay for his apartment. Furthermore, the father reported that Student H had been “run out” of the small town in which they had lived. Apparently his appearance and his behavior made many people in the school and the community very uncomfortable. Student H had very long black hair. He wore mostly black outfits with a long black coat. He was very quiet at school, kept mostly to himself, and seemed friendly and personable enough to get along with most students. In Homecourt he was well respected. He espoused a very carefree, casual, unpretentious philosophy. He did not impose himself on others nor did he tolerate much imposition on himself. The closest thing to observable deviant behavior at school was his fangs. He had a pair of very realistic fangs that he
purchased at a novelty store and used for a Halloween costume. Occasionally he wore his fangs to school. He sat in the back of the room and subtly smiled, baring his fangs every once in a while at his teachers or other students. He had some students convinced that he thought he was a vampire. He did not, but he did enjoy "weirding them out". His cavalier attitude toward schoolwork and attendance soon put him in academic jeopardy. He never received any credit while enrolled in school and by the spring semester of 1991 he transferred to a private alternative school where rules about attendance were less rigid.

Student H would be merely an interesting anecdote if it were not for a conversation he had in one Homecourt. The topic of the conversation was relationships. The students were discussing the difficulty in communicating with others and the obstacles to forming lasting relationships. Student H expressed his own feelings of alienation with the human race and the lack of any meaningful relationships. In a very calm and cool manner, he revealed an attitude that could best be described as purely sociopathic. He did not trust friendships; he doubted the reality of love. People were to be enjoyed and treated fairly in order to enhance one's own personal growth and well being. He expressed a certain tolerance and valuing of justice which made the other students see him as open-minded and eccentric. He was charming and polite and, while the other students viewed him as an idealistic nonconformist, the teacher began to see him in the chilling light of an antisocial personality.

The third year of Homecourt, 1991-1992

In the fall of 1991, there were four Homecourts. Two Homecourts met during first period on Wednesday and Friday, and two met during fourth period
on Tuesday and Thursday. By the spring semester three more Homecourts were added to bring the final total for the year to eleven. The three that were added second semester were all during fifth period, Peer Helper class. By adding more class periods, more students were exposed to Homecourt. Some 66 different students were enrolled in Homecourt at one time or another during the school year. Consequently, each individual Homecourt became larger. Homecourt averaged 8.9 students for the year. The largest Homecourt had 12 students in attendance, and it proved to be the most effective Homecourt. With this many students enrolled, absences exerted more of an influence on Homecourt than they had in the past. The Homecourt IX had difficulty establishing much bonding because of the absence rate. Most of the students were enrolled in academic classes, and the teachers would not consistently allow the students to attend Homecourt. On the other hand, most of the first period students were either unassigned or enrolled in less strict academic classes. The experiences of Homecourt XII established the policy of allowing Homecourt to have up to 12 students. The size of this Homecourt did not prove to be an obstacle to the creation of a proper atmosphere. The precedent was started that numbers were not the determining factor in creating an atmosphere for close bonding. Obviously, the personnel involved in the Homecourt was the key factor. A conscious decision was made by the instructor, after a great deal of deliberation, not to filter Homecourt, nor to systematically impose a process for insuring a constructive balance. The mixture of a variety of groups seemed to be best maintained through a random selection of students as they volunteered for Homecourt on a "first come first served policy" rather than a selection by the teacher. Chance, it was decided, was a better filter. This
policy, as much as possible, was still in effect during the spring semester of 1993.

Several students from the 1991-1992 school year impacted Homecourt in different ways. The first two students served as a testimonial to Homecourt, as well as playing a part in the evolution of Homecourt. Student Q was an honors student. She was a very active school leader and was well respected by teachers and students alike. She had a very high SAT score and was courted by universities across the country. She was very polished and impressed colleges in her interviews. She was also very witty and compassionate. During her second or third Homecourt, she risked exposing her vulnerability. She talked about the burden of living up to other's expectations. She expressed how painful junior high school had been. For example, she never had a date until her junior year in high school, because she was always the tallest person in her class. Although she shared her feelings in a humorous way, there were also tears on her cheeks as she talked. Student J expressed great empathy for Student Q because Student J had felt alienated in junior high school due to her size, as well. As the year progressed, Student Q revealed more and more of her own personal problems and family distress. By the end of the school year, her entire family was attending counseling. Homecourt had become an important ally for Student Q to face her own family travails. In the meantime, no matter what was going on in her own life, Student Q always was supportive and empathetic regarding other students. She became a perfect role model for all Homecourt participants.

The impact of Student Q was most significantly felt by Student J. At the time of Student Q's first disclosure, Student J had been in public school for less
than six weeks during the preceding three years. She did have a "reputation" among the other students, and she was very defensive. Although she wanted to succeed in a normal high school and to graduate, she was also feeling very isolated, condemned, and angry. Student J had been in treatment since she was seven years old. She wrote:

When I was eight years old, I was abused (sexually) by a neighbor. My father left when I was in fourth grade. When he left I became more hostile and violent and beginning to have more problems in school. I went to my first treatment facility when I was ten. While there I was abused again and I became more hostile and angry. I learned how to use drugs, practice bulimia, run away and be self-abusive to alleviate my pain. When I was in eight grade I was a total disaster. I was sent to a special school in the district. This lasted for six weeks before I was sent to a camp for intense treatment. At the camp I became really despondent. I ran away frequently. I attempted suicide. After six months, I was hospitalized. I was in the hospital for two years. (sic)

The connection between Student Q and Student J was the first connection that Student J had with a regular high school student. That Student Q had revealed some psychic pain had helped Student J relate not only to Student Q but also to other people in school. For example, during the last Homecourt before a holiday break, Student J brought gifts for all the other classmates in Homecourt. Student Q and Student J spent some time together outside of school, and Student J would introduce Student Q as "my only normal friend".

During the fall semester, in one student, the issue of lying which had
began as a trickle with student A and F, reached flood level. Student K dominated the Homecourt VIII. She was very dramatic and liked to be the center of attention. Homecourt VIII was usually very small with only three or four students that could be counted on to attend. It was obvious early in the semester that not everything that Student K said could be believed. However during the first semester, no one confronted her lying. At the beginning of the spring semester the instructor deliberated for a long time in trying to decide whether to allow Student K to reenroll in Homecourt. The instructor allowed her to rejoin because he felt that Student K's lying was symptomatic of some personal needs, and that any arbitrary choice on his part was not the best policy for determining enrollment. However, he again was in a quandary of how to deal with Student K. As it turned out, Student K was in Homecourt with Peer Helpers the second semester and confrontation resulted. The confrontation was actually initiated by Student K. She confronted the Peer Helpers, claiming that they kept her from getting her needs met in Homecourt. One particular Peer Helper, Student No. 1, responded with an accurate series of observations for Student K. The confrontation between No. 1 and Student K was restrained, but Student K elected to withdraw from Homecourt. The confrontation had concentrated on Student K's attention-getting behavior and her inability to cope whenever she was not the center of attention in Homecourt. The issue of lying was never actually confronted. The instructor knew of K's lies through confidential remarks made by K's counselor, her other teachers, and some students in other Homecourts. To confront her about her lies would have required breaching confidentiality. When K left Homecourt, the teacher was relieved that a resolution of this conflict was postponed.
This year in Homecourt resulted in the realization that Homecourt could
comfort people even when they had unsolvable problems. One student was a
member of an ethnic subculture with a religion that did not allow her to conform
to more normal social practices. She could not date, wear fashionable clothes,
question her parents, nor aspire to any ambitions beyond marriage to the
husband of her father's choice. She was very bright, an honors graduate. She
respected and loved her parents and she did not rebel against them. However,
her life was very difficult for her, and she felt a profound sense of alienation from
the people around her. Homecourt managed to express an acceptance of her
while still never fully understanding her. Another student was trying to complete
what could be her only full year physically attending high school. In every other
year she had to be assigned to homebound instruction because she had severe
arthritis. Homecourt could not lessen her pain nor could it help her when she
failed to stay at school through the year. However, she felt that Homecourt was
a positive experience. She wrote in 1993 that Homecourt "helped me learn that
telling people about me doesn't necessarily make me vulnerable to others but
rather a closer friend."

Suicide was an issue for two particular students during this year. One
student, a junior boy, was sent to Homecourt because he was at very serious
risk for suicide: he had plans, and he had means. A psychologist told the
parents that the student needed immediate hospitalization. The parents refused
to have him hospitalized nor would they provide him with professional
counseling. The parents had been reported to authorities for psychological
child abuse, but no action was ever taken. He did survive, however, and
managed to graduate the next year. Another student, a sophomore girl,
volunteered to join Homecourt out of a psychology class. She was very quiet and never shared very much during Homecourt. However, the next year when she was no longer in Homecourt, she came to the Homecourt teacher because she was feeling suicidal. A parental conference was arranged and she received professional help.

One student in particular came to be an important component in the evolution of Homecourt. During the spring semester of 1992, two teachers came to the instructor of Homecourt and asked him to work with Student No. 42, a sophomore boy. His behavior was particularly bizarre, and the teachers felt unable to manage him. The referral of No. 42 was significant for several reasons. First, he was the first student referred to Homecourt by a teacher. Second, the only time he could attend Homecourt was during fifth period when a Peer Helper class met; therefore, he was directly responsible for the initial scheduling of Homecourt during Peer Helper class. Third, No. 42 went on to become an important part of Homecourt the next year during the research semester. Fourth, No. 42 provided a clear challenge to the nondirective principle of Homecourt. It seemed clear that he had a need for some very specific objectives: he needed to be made aware of his effects on other people, and he needed feedback on his behaviors. Homecourt seemed like the logical place to provide such feedback. Conversely, Homecourt had been built on the idea of not establishing any preconceived notions of what a student needed. Student No. 42 seemed to be a perfect exception to this policy.

Homecourt never made any progress toward the stated objectives for No. 42; however, in many ways, he became a testimonial to the original concept of nondirective interaction. This student had a history of being in trouble in school
ever since his enrollment in kindergarten. He went through junior high school in the Behavioral Adjustment Class for emotionally disturbed students. He was intelligent yet very high strung. He was eccentric and abrasive. But more than anything else, he was obnoxious. For example, on one occasion, one of his teachers was passing back a test on which he had made a good grade. When the teacher handed him the paper, he jumped up and yelled in class, “Yes! There is a God!” Another time, a teacher was explaining how to do an assignment and asked the class if there were any questions. No. 42 raised his hand and said, “Is there a life after death? What is reality?” These remarks and others like them did not produce laughter from his fellow classmates. In fact, his classmates viewed him as weird beyond eccentricity. During an early Homecourt, he said, “You have no idea what it is like coming to school and knowing everywhere you go everyone hates you; no one likes you.” He was neither exaggerating nor was he expressing a paranoid delusion. One of his teachers even told him, “You know, you are not funny. No one thinks you are funny. No one even likes you.” Student No. 1, a Peer Helper who was in the same class, stood up to the teacher and said, “I like him; he’s my friend.” In fact, Homecourt and the Peer Helpers managed to convey their appreciation of him to him even though he managed to alienate almost every Peer Helper at some time. Even No. 1 reached a point where she lost her tolerance of him. Still, Homecourt was the closest thing he had to acceptance. He began eating lunch in the Homecourt classroom each day, and by the end of the semester, Homecourt became “my salvation”, he said.
Fall semester, 1992

The scheduling of Homecourt became an important issue during the fall of 1992. The instructor wanted Peer Helper class to grow in enrollment so he sacrificed his regularly scheduled conference period in order to schedule extra Peer Helper classes. Consequently, Peer Helper class was now scheduled for three periods per day. With three periods assigned for Peer Helper classes, there was now a potential for nine Homecourts each week. The school also had just changed to a seven period day which impacted Homecourt. Previously, the closeness, bonding, and most intense disclosure by students tended to occur during the second semester of Homecourt. There were exceptions to this rule, but generally, the first semester proved to be an introductory time. The type of bonding that sometimes occurred in Homecourt took time, and the warm fuzzy exchanges at the end of the first semester may have been the most significant contributions to this bonding. It was no surprise that the first semester involved a period of adjustment. However, the advent of the seven-period day proved to prolong and intensify this period for Homecourt. First and seventh periods became optional for most juniors and seniors. In theory this made the pool of potential students for Homecourt larger. Students no longer had to miss an academic class. Unfortunately, it also meant that Homecourt would require extra-curricular time. Most students would either have to come to school early for first period or to stay late for seventh period. The need for time to develop the closeness and commitment in Homecourt could not compete with the temptation to sleep late or to leave school early. Consequently, the attendance in Homecourt for the first semester was disappointing. This lack of commitment by some students was particularly
noticeable in seventh period. Each of the three seventh period Homecourts would have 12 students listed on the rolls but only six or so would actually attend; and that six changed each week. It was very difficult to establish any continuity or to build any trust level when no one knew from week to week who would be in a particular Homecourt. One of the effects of this inconsistent attendance was that the dropout rate between semesters was higher than in the past. As the spring semester 1993 began, the greatest challenge facing Homecourt was to try to increase the level of commitment of those who signed up for Homecourt and still not abandon the principle of student-directed participation.

Another significant development for Homecourt in the fall of 1992 was the inclusion of two hearing impaired students into Homecourt. One deaf student was a Peer Helper, Student No. 27. The other student, No. 25, was referred by the Deaf Education department. An adult interpreter who had attended a Peer Helper retreat also participated in Homecourt with these students.

A third development which had ramifications for Homecourt was the increase in the Peer Helper program. The first period Peer Helper class had 13 students. These 13 students needed to be balanced throughout each of the three days for placements. Five of them requested Homecourt as their placement which meant that there could only be room for five to seven more students in each first period Homecourt.

The lack of a conference period for the instructor proved to be more problematic than at first envisioned. Without a conference period, the instructor found it very difficult to communicate with the counselors both in connection with developments in Homecourt and in promoting referrals of other students into a
Homecourt. This lack of opportunity to communicate became a resonant theme throughout the period of research, the spring semester of 1993.

That spring, the target semester for this study, was the eighth semester of Homecourt. The research was an attempt to explore Homecourt in depth, not just to rely on sketchy anecdotal details. However, the spring semester of 1993 was the end product of the previous seven semesters, and Homecourt must be placed in the context of its own history. Although each Homecourt has been different and each semester a separate entity, Homecourt is dynamic and thus has evolved from its previous incarnations.

The Attendance and the Topics Discussed

During the spring semester of 1993, Homecourt was scheduled during Peer Helper class period when the Peer Helpers were on placements off campus. Therefore, there was a potential of three Homecourts each day or nine each week. On Tuesday, Wednesday, and Thursday, Homecourt met both first period, 8:30-9:25 am, and seventh period, 2:50-3:45 pm. Homecourt also met fourth period, 11:30 am-12:20 pm, on Tuesdays and Wednesdays. Thursday fourth period was the only conference period for the teacher, and it was set aside for meetings with the counselors and for other tasks. In the first period Peer Helper class, five students elected to have Homecourt as their placements. Therefore, they were enrolled in all three first period Homecourts. Consequently, there was room for a maximum of seven other students in any of the first period Homecourts. On Tuesday, these positions were filled, but on Wednesday, the Peer Helpers who had off campus placements elected to have Homecourt. This made Wednesday's enrollment 10. Thursdays Homecourt
added two more Peer Helpers from a placement, Student No. 18 and Student No. 19, to the five constant Peer Helpers. Consequently, Wednesday and Thursday Homecourts were completely filled with Peer Helpers who were enrolled in the first period Peer Helper classes. In the seventh period class, four Peer Helpers, the entire seventh period class, had their placements in Homecourt.

A total of 55 students enrolled in Homecourt during the semester. Two of those, Student No. 24 and No. 54, were “no-shows” and never attended Homecourt. Three more, Student No. 48, No. 50 and No. 51, showed up only one time. Student No. 48 and No. 50 enrolled, but then they asked to be allowed to be absent during an athletic season for the first few weeks. When the season was over, however, they never returned to Homecourt. Student No. 51 dropped out of school the day after attending his first Homecourt. Two other students ceased coming to Homecourt for legitimate reasons: Student No. 7 was assigned to homebound studies for reasons of illness; and Student No. 2 was a Peer Helper who was placed late in the semester at an elementary school. Student No. 11, an experienced veteran of Homecourt who had attended five different Homecourts since her sophomore year, changed periods from first to fourth, but she never really attended with any regularity. Student No. 6 attended only six out of thirteen meetings of her Homecourt because she was ill quite often, and because she could not relate to some of the other students. No. 6 was a junior honors student who was enrolled in A.P. psychology. At one of her Homecourts, Student No. 7 talked about her engagement and wedding plans. According to No. 6, she found this concept of marriage too foreign to relate to her own experiences. Student No. 41’s
attendance was very sporadic. She only attended eight out of twelve meetings. At first, she claimed that she was avoiding Homecourt, because she was afraid of Student No. 54 who was assigned to her Homecourt. However, No. 54 never attended. Apparently, No. 41 seemed reluctant to face the Peer Helpers after lying about a suicide during the first semester. She transferred to another school before the end of the semester. Students No. 40 and No. 45 were also sporadic in attendance. They came to Homecourt together and then rode home together. No. 40 seemed to have many legitimate reasons for not attending. She did often have younger siblings to supervise after school. She missed seven times. By the end of the semester, No. 45 was in some very serious trouble with drugs and other issues. Although she maintained daily contact with the teacher through her psychology class, she avoided Homecourt. She only attended eight sessions. Shortly after the semester ended, No. 45 was hospitalized a second time for drug rehabilitation and extensive psychological therapy. In conclusion, of the 55 students who enrolled in Homecourt, 44 attended regularly. Of those 44, 21 were also enrolled in Peer Helper classes. (For a complete listing of all the students enrolled in Homecourt, see Appendix G.)

The attendance rate for all Homecourts averaged 84.4%. Generally, seventh period produced the lowest rates of attendance while fourth period had the highest. This could be expected, because fourth period was in the middle of the day while seventh period was after school for most students. The Wednesday first period Homecourt, which was composed totally of Peer Helpers, had the highest rate of attendance. The attendance on a percentage basis is presented in the following chart. (For a complete compilation of
attendance data, see Appendix D.)

First Period: (Total 87.2%)
- Tuesday: 77.3%
- Wednesday: 96%
- Thursday: 88.5%

Fourth Period: (Total 90.5%)
- Tuesday: 95%
- Wednesday: 86%

Seventh Period: (Total 77.6%)
- Tuesday: 86%
- Wednesday: 75%
- Thursday: 72%

It is very difficult to accurately identify the topics discussed in Homecourt, and it is somewhat misleading to attempt to do so without reporting the time spent on each subject. There is a great deal of overlapping between topics. For example, a conversation about a relationship between a father and a daughter could be classified as a family issue; however, it could soon develop into a discussion about relationships with the opposite sex. A conversation on academic pressure could easily move on to family relationships. Merely listing the topics that came up in Homecourt does not convey the passion each topic engendered or the amount of time spent on each topic. Still, an attempt to list the most discussed topic in Homecourt for the spring semester of 1993 provides six dominant themes:

1. **Relationships with family.** Clearly, this was the most discussed issue in the Homecourts in the spring of 1993. Most often this topic centered on relationships between fathers and daughters, but other family issues were
discussed, too.

2. **Relationships with the opposite sex.** This topic included dating but was not limited to that. In fact, relationships with the family of a dating partner were a subtopic that was dealt with quite a bit, especially in first period. A look at the term "codependency" was also dealt with as another subtopic.

3. **Academic issues.** Pressures to do well, pressures to make a good score on the SAT, decisions about college, and decisions about class selections for next school year were all issues discussed, sometimes quite passionately.

4. **Relationships with friends.** Peer groups weighed heavily on the minds of the students in Homecourt.

5. **Suicide/death.** Almost all of the students in Homecourt were affected by a suicide or a death, and during the course of the semester, efforts to come to terms with these concepts and events came up.

6. **Philosophy, religion and spirituality.** Efforts were made in some Homecourts to try to make sense out of life in a more expansive way. To many students in Homecourt, religion was very important and an intense part of their identities. Others were trying to make sense of the term.

**Data Relevant to the Research Questions**

1. **How does Homecourt foster bonding among students who have a wide variety of interests and backgrounds?**

   During the spring semester of 1993 in Homecourt, four factors were identified as being significant in the development of closeness among the
students in Homecourt. The first factor was the seating arrangement. Although Homecourt met in a traditional classroom within the school, the desks were arranged in a circle for Homecourt. In the interviews following the completion of the semester, several students mentioned the seating arrangement as being very significant in their developing a sense of closeness. Student No. 16 mentioned that it was always a comforting feeling when she sat in the circle because she sat opposite No. 14. "Student, No. 14 had beautiful blonde hair that always made me feel peaceful; in fact, her hair was the most powerful image I have of Homecourt. It was very comforting", No. 16 said. Students No. 17, No. 19, No. 38, and No. 43 all mentioned the circle. No. 17 said, "When we would get into the circle, it was like a signal for something special. I don't know; it was kind of like time to be warm."

The second factor was a concept and activity originally introduced in psychology class. The last two meetings of each Homecourt have centered around the concept of "warm fuzzies" as invented by Eric Berne. In psychology class warm fuzzies are defined as "positive units of recognition that make people feel good and help people to grow". To illustrate the effects of warm fuzzies, the psychology classes exchanged them in two activities. First, each student anonymously wrote down any warm fuzzy he or she wanted to give to anyone in class. The instructor then read them out loud. This activity usually generated a great deal of laughter, yet it seemed to make the students feel good. It was followed by a discussion about how it felt to receive the warm fuzzies, why particular people got certain types of warm fuzzies, and why some people got more than others. Second, each student stood one at a time; each of the first three students who volunteered gave a warm fuzzy to the standing
student. By removing the aspect of anonymity, these warm fuzzies evolved into very meaningful exchanges. Usually they began with superficial compliments about clothing, but by the end of the first or second row of students, deeper personal traits were complimented. In Homecourt, the verbal exchange of warm fuzzies was done during the last two meetings and is done in four rounds. In round one, everyone, including the instructor, gave one warm fuzzy to someone in the group. In round two, everyone gave two warm fuzzies, one each to two different students, and in round three, they gave three. In round four, each student had to ask for the warm fuzzy they most needed from the group. By round four, sufficient warm fuzzies had been circulated that people were feeling very good and close to each other. Because of the nature of Homecourt, the compliments usually began at a depth reached in regular psychology classes only by the end of the process. This activity seemed to give permission for the students to share their positive feelings and the respect they had developed for one another during the semester. In fact the most difficult aspect of giving warm fuzzies was limiting the compliments to one or two. The fourth round was the most difficult for students, although perhaps it is the most important. This exchange of warm fuzzies was a very powerful activity for students and may be the most significant factor fostering positive feelings about Homecourt.

Although none of the students mentioned the warm fuzzy activity during the interviews, the researcher still felt that it was the single most powerful bonding activity. After experiencing it, students often requested to exchange warm fuzzies during the semester. References were often made to past warm fuzzies. Often the warm fuzzies healed hurt feelings and mended broken relationships. These results had been noticed in previous semesters. During
the target semester, the warm fuzzy exchange most impacted Student No. 42, No. 4, No. 45 and No. 13. By the end of his involvement in Homecourt, No. 42 had become very adept at giving compliments. This type of interaction was very important for him, because it was the first time he had learned to communicate with others in a positive way. On April 14, Student No. 3 confronted No. 4 in a very harsh manner. She told her that her procrastination in getting professional counseling for herself was a “phony cop-out”. However, during the exchange of warm fuzzies, No. 4 thanked No. 3 for the confrontation. She realized that the confrontation came out of caring. Student No. 13 resolved a conflict with No. 3 that dated back to the beginning of the year when No. 3 compared the older Peer Helpers to the new Peer Helpers in a negative way. When No. 3 complimented her, No. 13 felt better about the earlier remarks. For Student No. 45 the semester had been a very difficult one and she needed some positive interactions. She had spent the preceding summer in a drug rehabilitation facility. During the spring semester, she returned to drugs, left them again and returned a second time. Whenever she was most involved with drugs she was absent from Homecourt. Her family relationships had deteriorated. The exchange of warm fuzzies did give her some comfort and she felt valued by several members of the group. Unfortunately, this was not enough. She did not graduate and was hospitalized in a psychiatric treatment center upon completion of the school year. In summary, the exchange of warm fuzzies was always a very emotional time. Tears were not uncommon among the students. Everyone, including the teacher, was touched by the experience.

The third factor affecting bonding was the rules for Homecourt. Because the rules were usually covered during the first few minutes of the first Homecourt
meeting, it was easy to underestimate their significance. However, several students reported that the rules were very important to them. The five rules were as follows:

1) **If the teacher is absent, Homecourt does not meet.**

2) **Confidentiality is to be maintained concerning the issues discussed in Homecourt.** Exceptions to this rule, such as “a danger to self or others”, are acknowledged. (For this study the researcher also made it clear that the research for this paper would not sacrifice confidentiality because anonymity would be maintained.)

3) **Anyone may say anything that he or she wants without fear of being attacked, teased, or criticized.** This rule is an attempt to allow everyone to be free to express themselves in any manner they choose. In Homecourt it is safe to “try on” different ideas and to explore different feelings without fear of rejection.

4) **Although students may say anything, they do not have to say anything.** They are always allowed to pass on any topic. Probing and unwelcome delving into personal issues are not allowed. “I don’t want to talk about it” is a phrase that will always be respected in Homecourt.

5) **No violence is allowed.**

During the interview when asked what factors helped to develop a sense of closeness with the other students in Homecourt, Students No. 5, No. 9, No. 19, No. 20, No. 31, No. 38, and No. 52 all mentioned the confidentiality rule as being very significant to them. Also of particular significance was the fourth rule concerning the freedom to pass on any topic. Student No. 23 said, “I am quiet in all of my classes, but this was the only place where it was OK to be quiet.
That meant a lot to me.” The combination of rules three and four created an atmosphere lacking in pressure, which was a very important asset in the development of closeness. Both Student No. 10 and No. 16 expressed that the best aspect of Homecourt was the lack of pressure to live up to someone else's expectations. “The thing that helped me the most (to feel close) was that I didn't have to do anything,” reported Student No. 17, “I could just relax and get away from the relentless pressure of school. Homecourt was like an escape.” Student No. 17, a sophomore girl and a Peer Helper, was the youngest member of class. She was also a cheerleader and a class officer in Student Council. Very intelligent and compassionate, she was among the “Top Ten” in grade point averages for her class; and she spent a summer doing charity work in a third world country. On May 21, she disclosed her feelings about the dehumanizing and alienating atmosphere of the school. On May 19, a junior boy, not enrolled in Homecourt, committed suicide. In Homecourt the discussion centered on the loneliness that might have led to the suicide. No. 17 talked about an intense loneliness she felt in the school, especially at the beginning of the year. She had felt like no one cared; everyone had been selfish and self-centered; and no one had reached out to make others feel welcome. She said that Peer Helper class and Homecourt were the only exceptions, and she was not sure how she could have coped without them. To most objective observers, No. 17 was one of the most accepted and most socially adjusted students in the school. For her to admit to this intense alienation was very disturbing. The teacher could not help but wonder how the students who did not have activities such as cheerleading, Peer Helpers, Student Council, or Homecourt must have felt. Did her revelations represent
the "tip of an iceberg"?

Three specific student behaviors or attitudes provided the fourth factor that facilitated bonding. First, students felt closest to the other students who behaved most seriously in Homecourt. Although Homecourt was a place filled with a great deal of laughter, the closeness developed out of the more sober moments. They laughed with Students No. 1, No. 18, and No. 30, but when time came to identify the person in Homecourt to whom they felt closest, their names were seldom mentioned. Instead, the students who were most serious-minded were listed, Student No. 12 and No. 29. Second, the body language of these students communicated concern and commitment to listening. Third, these students modeled self-disclosure and vulnerability.

Student No. 12, a junior girl and a Peer Helper, was enrolled in Wednesday's first period Homecourt, and by the end of March, she had become the leader in her Homecourt. There were two ways that she demonstrated leadership. First, although seating was unassigned and was usually decided spontaneously, the person who most wanted to speak usually sat opposite the teacher. However, during Wednesday's first period Homecourt, the students who had the most to say often sat opposite No. 12. Remarks were often directed to her rather than to the teacher. Second, No. 12 responded to other students' self-disclosures with such skill that the teacher did not need to say anything. For example, on one occasion, No. 14 was talking about an incident during the preceding weekend wherein her father struck her. It was No. 12 who asked the appropriate questions to ascertain if the incident was an example of child abuse. It was No. 12 who helped No. 14 devise a plan of action to deal with the father and to prevent future incidents. No. 12 gave No. 14 support, but
her interventions transcended support. No. 12, also was a model for self-disclosure during an exchange on March 31. On that date No. 12 discussed her relationship with her ex-boyfriend who was continuing to call her and refusing to allow their relationship to end. He had become somewhat violent, as well, although not to a dangerous extent. No. 12's parents had talked to this boy and to his parents. No. 12 had even accompanied him to a counselor. The boy's parents refused to acknowledge his need for continued therapy, and he had used threats of suicide to try to manipulate No. 12; he had also embarrassed her in public. No. 12 was coping as well as she could. However, she refused to totally abandon him. She was protecting herself, and she was asserting herself in the relationship. But she would not, or could not, completely sever the bonds of the relationship. She seemed to have a healthy perspective on the issue, and when she was asked how Homecourt could help her, she replied, "It helps knowing someone else cares."

On Tuesday, Wednesday, and Thursday seventh period, No. 29 performed as a model Peer Helper. She was very effective at reflecting other students' feelings. On several occasions, she was more accurate in her restatements than was the teacher. For example, when No. 47 was explaining his feelings on January 28, she clarified them for him accurately. She paid attention without being distracted by other students. She allowed herself to demonstrate self-disclosure and risk-taking by being vulnerable. On February 18, she talked about some feelings she had, because she felt she had cheated in one of her classes. Actually, what she had done would be considered cheating only under the broadest definition of the word. She had let someone in her study group copy her homework, a practice which was usually within the
rules for the class but not for that particular assignment. As she talked, she was obviously very depressed and sad. No. 30 tried to make a joke out of her feelings and told her that her behavior was not cheating but “shrewd time management policy”. No. 32 and the teacher realized that her problem was not so much with her behavior as with herself. She felt that she had let down her own standards and principles, and that was what bothered her. She exposed her guilty feelings to the group, and had developed a plan for what to do about them; she utilized Homecourt to help in the process, thereby modeling both self-disclosure and a problem solving strategy.

On February 25 she revealed the dilemma she was facing with her boyfriend. The boyfriend was jealous of her and was already dreading her departure for college after her graduation next year. No. 29 was an excellent student and was planning on attending a first-rate university. She was in all honors classes and would graduate with honors, while her boyfriend was having difficulty at a local junior college, having barely graduated from high school the year before. Her boyfriend had also attempted suicide during his senior year, so any argument between them frightened her. She felt responsible for her boyfriend in a way that was not healthy for either of them; however, she was at a loss to decide what else to do. She was weary from the strain of dealing with him, but she expressed concern and fear for him, as well as a deep loyalty to him. Taking about this in Homecourt, she began to see the problem in a different way and to formulate a plan of action. She wanted her boyfriend to talk to a professional counselor. Although he had gone to counseling for a short time following his suicide attempt, she wanted him to see a counselor again to help their relationship and even offered to go with him. As
it turned out, No. 29 and her boyfriend discussed these issues together, but they
never received professional counseling. By the end of the semester, she was
not as concerned about her boyfriend's obsessive behavior as she had been in
February when she had discussed it with Homecourt.

Unfortunately, during the semester of data collection, four obstacles to
the development of closeness surfaced. The fact that these obstacles coexisted
with the factors that facilitated closeness left the researcher in a quandary
concerning the issue of closeness in Homecourt for the target semester. From
the evaluation sheets and from the interviews, it was determined that the
students in Homecourt did bond but in differing degrees. As Student No. 18
said, "I didn't feel real close to the other students in Homecourt, but I certainly
felt closer to them than I did students in my regular classes." This sentiment was
repeated by nearly half of the students. The researcher resolved the question of
closeness by noting that Homecourt apparently produced more closeness than
regular classes, if less than hoped for. Nonetheless, the four obstacles did
impact Homecourt.

The first obstacle centered upon the effect of having such a diverse group
of students representing a wide range of values and experiences. Although this
diversity was seen as an asset by many, some students reported feeling very
distant when students talked about experiences to which they could not relate.
For example, on February 2 Student No. 7 discussed her wedding plans. She
expressed gratitude that Homecourt was the only place she could talk about her
plans without being criticized or ridiculed. For No. 6 the concept of a wedding
was too difficult for her to handle. She never felt connected to the students from
that point on. Her alienation was compounded the next week when No. 7 and
No. 1 talked about their experiences with drugs, sex and suicide during junior high school. Even Student No. 29 reported that the discussion on drug use upset her, and she had difficulty being supportive when this topic was discussed. The second obstacle was when some students would not pay attention to other students as they spoke. When this behavior was displayed by only one student, it was not much of a problem. However, there were times when several students refused to focus on a speaker, causing detrimental effects. The most dramatic example of this was during the first week of Homecourt during period one. On Tuesday, January 26, the usual procedure for the first day of Homecourt was not followed, because Student No. 18 presented a problem about which she wanted help from Homecourt and her fellow Peer Helpers. Normally, Student No. 18 and No. 19 were in Homecourt on Thursdays only, but their placements were not to begin until the next week. No. 18's problem was both a family issue and an issue with her boyfriend of whom the family did not approve. While No. 18 shared her fears and concerns about her boyfriend and expressed the hurt she felt from her family's lack of trust in her, only the instructor and Student No. 7 were listening. Student No. 1 and No. 3 were working a crossword puzzle; No. 2, No. 5 and No. 17 were doing homework. No. 19 appeared to be sulking. No. 4 appeared ten minutes late to class. She brought a glass of water with her which she spilled. She then spent another ten minutes commandeering the center of attention while she cleaned the spill. Behaviors of this type were present in each Homecourt to some extent.

One of the greatest obstacles to the growth of closeness was the behavior of one particular student, No. 30, a junior Peer Helper enrolled in seventh period. His behavior was marked by insensitivity, inappropriate and
offensive humor, and a variety of avoidance mechanisms. For example, on January 27, Student No. 44 tried to provide leadership by introducing the subject of academic pressure. He asked the other students how they handled stress. No. 30 replied, “I don’t do homework.” He repeated this phrase several times during the discussion subverting No. 44’s attempt to produce a unified topic. No. 30, was fixated on No. 33’s SAT scores. At first his admiration for No. 33’s SAT score was just a joke. No. 33 had made a 1560 on the SAT, and No. 30 said he wanted to figure a way to get “some of those extra points that you don’t need added to my score”. The joke went on too long however, and soon it was a source of irritation not only to No. 33 but to the rest of the Homecourt. On March 2, No. 30 attempted to draw a parallel between David Koresh and Jesus Christ. It was neither humorous nor insightful and was actually offensive to many members of the group. During the April 20 discussion on suicide, No. 30 alone expressed neither sympathy nor compassion for anyone who commits suicide. The only time he initiated conversation was to bring up the SAT scores or his own inability to decide whether to enroll in pre-calculus or not. His lack of empathy during Tuesday Homecourt was merely considered an irritant. In other Homecourts, however, it was a much more serious issue.

On February 4, he argued about sex education with No. 29 and showed little appreciation for the emotional concerns she expressed. The conversation was purely an intellectual exercise for him. On February 25 when No. 29 was experiencing peak vulnerability about her boyfriend, he observed, in what might have been his most revealing remark of the year, “Things get messy when emotions come in.”

However, as disruptive as No. 30’s behavior was it was not the greatest
obstacle to closeness. The greatest obstacle was the dishonest, incongruent behavior of Student No. 1 and No. 4. No. 1 talked about three issues over the course of the semester. First, she talked about the difficulty in deciding which college to attend. She vacillated between four different colleges. The second issue she discussed was the bureaucratic red tape and confusion surrounding her financial aid and admission to college. At different times she reported that she had full scholarships to each of the four universities. She reported that her admission to one university was denied because of a mistake in the registrar’s office. She alleged that her low SAT scores kept her from being admitted to this university, but that her essay and her ACT scores would have gotten her admitted, if they had not been lost. One other subject of importance was also mentioned with less regularity. No. 1 reported an ongoing battle between her boyfriend’s parents and herself. Her version of the disagreement centered on the fact that she was not of the same religion as her boyfriend’s family, and that she was being victimized by religious prejudice. At various times she reported that his mother was gossiping behind her back and spreading rumors about her. She said that his mother was blaming all of her son’s academic problems on her. The rest of the group was supportive of No. 1 in her conflict with the boy’s mother. Efforts by the instructor to get No. 1 to identify any role she played in the conflict with the mother were ineffective. The other student’s reactions reinforced her view that she was the one being victimized. The only time No. 1 ever cried in two years in Homecourt was over this issue. On February 23, as Homecourt was ending, No. 1 talked about her relationship with her boyfriend’s family. She did so with a great deal of sarcastic humor. When the teacher asked her if she really thought that it was funny, she cried and said, “No. It
hurts. I'm not a bad person.” The implications of this last phrase were never acknowledged by the rest of the group; and No. 1 never again spoke about her relationship with that family except in sarcastic, satirical, and self-serving tones. The importance of that phrase—"I'm not a bad person"—took on added meaning in light of developments outside of Homecourt that No. 1 never revealed in Homecourt. She never mentioned in Homecourt that she had been dismissed from the cheerleading squad early in the semester. She was the only cheerleader to ever be dismissed in the school's 25-year history. She also never mentioned that there were other issues more important to his parents than her religious affiliation.

Student No. 1 had almost completely lost credibility by the end of the semester at least with the teacher and with Student No. 3, who started the year as No. 1's best friend. No. 1 talked about the difficulty in determining which college to attend when it was doubtful that she could be accepted to any school at all. She talked about all of her scholarships when there were none. Most of the information that No. 1 lied about was very difficult to check. Many times the revelation that she was lying came from a confidential source. The teacher had several conferences about No. 1 with her school counselor. Although it was established that No. 1 did a great deal of self-serving distorting, it was never clear how the teacher should respond to it. No one could be sure whether she had "stepped over the line" and actually believed her own distortions or whether she was just so desperate that she needed to maintain a public image, even one that was so at odds with reality. Student No. 3 was sure that No. 1 was just lying, pure and simple. There were times that she stretched the truth beyond any ability to rationalize her stories as merely "psychological wish-fulfilling
mistakes. For example, when completing the form to announce each student's honors at graduation, No. 1 listed receiving over $100,000 of scholarships. All of this was pure fabrication. Other students made outlandish claims, too, but they corrected them before the honors/baccalaureate ceremony. No. 1 never did correct her listings. Another example concerned the conflict between No. 1 and the cheerleader sponsor. No. 1's version of the conflict was significantly different than the sponsor's version. There were many other examples, too, but the final conclusion was that she had lost all credibility with the teacher and with Student No. 3.

This loss of credibility affected Homecourt significantly. When No. 1 talked in Homecourt, the teacher seldom asked questions or sought clarification. The teacher never confronted No. 1, and this was for a variety of reasons. During conferences with her counselor, the teacher and counselor decided that confrontation did not have much likelihood for success. It would require more effort to disprove her versions of the truth than was possible. The counselor and the teacher feared what might have happened if No. 1's "fantasy-world" was taken from her, and they believed that the possible consequences of such a confrontation was well beyond the scope of Homecourt. Furthermore, No. 1 was a very powerful and constructive force in the school at times. For example, on May 20 the Peer Helpers in first period were asked to roam the halls to find students who were upset and who needed to talk to the counselors about the suicide of a junior boy on the previous night. No. 1 was very effective in this capacity. She helped several students get to the proper counselors; she even helped a teacher. She was a positive force in the school at that time; however, she was not as helpful as she led Homecourt to believe. She told
Homecourt that she was up all night for three nights in a row talking to distraught students about the suicide. However, the counselors felt that the student body had actually come to terms with the suicide by the next day. None of them needed to talk to students at night. In summary, if graduating was producing some sort of emotional backlash or making her feel desperate, perhaps it was because she was losing her support group. Perhaps the discrepancy between who she was academically and who she really wanted to be was too great for her to face alone. At any rate, she had entered school as an "at-risk" student, and she was graduating. She was even admitted to a college. Still, her personal issues called for long-term professional evaluation and possible therapy which was well beyond the scope of public education to provide.

The first period Homecourt was clearly dominated by Student No. 4. From the fifth week on, every Homecourt began with and usually centered upon No. 4. She always began talking about her current problem before anyone else had a chance to speak. In many ways her domination was due to the absence of anyone else taking charge. She really had only one major issue, but related to it were four minor issues, each of which dominated an entire class period. These side issues were: 1) a trip to Nashville over spring break, discussed on March 3; 2) a trip to Washington, D.C. to visit her father, discussed on April 6 and later detailed on April 13; 3) Senior Prom plans, discussed during most of the month of April; and 4) her dilemma concerning a visit from a friend, discussed on April 14. With each of these topics, it was clear that more than the surface issue was involved. Attempts to get No. 4 to see the underlying problems produced frustration. The really big issue for No. 4 centered on the
need for family therapy. This issue surfaced on March 24 and was not resolved by the end of Homecourt in May. On March 24 she revealed that her family had received therapy in the past and that she presently felt a personal need to enter therapy again. She planned to talk to her pastor about her need for therapy after he convinced her that the family might benefit from family counseling. However, she postponed calling the pastor to make an appointment. On April 8, she finally made an appointment, and the first thing the pastor assigned her to do was to write a journal of her feelings about her father. It was not until April 14 that she reported to Homecourt that she had started the journal, and she never did reach a point of closure on it. Student No. 4's relationship with her family, especially her father, was the dominant conflict in her life. She had attempted suicide before and still talked about it as late as January. For her, introspection was a very slow process.

Many of the other students in Homecourt, especially Student No. 3, viewed No. 4 as "phony". Only Student No. 2 knew that she still thought about suicide. No. 4 knew No. 10 before class; they had been in choir together. They sat together all semester, and on most occasions, when No. 4 spoke she looked at No. 10 for comfort or support or approval first. She often turned to No. 10 to help her word her answers to questions. On at least one occasion she asked No. 10 to explain for her why she smiled when she talked about serious conflicts with her parents. Everyone in Homecourt believed that No. 4 and No. 10 were very close to each other. However, after Homecourt was over, an interview with No. 10 revealed that she hardly knew No. 4 before Homecourt; and she did not feel particularly close to her. No. 10 unknowingly and reluctantly became No. 4's crutch. Furthermore, the rest of Homecourt did not
know that No. 4 was a special education student with learning disabilities. Her cheerful facade and outgoing personality managed to hide the severity of her learning problems. A great number of difficulties came from the fact that she could not pass the TAAS test, and yet her father would not let her accept a waiver from TEA for her learning disabilities. The first period Homecourts included one of the "Top Ten" graduates, a National Merit finalist, and discussions about the difficulty in choosing the right college. Student No. 4 was all alone in worrying about simply graduating.

Student No. 4's behavior was much more observable to the majority of students in Homecourt, and by the end of the semester, proved to be much more negative influence upon Homecourt. Her negative effect on Homecourt came from the fact that she often dominated Homecourt to the exclusion of everyone else and from the fact that she never seemed to do anything about any of the problems about which she talked. Many students commented during the interviews that No. 4 became very frustrating. Student No. 3 confronted her very harshly on April 14 with the idea that her procrastination on the journal was really a "phony cop-out". The teacher intervened by softening No. 3's remarks. Still, No. 3 was speaking out of a frustration that others felt, too.

Both No. 1 and No. 4 had been in several previous Homecourts. No. 1 had been in at least one, and usually more, Homecourts every semester since the second semester of her sophomore year. No. 4 had been in three previous Homecourts. Therefore, they may have reached a "point of diminishing returns" for Homecourt. Any possible personal benefits from a support group might have been exhausted. The needs of No. 1 and No. 4 seemed to extend beyond support and called for evaluation and treatment from a mental health
professional. In fact, this final semester in Homecourt may well have been counter-productive for both of them.

2. What happens in Homecourt? In other words Is there a pattern that takes place?

In looking for a consistent pattern in Homecourt, the researcher began with a tentative hypothesis which was modified several times during the course of the target semester. The working hypothesis was: the success of Homecourt depends upon the surfacing of a student to function as a leader by the second or third meeting. This idea seemed to be validated by the Homecourts in previous semesters specifically Homecourt VI and XII. The least successful Homecourts developed either no leader, leadership was exerted too late in the semester to be effective, or the group members bestowed the leadership to disruptive rather than to productive students.

The first modification to the hypothesis was: attempts by a particular student to be a leader did not always succeed unless there was an incident of self-disclosure revealing vulnerability. For example, Student No. 44 attempted to exert leadership during the first meeting of his Homecourt seventh period on Wednesday, January 27. He suggested a topic by asking the group, “How do you handle stress?” Although No. 44 was an oriental senior male who graduated among the top ten graduates, his topic seemed to have no personal relevancy and was viewed as merely an intellectual exercise. The other students did not seem to be really interested in the subject, and this was the last time No. 44 initiated a topic. Student No. 28 also tried to exhibit leadership qualities albeit in a somewhat subversive way. He seemed to try to get the
other students to follow him along some path of confusion rather than into direct communication. Rather than gathering a following of the group members, he elicited feelings of alienation. Student No. 29 tried to lead her Homecourts through quiet example rather than overt behavior. On Tuesday and Wednesday she functioned as a perfect listening board for other students; however, any leadership she exerted was limited to Thursdays when she did engage in self-disclosure.

The second modification to the hypothesis became: self-disclosure was not enough in itself to develop leadership. The risk from self-disclosure had to be done by the "right" student, risking loss of group esteem. Students No. 3 and No. 10 were both very open by the second meeting of their Homecourt. They both expressed very intense feelings involving their respective families. No. 10 talked about the hostile reactions she received from her grandparents, and No. 3 revealed intense anger for her mother about past transgressions and how that anger affected her in the present. No. 27 managed to dramatically capture everyone's attention on February 17. He disclosed the difficulties being a hearing-impaired person living in a hearing world. As he spoke, the rest of the Homecourt participants were visibly touched. When he was asked how the group could help, he replied, "Just don't think we're stupid." The most painful aspect of being deaf, he said, was the way the hearing world treated him like he was stupid. The interpreter was also moved by this student's revelations. She knew that many of the students in the hearing-impaired program felt this way, but she had never known the actual depths of his feelings. The ironic fact was that during her class in sign language, No. 27 acted in a very immature and silly manner, actually causing many of the hearing students to view him as
unintelligent. Another example involved the first meeting of Thursday’s seventh period Homecourt which began with a very intense emotional disclosure by Student No. 47, a senior male. After the rules of Homecourt were explained and during the introductions, No. 47 expressed hostility toward school. Anger was unusual for this particular student, so the teacher asked him to elaborate on his feelings about school. As he spoke, No. 47 cried but was able to identify his anger as pain. He felt very hurt that his friends did not seem to take him seriously. The rest of the Homecourt expressed support and offered comfort. Of the seven Homecourts during the first week, this Homecourt was the most intense and the most serious. Nonetheless, the leadership displayed by No. 47 in modeling emotional introspection was short-lived. At the next meeting, he refused to talk further about the situation that was troubling him. An attempt to get him to realize that his behavior and his body language were the reasons for his friends not taking him seriously failed. In the past he had received a great deal of positive feedback for being happy-go-lucky and for always smiling. He could not understand how the friends that he felt so close to and so loyal to could not understand now how badly he felt, even though he continued smiling when he talked to them. Never again during the rest of the semester would he discuss such a personal subject. His attendance became sporadic, and he only came to four more meetings, usually late. Although this lack of commitment was not caused by reactions of others to his self-disclosure, his early leadership ceased for the semester.

In summary, none of the self-disclosures by these students resulted in a leadership position because they had not been held in high esteem by the groups before the revelations. This led to the third revision of the hypothesis:
leadership was not automatic in Homecourt. Some periods never developed a leader. A complete rejection of the original hypothesis resulted from this last modification. The data did not support the hypothesis. Instead, the subject of organization and patterns within Homecourt settled on each specific Homecourt.

Two particular Homecourts demonstrated the individuality of each Homecourt structure by exemplifying opposite approaches. First, the Homecourt that met seventh period on Tuesdays structured itself around themes rather than personalities. Issues, rather than people appeared to generate the most intense interest. These topics tended to intertwine. However, they can be separated artificially, for analysis' sake, into four separate entities or subtopics. The first theme involved friendship and was introduced during the first meeting on January 26. In this Homecourt the particular aspect of friendship that was initially broached addressed both the impact and the randomization of friendship. Everyone expressed that friendships had tremendous effects on their lives, but no one really knew how to make friendship occur. The best friendships seemed to have happened magically through chance rather than through conscious effort. For example, Student No. 33 reported that because his teachers made seating charts based on alphabetical order, he had an inordinate number of friends whose names were in the same part of the alphabet. No. 36 seemed to be particularly touched by the concept of chance in determining her friendships. She reported that her best friend was very important to her and she did not know how she could have made it through high school without her. However, upon analysis, she realized that her best friend just happened to live next door to her. If her family had
bought another house on another block, they might never have met one another.

The second theme dominating this Homecourt was concern about the future. The future was a topic on March 2, March 9, and March 30. At first the issue of "the future" concerned mainly college plans. Student No. 36 and No. 38 were particularly caught up in this issue. Each was having trouble deciding upon a college. Their first choices focused upon a college that would provide more distractions than study time. No. 38 wanted to go to school on the West Coast, because she had a romantic image of 1960's radicals and hippies still existing on campuses there. No. 33 could not come to a decision on a major. A look at the future for No. 37 brought her disturbing anxiety. No. 37, a junior girl and an honors student, was a gifted musician with an excellent academic future. She was undecided about whether she wanted to major in music or in premedical studies in college. Both were realistic possibilities. Although she realized that she did not have to make this decision soon, she knew that whichever one she chose, the other choice would probably close for her as a possible future. She did not want to close any of her doors and saw decisions about the future as eliminating her options. Even discussions about her family, which she gleefully termed as dysfunctional, never provoked the kind of sobriety or the anxiety which discussions about her future did.

The subjects of friendship and future plans came up several different times during the semester with differing degrees of seriousness and differing amounts of time spent examining them. However, the third issue was always a very serious issue for most of the participants. Whenever it came up, the students would each approach the subject from different perspectives and
always passionately. This issue could be referred to as religion, but it was more accurately a quest for spirituality. For three of the students, No. 29, No. 31, and No. 32 commitment to the Christian religion was a dominant factor in their lives. No. 32, a junior honors student and a National Merit semifinalist, was considering becoming a pastor. His family could not understand his commitment; and his intense passion for religion also separated him from most of his fellow students. This alienation was very serious and painful for him. Three other students, No. 30, No. 35 and No. 37, had recently come to view their Jewish heritage as a very powerful and definitive force in their lives. Student No. 33 was agnostic, although he was more articulate in defending the skeptical part of his agnosticism. However, the dominant spiritual leader of the group was really No. 34, a senior boy who was enrolled in some honors classes and who had come to Homecourt via his A.P. psychology class. He was very quiet and serious and he looked like a child from the 1960s with his long hair and the hint of a beard on the tip of his chin. Whenever he talked, he usually had very gentle and intense insights to share. His readings included Herman Hesse and Carl Jung, and he attended lectures by Ram Dass. He spoke of being overwhelmed by the humanity around him in school and by the amount of love he saw. He was one of those rare persons who can say things like that without being ridiculed or drawing laughter. A hint of drug use seemed to accompany his descriptions of altered states of consciousness and his perception of them as desirable. Whenever the subject of religion or spirituality came up, No. 34 kept the group on a philosophical plane which offended no one and yet stretched everyone in their respective searches for meaning. The discussion on February 23 became the longest, most intense period ever spent
on this issue, but it continued to come up on several other occasions, particularly because it intertwined so neatly into the fourth major issue, death.

Death was initially mentioned during the first meeting on January 26. During the preceding month, a junior at the school had died suddenly and unexpectedly during a simple surgery, and many of the students had attended her funeral. In the first meeting, No. 34 addressed the issue of death by disclosing that one of his best friends in seventh grade had committed suicide. By discussing his feelings, he led the group into the discussion of friendships mentioned earlier. On February 23, the subject of death again came up but within the context of religion. No. 38 discussed a religious conversion her father had experienced just before his death. No. 38 could not understand either the emphasis her father had placed on religion or the peace and contentment he had received from it. In fact, the subject of religion really confused her, and she could neither relate to nor understand the other students' views on religion. "I don't see what the big deal is; I mean, why bother thinking about it?" she asked. Yet, at the same time she was awed by her father's conversion and the peace of mind it gave him. On April 20, following the suicide of a junior boy, death was reexamined in the light of suicide. No. 33 and No. 38 both revealed that they had felt suicidal during junior high school, but neither one could identify what had changed to enable them to cease contemplating suicide.

In summary, period seven Tuesday Homecourt was a very intellectual Homecourt, and the conversations focused on topics rather than personalities. Perhaps this was not too surprising, considering the composition of this Homecourt. Of the eleven students, eight were enrolled in honors classes. Four of the students were, or went on to be, National Merit finalists and
semifinalists. Of the remaining three, two were relatively poor students academically who did not speak much in Homecourt because they were intimidated by the others.

The Homecourt that met during seventh period on Wednesday, on the other hand, never exhibited any consistent structure or leadership. Each meeting was like a separate Homecourt, as if there were twelve individual Homecourts rather than one Homecourt meeting twelve times. The main reason for this lack of continuity was the attendance rate in this Homecourt. The attendance rate was 75%. There were twelve students enrolled in this Homecourt, but all twelve were present only twice during the semester, February 24 and March 10. Although there was no consistent pattern between the different Homecourts, there were pattern within each Homecourt. Sometimes these patterns were most accurately viewed as a lack of any specific order.

3. How are students impacted by Homecourt outside of Homecourt?

When asked how Homecourt impacted their lives, students reported three areas of impact. The first consequence was a general improvement in communication skills. As one former student said, “After Homecourt I found myself asking different questions and listening differently. It was amazing. I could tell who had been in Homecourt by the way they paid attention and how they responded.” The mother of Student No. 22 reported that she noticed an observable improvement in the quality of communication with her daughter. The mother felt that she was able to talk to the daughter more openly and that
the daughter listened more completely. She credited this change directly to her
daughters enrollment in Homecourt and Peer Helper class. When Student No.
19 was asked how Homecourt affected her, she reported that her boyfriend
noticed a difference in their communication level. “We don’t fight like we used
to,” she said, “We fight as much but it’s different. We don’t fight as long; we get
things solved.”

The second change students reported as resulting from Homecourt was
an increase in their tolerance for other students. Five former students listed
tolerance for other students as the main benefit of Homecourt. As one student
said, “I learned to value other people’s differences.” Eleven students from the
target semester also mentioned a new appreciation of differences as a chief
value of Homecourt. This new tolerance was often expressed as the
development of a perspective in their own lives. As Student No. 9 said, “It made
me appreciate my family situation hearing about (Student No. 1’s) life. She’s
kind of amazing when you think about it.”

The third effect of Homecourt was an expanded awareness. Sometimes
this was an awareness of other students, as in the case of Student No. 8, a
senior girl who was an honors graduate. She said, “I was not aware that there
was so many different value systems in this school. I did not know how many
people got drunk each weekend, for example. Being in all honors classes
during high school, every class had the same students in them, I guess I really
lost touch with the other approaches to school. That was the best thing about
Homecourt. I did not really feel close to the others, not as much as the ones in
my classes, but it sure opened my eyes.” No 26 echoed this sentiment
particularly as it related to the hearing-impaired program. At other times the
awareness referred to a self-awareness. For example, by the end of the semester, No. 3 was much more aware of her own anger toward her mother and how it affected her behavior. No. 10 reported being more aware of her feelings, also. At the beginning of the school year, Student No. 18 was distressed over her inability to cry or feel any emotions. By the end of the second semester, she no longer felt this way. She credited Homecourt with playing a part in the change.

The researcher felt that there were three other ways that Homecourt impacted students beyond Homecourt. First, several students enrolled in Homecourt made efforts to enroll other students into Homecourt. These referrals were evidence of their increased awareness of other students' needs. At least six student enrolled during the target semester referred additional students to Homecourt and a total of 18 students were referred to the teacher to discuss personal problems. Second, Homecourt provided a vehicle by which students could make self-referrals. For example, one student who had been in Homecourt during her sophomore year but was not enrolled during her junior year, came to the teacher of Homecourt when she was experiencing suicidal feelings. Because of her prior experience in Homecourt, she came to the teacher at a time of personal crisis. Student No. 3 also revealed a suicide attempt to the teacher while withholding this information from others. Third, Homecourt often provided a springboard for more intensive counseling. Quite often the teacher communicated to the school counselors in a way that would not compromise confidentiality. He made a comments like, "You need to talk to Student No. 19" or "Have you talked to No. 45 about her weekend?" Often times the teacher would simply tell the student to talk to the counselor about a
particular issue. At least half of the students were impacted by counselor interactions that were initiated during Homecourt. At other times, an issue would be introduced in Homecourt only to be dealt with in a session with a school counselor. Students No. 3, No. 4, No. 18, No. 19, and No. 20 particularly benefited from continuing in more detail conversations begun in Homecourt.

4. How enduring are the effects of Homecourt?

Upon completion of all Homecourts for the spring semester of 1993, evaluation forms were given to the participants. (See Appendix A.) This form included a Likert scale that attempted to measure the perceptions of the students involved in Homecourt and contained some criteria based on a Rogerian model of effective communication. Students were asked to rate seven statements on a scale of 1 to 5, "strongly disagree" to "strongly agree". The first statement was simply a general assessment of Homecourt: "Homecourt made a positive difference in my life". The next six statements were Rogerian in origin. Two of the statements concentrated on "understanding", two concentrated on "positive regard", and two concentrated on congruency, here designated "honesty". The students were asked to determine if these characteristics applied to the other students in their Homecourt and to the teacher. Open-ended questions designed to supplement and to serve as a starting place for the interviews followed the statements. This emphasis on subjective perceptions was consistent with both the objectives of Homecourt and with the nature of nondirective instruction. In the absence of clearly-defined, objective standards by which to evaluate Homecourt, the target was essentially the
students' perceptions; therefore, by necessity, evaluation centered on those perceptions. The evaluation form in Appendix A includes the following statements:

1. Homecourt made a positive difference in my life.
2. The other students in Homecourt understood me.
3. The teacher in Homecourt understood me.
4. The other students in Homecourt liked me.
5. The teacher in Homecourt liked me.
6. The other students in Homecourt were honest.
7. The teacher in Homecourt was honest.

The same evaluation form was sent to 40 former students enrolled in previous Homecourts. These 40 former students represented a cross section but they were not randomly selected. Therefore, it is difficult to justify any findings using these former students; they may or may not be representative of the population of former students enrolled in Homecourt. Little effort was made to insure the integrity of the sampling. These students were contacted based upon to a variety of criteria. For example, one very pragmatic concern was whether or not there was access to a student's correct address. Some students were contacted because the researcher considered them to be more articulate, and thus more able to complete the questionnaire and perhaps contribute more useful insights. No one was selected because he or she might give positive answers to the questions. In fact, the researcher made an effort to contact any person who might have indicated that they had negative experiences as a result of their Homecourt involvement. Of the 40 who were sent evaluation forms, only 26 returned them. Another eight were returned unclaimed by the post office.
Attempts to analyze the answers by year of involvement in Homecourt proved to be impossible, because so many students were enrolled in multiple Homecourts over several different years. The table outlining these findings is in Appendix F.

Besides being asked to complete the first open-ended statement, the former students were asked five additional open-ended questions to serve as a substitute for personal interviews. (See Appendix A.) These five questions were:

1. Do you remember Homecourt as a positive or negative experience? Why?
2. How did Homecourt affect you?
3. Have your views of Homecourt changed since you participated?
4. If given the opportunity, would you participate in Homecourt again?
5. Do you have any additional comments that would help explain Homecourt?

To the first question soliciting the best feature about Homecourt, five former students listed “meeting new people”. Five more stated that to be able to talk and to be listened to were the best things. Three felt that Homecourt reduced their feelings of alienation. Three more said the best aspect was the stress-free and relaxing nature of Homecourt.

Regarding the first additional question, all but one of the respondents said that Homecourt was a positive experience. She was also the only one who said that if given the opportunity, she would not participate in Homecourt again. Explaining her responses in the comment section of the sheet, she stated, “I feel that it (Homecourt) was more geared towards the "alternative" lifestyle and
students with family or social problems. I did not have significant problems in high school and therefore never felt like I truly fit into the Homecourt group."

To the question "How did Homecourt affect you", five responses described an expanded awareness of other students and of their problems and four mentioned making new friends. As one student stated, "I learned to value other people's differences." Three students felt their self-esteem was improved and three more reported growth of communication skills. The majority of students reported that their views of Homecourt had not changed. However, the four who said their views had changed found that their appreciation of Homecourt had increased. No one reported developing negative views.

The comment section of the sheet provided many revealing and personal testimonials about Homecourt. As mentioned earlier, Student E credited Homecourt with opening the door for him to enter therapy. Another student wrote that Homecourt "was a dream come true. I could not have made it through my senior year without it. It was the only time I didn't feel alone." Still another student attested that, "it (Homecourt) taught me who I was before I knew there was a me." And one more student described Homecourt as "one of the places where I felt I belonged." However, perhaps the most insightful comment came from Student B. To the question, "Do you have any other comments that would help explain Homecourt", Student B described a moment that is perhaps the quintessential Homecourt experience, embodying in one situation the many facets of Homecourt:

"I heard the funniest joke in the world in Homecourt. The day that the boy killed himself at [another high school in the same district] a girl came into Homecourt because she had been on that campus, across the hall from the suicide. Although she
wasn't in Homecourt, she'd been sent--I think by [a teacher at the home school]--because she was extremely upset. We talked about the suicide until there was nothing left to say. There was the kind of tension created by extra-long silence, until [a male student] touched my desk and said, "Ask me if I'm an orange." I looked at him gratefully, "Are you an orange?" He looked down quickly and shook his head, "No." God, it took 20 minutes to restore order. We laughed until we cried. We'd get quiet, and then someone would remember and start laughing again. That's Homecourt."

5. How did the positive feedback from former students compare with perceptions of students enrolled in the target semester?

The highest possible score on an evaluation form was 35, meaning that a student "strongly agreed" on every statement. Of the 43 students during the spring semester of 1993 who evaluated Homecourt, nineteen rated it above 33. Fourteen rated it below 30. Because No. 1 and No. 30 were enrolled in three Homecourts each while No. 3 was in five, their ratings comprised the lowest 11 ratings. Low ratings given by No. 26 and No. 28 were predictable, because a lack of closeness marked their particular Homecourt. Additionally, because No. 40 and No. 45 expressed hostility toward other members of Homecourt during the last meeting, their low evaluations were not surprising either. No. 42 indicated that Homecourt was a favorable experience; however, his rating of 30 seemed rather low until an item-by-item analysis was done on his score. His lowest assessment of "3", came on the statement, "The other students in Homecourt liked me". However, for the statement, "Homecourt made a positive
difference in my life”, he refused to be limited to “5”, using “6” as his evaluation. Looking at the averages for all of the Homecourts, the highest rated statement, a score of 4.8, was the last statement, “The teacher in Homecourt was honest”. The lowest average rating, a 3.9, was for the second statement, “The other students in Homecourt understood me”. The first statement, “Homecourt made a positive difference in my life” had an average rating of 4.4.

There were only six individual ratings of “2” from evaluators, and none of these was for the first, fourth, fifth, or seventh statements. Two of the “2” ratings were for the second statement. Student No. 45 felt misunderstood, and so did No. 3 in period one on Tuesdays. No. 45 felt judged for her drug use and No. 3 apparently felt misunderstood only during Tuesdays first period. The only “2” on the third statement was accurate and was an assessment from No. 28. The three “2” ratings on the sixth statement regarding students’ honesty came from Students No. 1 twice and No. 3 once. Both were reactions to Student No. 4 and were affected by each other’s assessments.

Only three Homecourts averaged a total score less than 30; two of them were first period Tuesday, 29.8, and also Thursday, 29. The other was fourth period on Wednesday, 28.3. The highest scores were in seventh period Thursday, 33.5, and also Tuesday, 32. See Appendix E for complete charts on the evaluation sheets.

The scores for both former students and current students were found to be fairly consistent. There was a one-point difference between the average scores of both groups. The average score for former students was 31.5, while the average for current students was 30.5. On individual statements, the largest difference was on the sixth statement, “The other students in Homecourt were
honest”. There was a difference of 0.5. The third and fourth statements averaged the same for both groups, 4.4 and 4.3, respectively.

The bottom of the evaluation form included two open-ended, incomplete statements designed to be completed by the students enrolled in Homecourt during the spring of 1993. (See Appendix A.) These sentence-completions supplemented the Likert scales statements and served as a beginning point for the interviews. The two statements were:

1. The best thing about Homecourt was...
2. The thing about Homecourt that needs to be changed is...

Seventeen students responded to the first statement that meeting new students was the best thing. Ten more students said that their expanded awareness of the experiences of different students was the best thing. The atmosphere of freedom embodied by Homecourt was the best thing to another 14 students.

Seventeen students answered the second statement by saying that nothing about Homecourt needed to be changed. Five responses indicated that the tendency to focus on one person needed to be changed; however, three of those five responses came from Student No. 1 who was referring to No. 4. Five answers maintained that Homecourt needed to be longer, although it was never clear whether the responses meant “longer than one period” or “longer than one semester”. Four responses indicated a need for more structure or more direction. This seemed contradictory to the 14 responses expressing that the best thing was the atmosphere of freedom. Contradictory responses also occurred on other issues. Three people said Homecourt was too small. Only one said it was too large. One student felt that more
homogeneity was needed in the make-up of the groups, but another student felt that more variety was needed.

Emergent Research Questions

Because qualitative research is an iterative process, analysis in an ongoing part of data collection and is constantly being revised. This gathering and reforming is consistent with the theory behind qualitative research (Bogdan & Biken, 1982; Miles & Huberman, 1984; Spradley, 1980). During the data collection period of this study three additional research questions were formulated. The first question concerned the overlapping impact of three other programs upon Homecourt. The second question concerned the role of the teacher of Homecourt and the third question concerned the nondirective nature of Homecourt.

1. How did Peer Helper class, T.O.P.S., and psychology class impact Homecourt?

Of the 55 students enrolled in Homecourt during the spring semester of 1993, 23 were Peer Helpers and two more became Peer Helpers during the semester. Out of eight Homecourts, two Homecourts were composed totally of Peer Helpers and Peer Helpers made up the majority in four of the others. In the remaining two Homecourts, Peer Helpers composed almost 50% of the students enrolled. The line between Peer Helpers and Homecourt was blurred to many students, counselors, and teachers; however, Homecourt existed before Peer Helpers, and the process by which Peer Helpers came to dominate
Homecourt evolved during the intervening semesters.

During the spring of 1988, as a reaction to several suicides in the local district, the SAP directors began looking into effective peer counseling programs throughout the country. Their search settled on a program out of California entitled "Natural Helpers". The Natural Helpers program centers around three components. First, a survey is given to the student body. The survey asks students to name which students they would talk to during a period of personal crisis. All of the Natural Helpers must be selected from this survey. In other words, students, rather than faculty, select the Natural Helpers. The selection process is not determined by numbers only, as representation of various social groups in the school is considered. As part of the survey, teachers are also selected. Second, the identified students and teachers attend a weekend retreat to learn "The Helping Skills". The rationale behind this program is that if these are the people students are talking to already, they should be trained to function more effectively and constructively. The training involves active listening skills, problem solving steps, establishing the Natural Helpers' limits, making referrals to outside agencies when appropriate, and teaching the helpers to take care of themselves. The third part of the program is the class which can be taken for credit and is an extension of the retreat. The class involves refining the helping skills and learning more information about special areas of concern like drug abuse or sexually transmitted diseases. Part of the class includes being assigned two or three days per week to an elementary or junior high school where a Natural Helper is available to those students, as well.

By the fall of 1989, several students at each campus of the local district
had been identified to attend a weekend retreat to learn the Natural Helpers Model of “The Helping Skills”, and by the fall of 1990, with the state approval, Peer Helper class was officially added to the list of classes offered at each school. (The name Peer Helpers was selected to be used instead of Natural Helpers, although all of the training material and lesson plans still carry the Natural Helpers' logo.) This first class on the particular campus of the research had a small enrollment of only eight students and met the last period of the day. The following year the enrollment was only twelve and the class was scheduled during the middle of the school day. In the fall of 1992, Peer Helper classes were offered three periods each day. During first period, thirteen students were enrolled. Fourth period had five, and seventh period had four Peer Helpers.

The paths of Homecourt and Peer Helper class crossed early in their respective histories. When the Peer Helper class first began in 1990, Homecourt had already been established. Recruitment of Peer Helpers into Homecourt was the first and only involvement at that point. In the Fall of 1991, the idea was voiced to use one period of Peer Helper class for Homecourt. At that point, a student, No. 42, was referred to Homecourt by several teachers and a counselor. One teacher in particular wanted a place that she could send No. 42 when he needed to leave the classroom. The only period where there was any chance for No. 42's enrollment in Homecourt was during Peer Helper class. Once presented, the idea of using Peer Helper class for the scheduling of Homecourt proved to have several advantages. At that time, the size of Peer Helper class was small. The size enabled Peer Helpers to add to the enrollment of Homecourt without overwhelming it. Combining Peer Helpers and Homecourt made both programs seem more efficient.
Homecourt was scheduled during the teacher's conference periods. Because of budget issues, the luxury of having two conference periods was no longer feasible, thereby necessitating either a cut-back of the number of Homecourts offered or finding an alternative method for scheduling them. In 1992, there were no conference periods at all scheduled for the instructor; so he taught four academic classes each day and three Peer Helper classes. Homecourt would have had to have been canceled if it could not be scheduled during placements for Peer Helpers.

A precedent of using Peer Helper class for Homecourt was established as early as 1990. From the beginning, Peer Helper class had a built-in element of flexibility to provide for the emotional needs of the Peer Helpers. The instructor told each class that their personal needs were more important than the curriculum. At various times during the first semester, different Peer Helpers asked the class to help with particular problems. Class became, for all practical purposes, a sort of Homecourt for Peer Helpers. This role was expanded to others, and Peer Helper class soon functioned as a little-known mini-crisis center within the school setting. For example, one day a Peer Helper brought a "visitor" to class. The visitor was actually a student from another class who had recently been released from psychiatric treatment. The student was being treated rudely by some students in another class and he erupted in an outburst of anger; he threatened to kill the other students. Peer Helper class became his "defusing zone" on that particular day. On another occasion, two sophomore students came to Peer Helper class, because they felt guilty for the role they had played in getting a friend into a nonvoluntary psychiatric hospitalization. By the spring of 1991 every Friday in Peer Helper class was
spent with "guests" from the school utilizing Peer Helper class as a support system. This was done with administrative support but not with complete faculty awareness. In other words, while it was not official policy, it was not kept a secret.

Furthermore, it was altogether fitting and proper that Peer Helpers became directly involved with Homecourt. Although Peer Helpers were the students recognized by fellow classmates as being the most helpful, many of the Peer Helpers had histories of personal difficulties. It was no surprise to find Peer Helpers who had experienced suicide attempts or of drug abuse problems. Included with examples of students with exemplary personal lives were also students who had been treated for such serious problems as eating disorders and drug addictions. A roll call of all the Peer Helpers over the past few years would find honor graduates, including a valedictorian, as well as "at risk" students with little academic achievement. The Peer Helper program has been infused with drop-outs as well as with National Merit finalists. For example, during the spring semester of 1993, the period of data collection, within the 25 Peer Helpers enrolled in Homecourt were eight with suicide attempts in their past, three diagnosed with learning disabilities, three who had been treated for drug abuse, and one who was diagnosed as having an eating disorder. In fact, to some faculty members, Peer Helpers took on the identity of being an "at risk" program.

The involvement of Peer Helpers has had both a positive and a negative effect on Homecourt. In a positive way, Peer Helpers brought into Homecourt some skills in communicating with others and a sensitivity for other peoples' concerns. They provided a nurturing element, and they knew how to share their
own concerns. They provided role models for others, both in sharing and in overcoming emotional problems. The impact of their demonstrations of self-disclosure cannot be overestimated as a factor in the bonding in Homecourt.

Two specific examples illustrate the positive traits Peer Helpers brought to Homecourt. In the fall of 1992, the first hearing-impaired student, Student No. 25, enrolled in Homecourt. He was recruited to join Homecourt, because he was having a difficult time adjusting to high school and because the first hearing-impaired Peer Helper was enrolled in the same class. Several class sessions met before No. 25 appeared. He had various excuses for missing Homecourt, but it was obvious that he was reluctant to join. When he finally appeared, he was asked to introduce himself and tell the Homecourt about himself. He then proceeded to tell how sad he was and how terribly alone he felt at this school. He talked for fully five minutes, using an interpreter, expounding upon his theme of alienation and fear. When he was finished, the instructor asked him, “How can we help?” He looked up and said, “Just say ‘hello’ when you see me in the halls.” A Peer Helper then said, “How do you sign ‘hello’?” The entire Homecourt learned to sign hello. The change in the student was immediate and very dramatic. He walked through the halls with his head held higher, and he no longer hid his eyes beneath his baseball cap. The appropriateness of the Peer Helper’s response and the sensitivity it demonstrated illustrated the benefits of Peer Helpers in Homecourt.

The second positive example comes from student No. 41 during a day when she was not enrolled in Homecourt. Her counselor informed the Peer Helper class that No. 41 needed their help. During the last period one Friday, No. 41 told the Peer Helpers that her friend had committed suicide the night
before. The friend was from an adjacent community and had called her right before the suicide. She said she was feeling guilty for not being at home for the call. She cried and expressed great sorrow, guilt, and confusion. The Peer Helpers listened to her tears and gave her all the support that they could. One volunteered to accompany her to the funeral, and several gave her their home phone numbers so that she could call them if she needed more help. On Monday, it was discovered that everything she had said was a lie. She had fabricated the entire story and manufactured the tears. When the Peer Helpers were told of the deception, the entire class responded with sympathy for her. None expressed hostility. All of them appreciated the desperation she must have felt to concoct such a story. There was never any rancor, and the class continued to be supportive and pleasant to her throughout the rest of the year.

One of the gateways into Homecourt has always been through psychology class. Recruitment for the first Homecourt centered on students enrolled in psychology classes. The Homecourts of the spring semester 1993 had 16 students who came directly from psychology classes and another three who came indirectly. Over one-third of the enrolled students were impacted first by psychology class. However, psychology effected Homecourt in more ways than just supplying students.

First of all, psychology class generated an interest in the whole process of talking and communicating about personal issues. To some extent psychology class provided the theory and rationale behind Homecourt. The students often perceived Homecourt as a type of seminar on psychology or as a hands-on experience in psychology. The psychology instructor used many personal examples in his lectures, and the students made a connection
between the examples and Homecourt.

Furthermore, quite often over the years, Homecourt has expanded upon themes and subjects that began in psychology class. A lecture on Alfred Adler, for example, led to a discussion on the goals of misbehavior which in turn led students in Homecourt to analyze their own goals of misbehavior. A lecture on Virginia Satir led to a general discussion of communication patterns both inside and outside of family bonds. Several year ago, a discussion seeking clarification about Maslow's concept of "peak experiences" produced a conversation that proved to be so moving that most Homecourts since have replicated the same conversation. The students shared their "peak experiences". Although their concepts of "peak experience" might not have been what Maslow had in mind, the sharing proved to be quite bonding and revealing. Perhaps the most direct transfer of psychology class to Homecourt involves the last activity of the semester in each Homecourt. The last two meetings of each Homecourt have centered around the concept of "warm fuzzies" as invented by Eric Berne. In Homecourt, the exchange of warm fuzzies is allotted to the last two meetings of Homecourt and is done in four rounds. The exchange of warm fuzzies, which came directly from psychology class, is a very powerful activity for students and may be the most significant cause of positive feelings about Homecourt.

Teens Offering Peer Support, T.O.P.S., was yet another program that overlapped and impacted Homecourt. During the spring of 1993 only six of the students enrolled in Homecourt had a previous history of T.O.P.S. involvement. However, in other semesters, membership in T.O.P.S. had been closely aligned with Homecourt. T.O.P.S. was a feeding ground for Homecourt in more than
one way. At least two years before Homecourt, T.O.P.S. was created as an extracurricular social organization. In the beginning it was called the "Anti-Social Club". The Anti-Social Club was an oxymoron created in a tongue-in-cheek manner to foster communication of a free-floating, uncensored nature. It was a precursor of Homecourt. The building principal at the time gave approval for its creation provided that nothing in its name or in its activities could be misconstrued as psychological therapy. The purpose was to reach out and contact the students who were most alienated at the school. At that time, the term "socials" was used by student critics to designate conformist groups; no one identified with the term or used it to describe his or her own group. Socials were always "other students". Therefore, the term anti-social carried a certain status as well as a covert meaning. The self-deprecating and tongue-in-cheek nature of the Anti-Social Club was expanded in recruitment announcements and posters. It was always listed as being sponsored by either the "Society for the Prevention of Mental Health" or the "Society-for-the-Friends-of-Those-Who-Have-No-Friends". Members tended to come from either psychology classes or from physics classes, because the two faculty members who were its sponsors taught these two classes. Although the Anti-Social Club was always a sort of "in-joke", it produced a loyal membership of about a dozen students each year.

Although it was an early version of Homecourt, the Anti-Social Club was quite different. The attendance at the Anti-Social Club was very flexible. It was never the same group of students. Even though there were generally a loyal few students who attended every meeting, there were also new students at each meeting, plus former students, guests from other schools, and so forth. One never knew who would appear at an Anti-Social Club meeting. On one
occasion, for example, the PTA sent a representative to hear student views on the merits of parental education. Because of the lack of continuity of personnel, the Anti-Social Club discussed issues on a superficial level and never attempted to delve into anything very personal. Unlike Homecourt, generalities were never made specific. The students sat in a circle and exchanged ideas about whatever issue was brought up for the week. Racism, sexism, and quality of education, among other issues, were all topics discussed at various times. However, seldom, if ever were the issues brought to a personal level. For example, a discussion on date rape stayed impersonal, and no one was encouraged to share revealing details on the subject. If students ventured into any areas of self-disclosure, the topic was then usually gently steered away from them. Humor was the main intervention that kept the level of intensity light. Mainly, the students in the Anti-Social Club laughed a lot while they also discussed serious topics.

The Anti-Social Club directly affected Homecourt by providing many of its first recruits. In fact, the first Homecourts had at least one member of the Anti-Social Club in each of them, and the consistent attendees of the Anti-Social Club were all enrolled in a Homecourt.

By the fall of 1991 the Anti-Social Club was renamed "T.O.P.S.". There were four reasons for this change. First, many parents complained about the group's name and would not let their children attend an organization called anti-social. Second, many students, particularly sophomores, were intimidated by the name Anti-Social Club. Third, every other school in the district, particularly the junior high schools, had a chapter of T.O.P.S. Trained, supervised, and inspired by the SAP, T.O.P.S. was a cornerstone to prevention
programs at the secondary level. Fourth, a stipend was available for the sponsor of T.O.P.S.

Since its name change, T.O.P.S. has attracted a different type of student, one less alienated and less loyal. It still meets one day each week after school, and every year a T.O.P.S. training session is given for interested students. The training is conducted outside of the school setting. It involves a complete day away from the campus and is led by either the head of the district SAP or by a consultant from outside of the district. The first training sessions were done by professional drug counselors from a local mental health center. Although the training and the meetings have not generated the loyalty or the passion associated with the Anti-Social Club, they still provide a source of referral for Homecourt. The line of demarcation between T.O.P.S. and Homecourt is much clearer than the line between the Anti-Social Club and Homecourt; however, to many students who have not experienced either, the distinction between Homecourt and T.O.P.S. is not clear. This confusion has never been an issue to participants in Homecourt, though.

Homecourt did not operate in a vacuum, because Peer Helpers, T.O.P.S., and psychology classes all joined to mutually affect it. Homecourt has generally benefited from the overlapping of these programs. The school's psychology course and T.O.P.S. have both been helpful to Homecourt, and the Peer Helper program has literally, enabled Homecourt to exist. Without the class periods provided by Peer Helper placements, Homecourt either would have ceased to exist or would have been limited to only one or two periods per week. The Peer Helpers themselves have been very positive influences in Homecourt, too. The negative effects of Students No.1, No. 3, No. 4 and No. 30 during the spring of
1993 were unusual exceptions. Besides, any negative impact by Student No. 1 in 1993 should be viewed in the light of the very positive influence she exerted during her sophomore and junior years.

2. Was Homecourt a function of the personality of the teacher?

Homecourt, Peer Helpers, psychology classes and T.O.P.S. are all very different programs, but they share one consistent element of continuity: they are supervised by the same individual. To better understand the underlying nature of these programs, a look at the roles this teacher plays is necessary. The instructor's primary responsibility is to teach the high school's psychology course. T.O.P.S. meets after school, and Homecourt began as a voluntary program during his conference period. Peer Helper class was a logical teaching assignment for him, as well, because he was selected on the Peer Helper survey as a teacher that students would talk to in times of crisis. Due to his involvement with T.O.P.S., Homecourt, and Peer Helpers plus his position as head of the campus SAP, this instructor considers himself to be a complement to the school's counseling department. Thirteen years of experience teaching psychology, a background in counselor education, past experience as a special education teacher of emotionally disturbed adolescents and special training in drug education lend to support this role, as well. He is careful to maintain a reputation among both the administrators of the school and the counseling department that he has established his limitations, including an awareness that, although he functions somewhat like a counselor, he is not one. Therefore, he is trusted not to step over the thin line that exists between
providing student support and engaging in psychological counseling. This
distinction serves as the foundation for the programs he has established.

The fact that all these programs are supervised by the same individual
provided a problem for this research study of Homecourt. Nearly all of the
students in Homecourt had some type of relationship with the teacher before,
after, and during Homecourt. During the spring semester of data collection, of
the fifty-five students enrolled in Homecourt, only ten (Students No. 23, No. 24,
No. 28, No. 35, No. 41, No. 49, No. 50, No. 51, No. 52, and No. 54) had never
been in any of the other programs. (Of those ten, two dropped out of
Homecourt, No. 50 and No. 54. Two were dropped from school, No. 24 and No.
51. No. 23 and No. 54 went on to enroll in psychology class the next year. No.
28 and No. 35 both re-enrolled in Homecourt. No. 41 and No. 49 transferred to
other schools.) In other words, of the ten, five went on to participate in at least
one of the programs the next year. 50 of the 55 members of Homecourt had a
relationship with the instructor in addition to participating in Homecourt. A
fundamental dilemma for the research became trying to ascertain if the results
of Homecourt were tied to the program design or if the personality of the
instructor was the key ingredient. Would Homecourt be the same with a
different instructor? At least one counselor felt that Homecourt was tied to the
individual teacher. Interviewed in May of 1993, this counselor made very
favorable observations and was extremely supportive of Homecourt. One
of these observations included the following thought:

"The value of Homecourt is that it provides
a safe place for kids. It is not a place to refer "sick"
kids to, although some may select it. It is a real
positive force, not as deep as counseling, not a
substitute for counseling but still a valuable place for kids. By being rather nondirective it requires certain traits by the leader. It can't be led by a coach with a free period. It needs a high trust level from the students, and the leader must trust kids and have faith in them. And it is very important that the leader recognize his limits."

In the follow-up questionnaires and surveys sent to past participants of Homecourt, a theme that occurred with distinct regularity indicated that the teacher was the key element in Homecourt for many students. The researcher was disturbed by this observation.

If an attempt to replicate Homecourt is undertaken, the effects from these other three programs must be noted and considered. For some, the influences from these programs might be considered a liability rather than an asset. For example, counseling students to whom one must assign grades, as might happen when a student enrolled in psychology class enrolls in Homecourt, seems to generate a conflict of interest, or at least, appears to jeopardize grading objectivity. Perhaps Homecourt has escaped the inherent difficulty of these different tasks, because it was not purely a counseling program, but rather a support group, a sort of extension of the curriculum. This view was most articulately expressed by Student No. 43, a Peer Helper also in T.O.P.S. and A.P. psychology. She remarked about Homecourt after completing psychology class, "I think students, me especially, can open up to the teacher of Homecourt more than to the counselor, because he (the teacher) sees us in classes and the hallways and everywhere and not just in his little office downstairs."

Being an effective teacher in Homecourt requires, more than anything
else, a fundamental belief in the program. As one counselor previously noted, “The leader must trust kids and have faith in them.” The spring semester of 1993 severely tested the teacher’s convictions, more so than any of the previous seven semesters. To the question of whether Homecourt was an extension of the teacher’s individual influence, an answer was tentatively reached. Although no real evidence exists to indicate that this semester’s Homecourts were any less productive than those in past semesters, the teacher felt that his performance and attitude suffered in comparison to the past. However, it is possible that this lack of correlation between the teacher’s subjective evaluation of his own performance and the evaluation of Homecourt productivity supports the conclusion that Homecourt is not necessarily a function of any particular teacher.

During this semester two factors played a role in developing a facsimile of “burnout” in the teacher. First, his choice to sacrifice his conference periods for Homecourt was unwise. Teaching seven periods every day, five days each week, with only lunch and one period per week for conferences and preparation, proved too demanding. It was too much for him, and by the middle of the semester, he continually felt physically and emotionally drained. The first factor complicated and intensified the second factor. The dishonesty and the incongruent behaviors demonstrated by students became exhausting. His frustration at not being able to establish an effective policy for dealing with their lies and incongruencies helped to escalate him to a point of emotional exhaustion. Instead of looking forward to Homecourt each day as he had during past semesters, the teacher found himself looking forward to May and the end of Homecourt. Instead of feeling validated in his viewpoints in
nondirective teaching, the teacher found himself questioning all aspects of the program. At one point, he pondered the possibility that his lack of a policy for dealing with lies and, indeed, his whole endorsement of nondirective teaching, might have been a rationalization for his own passive-aggressive nature. Thus, Homecourt became a crucible for the teacher's own self-doubts, a therapy session for himself. This uncomfortable questioning was eased by the eventual feedback he received from the participants in Homecourt. However, this particular semester was much more difficult for the teacher than it was for the students.

The teacher believed that the problem with his performance in the spring semester of 1993 was due to his abandonment of the principles of nondirective teaching as outlined by Rogers (1961). Of the three criteria needed for a nondirective teaching atmosphere, congruency was the most important according to Rogers. Congruency, also called genuineness or honesty, was the element the teacher felt that he had abandoned. The teacher felt that he had not been genuine or congruent during the semester especially with Students No. 1, No. 3, No. 4, and No. 30. Certainly there were reasons; however, the reasons (or rationalizations) did not change the fact that the principle was compromised.

By the end of the semester, as the analysis of all of the data was being completed, the researcher came to view congruency not as a target for the teacher as much as a direction for the teacher. In other words, congruency exists on a continuum and the teacher's performance may not have been as far along the continuum as he would have liked, but it was still further along the continuum than he at first acknowledged. The assessment by the students of
the teacher's honesty as recorded on the evaluation forms supports this conclusion. The teacher may not have measured up to his own standards of genuine or congruent behavior, but apparently, his performance was more congruent than the students were accustomed to from an adult. The researcher concluded that the pursuit of congruency has a positive effect whether it is completely obtained or not. Failing short of complete congruency does not diminish what is accomplished.

3. Was Homecourt really nondirective?

Presenting Homecourt as a model of nondirective teaching is perhaps misleading. In some ways, Homecourt did not conform to a nondirective model. The warm fuzzy activity at the end of each semester was certainly not within the parameters of nondirective methodology. Furthermore, the teacher was the center of far too many interactions to be considered strictly nondirective. Students talked mostly to the teacher, often making him the center of many Homecourts. In these ways Homecourt was not truly nondirective. However, in other ways it was. There were never any goals established for the students, nor was an agenda ever decided before a meeting. An attempt, mostly successful, was made to keep each Homecourt as spontaneous and self-sufficient as possible. The teacher avoided imposing both his vision of Homecourt and his personal values on his students. Perhaps the question of whether Homecourt was nondirective or not is simply a moot point.

The real essence of Homecourt is a very simple idea: there is value in an open discussion between students with a teacher present; and this value does not need to be defined ahead of time. This is an ancient idea with roots dating
back to Socrates. It has been expressed by many scholars, including Adler, Driekurs, and Glasser, as well as by Rogers. The idea itself is perhaps is an untestable hypothesis, an article of faith. With Homecourt, this idea produced a sense that more was accomplished than was attempted. Furthermore, when the subject of student change and growth is raised, a very emotional and controversial issue in the nation today, usually the debate centers on the issue of who will determine the direction of the changes. The Homecourt approach may be the safest way to resolve this controversy: allow the students to select the direction of their own changes. The guiding principle of Homecourt may or may not be an effective way to direct a counseling program, but it does seem to be the best, least offensive way to direct curriculum-extensions such as Homecourt. Simply stated, this principle is: one is only free to change if one is free to remain the same.
CHAPTER 5

THE DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

This study examined Homecourt, a nondirective support group at a public high school. Because of the nature of qualitative research, the researcher's discussion of the study is descriptive in the preceding chapters. However, this last chapter analyzes the study's findings in the following four sections: (1) an overview of the study, (2) findings based on the research question, (3) recommendations for the future of Homecourt, and (4) conclusions of the study.

Overview of the study

Homecourt is a gathering of students with one teacher present at all meetings. A Homecourt meets for one period each week to discuss topics of general interest. These topics are neither determined by the teacher nor are they selected ahead of time. Homecourt is a type of support group. However, most support groups are based on common areas of concern and have an agreed-upon objective. For example, drug rehabilitation support groups, eating disorder support groups and suicide survivor support groups have become accepted programs in many schools (Anderson, 1987; McGovern & DuPont, 1991). Unlike these groups, Homecourt has no common denominator among its students. In fact, this diversity among its members is a defining characteristic, and it is one of the most positive elements of the program.
Homecourt also differs from other models because of the absence of specific objectives or defined goals. For example, a support group for eating disorders concentrates on supporting its members in avoiding their personal eating problems. In Homecourt there are no common problems; therefore, there are no common goals. Each member has to develop his or her own objectives and purposes either consciously or subconsciously. The greatest power of Homecourt comes from the absence of specific learner outcomes. Because the program does not delineate any end-targets, each student is free to pursue personal objectives, and thus any growth or change is owned by the student. In other words, by not providing a direction, Homecourt empowers students to determine their own directions and growth. To the students this lack of direction is called "freedom" and is considered to be one of the most positive aspects of the program.

Due to the nondirective nature of Homecourt, confrontation and probing are not interventions that are employed. Because of the lack of probing, any disclosure by a student comes with full and conscious awareness of that student. Because there are no confrontations, students feel safe. There have been times, of course, when these policies have been tested, and students have lied in Homecourt and have acted in ways that interfered with group cohesiveness. However, because of the nature of Homecourt and the inevitability of the bell at the end of the period, confrontation is not the chosen intervention. The primary method of intervention is the phrase "how can we help?". The fact that this phrase is used by both the teacher and students demonstrates that Homecourt is effective in reducing feelings of alienation.
Each semester's Homecourts are completely different. Participating students enroll in Homecourt for one period per week and begin attending during the third or fourth week of a semester. Homecourt ends the week before final exams. Therefore, each Homecourt lasts about 12 or 13 weeks. After concluding each semester, students may elect to re-enroll in Homecourt for the next semester, assuming their schedules allow them to do so. Students who enrolled in Homecourt, are excused from regular classes for the assigned period once each week. An attempt is made to enroll students during study halls and gym classes so that they have minimal academic disruptions.

A Peer Helper class at the campus was used as part of this study. This class is given state graduation credit as a social studies elective. Two days each week, the Peer Helpers are “on placement”, usually going to work with students as local elementary schools or junior high schools. On the days of Peer Helper placements, Homecourts meet during the scheduled time for Peer Helper classes. The Peer Helpers may choose to enroll in Homecourt or they may choose a third day of off-campus placement instead. Prior to enrollment a permission slip must be signed by a parent and by the teacher whose class the student is missing. The permission slip includes a description of the program. (See Appendix C.)

The target semester for this study was the spring semester of 1993. Beginning on January 26, 1993, and culminating on April 29, 1993, a total of eight different Homecourts met each week, although three of the Homecourts actually functioned as one. Homecourts met on Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday during first, fourth, and seventh periods, while no Homecourt met
during fourth period on Thursday. The three days that met first period were the Homecourts that came to function as one Homecourt. A total of 55 students enrolled in Homecourt, although only 44 attended regularly.

This study revolved around collecting data from each Homecourt meeting. Field notes, which emphasized attendance, topics discussed, and other objective details, were taken at each meeting. Journal entries made each evening expounded on the more subjective and emotional details of the Homecourt sessions and the meanings of the objective data. Interviews conducted with the participants, counselors and some teachers were also an ongoing part of data collection. All data were coded to protect the anonymity of the participants, as well as to facilitate later organization of the data. At the end of the target semester, evaluation forms utilizing Likert scales and open-ended response questions were administered to the participants. Students from past semesters were also contacted and sent evaluation forms to supplement the information already. (See Appendix A.)

This study focused upon and was guided by the following research questions:

1. How does Homecourt foster bonding between students who have a wide variety of interests and backgrounds?
2. What happens in Homecourt? In other words, is there a pattern to the experience of Homecourt?
3. How are students impacted by Homecourt outside of Homecourt?
4. How enduring are the effects of Homecourt?
5. How does the positive feedback from former students compare with
Addressing the Research Questions

1. **How does Homecourt foster bonding among students who have a wide variety of interests and backgrounds?**

   When Homecourt promoted bonding, four factors emerged that seemed significant. First, the seating arrangement played an important role in fostering closeness. Second, the closing of Homecourt at the end of first semester was always very powerful in establishing bonding for the second semester. The last two meetings of Homecourt centered upon the exchange of "warm fuzzies", a concept borrowed from psychology class. Generally, the spring semester has always been more intense in terms of bonding than the fall semester because of the warm fuzzy exchange. Although it somewhat compromised the principles of nondirective teaching, this activity allowed students to share the positive feelings for each other which are often repressed socially. To put it another way, the activities at the end of a Homecourt gave students permission to express the positive feelings that built during the semester. By surfacing these feelings, the feelings expanded. Students reported feeling very touched by the appreciations voiced by other students. Adolescence can be seen as a time marked by self-consciousness and overly critical self-judgments. To receive praise and to be valued is a powerful, self-confirming experience. Therefore, seldom does a semester in Homecourt end without tears being shed. Third, it is easy to overlook the effects of the rules governing Homecourt, because they are dealt with rather hastily during the first meeting and never overtly expressed
again. However, the rules about being non-judgmental and especially about maintaining confidentiality were very important factors in creating an atmosphere for bonding. Because confidentiality was assured at the first meeting, students saw Homecourt as a place where it was possible to expose themselves without fear. As the semester progressed without the confidentiality rule being broken, trust and closeness resulted. The fourth factor was three specific student behaviors demonstrated most consistently by the two student who were identified as being the most effective Homecourt members. Students No. 12 and No. 29 displayed a serious-minded attitude, exhibited the body language of good communication, and risked being vulnerable.

The study also identified four factors that inhibited the development of closeness. First, the diversity of values, which many students viewed as the best aspect of the program, proved to be an obstacle for some students. Second, at times many of the students engaged in behaviors that were not conducive to good communication; they did not pay attention. Third, Student No. 30 engaged in many insensitive and avoidance behaviors that proved to be very detrimental to bonding. Fourth, Students No. 1 and No. 4 were very dishonest or incongruent with their behavior which damaged any progress toward bonding.

2. What happens in Homecourt? In other words, is there a pattern to the experience of Homecourt?

At the beginning of the research period, the researcher’s working hypothesis centered upon the need for strong student leadership to exert itself by the second or third meeting of Homecourt. The data from the target semester
ultimately led to the rejection of the hypothesis. Patterns were discerned only in individual Homecourts, rather than in Homecourts in general. One Homecourt, for example, structured itself around themes while others never developed a discernible structure.

3. How were students impacted by Homecourt outside of Homecourt?

The students identified three results of participation in Homecourt, and the researcher identified three additional effects. The students reported an improvement in communication skills, an increased tolerance of other students, and an increased awareness of both self and others. The researcher noticed that Homecourt produced incidents of referrals for other students, examples of self referrals, and provided a springboard for more intensive professional counseling.

4. How enduring were the effects of Homecourt?

From the Likert scales and free responses completed by former students, it was concluded that the effects of Homecourt are relatively enduring.

5. How consistent were the perceptions of Homecourt made by former students with those made by current students?

Although the Likert evaluation scales did not provide a definitive evaluation of Homecourt, they did provide a useful tool for comparing the perceptions of Homecourt over the years. The researcher’s impression that there was a consistent pattern of positive feedback on Homecourt was reinforced by the evaluation sheets from past students, because they proved
congruent with the results from the same scales used by the students of spring 1993. In fact, the difference between these two scores was minimal. Only a one-point difference existed between the total averages of each group.

During the course of the semester, three additional research questions emerged:

1. How did the overlapping nature of three other programs, Peer Helpers, T.O.P.S., and psychology class effect Homecourt?

   None of the three programs operated independently. Each program benefited the others, and all combined to effect significantly Homecourt. Although it is difficult to separate Homecourt from the other programs, the symbiotic relationship seemed to be a constructive one.

2. Was Homecourt a function of the personality of the teacher?

   A compounding variable for this study was the fact that all of the programs were taught or supervised by the same individual. The data from the semester supported the idea that the teacher was not the most significant factor in the success of Homecourt. Furthermore, although the teacher felt that he did not perform as well as he could or should have, the results from the Likert scale did not confirm his perceptions. The teacher judged himself more harshly than did the students.

3. Was Homecourt really nondirective?

   There were elements of Homecourt that did not conform to a pure model of nondirective teaching; however, the principles of a Rogerian approach was
never abandoned. At any rate, the essence of Homecourt was a very simple idea: there is a positive benefit when students get together and communicate.

Recommendations for the Future of Homecourt

In order to validate Homecourt, more objective data need to be available. Reliance on a subjective evaluation and anecdotal research, although adequate for this study, must be supplemented by more observable and measurable criteria to accurately assess the impact that Homecourt has on students. This study has demonstrated that evidence exists to support the belief that Homecourt impacts students who are “at risk”. However, at this time there is no quantitative research on Homecourt to identify either the extent or the specific area of impact.

To carry out a quantitative study, identifying measurable objectives, while still operating a nondirective program without objectives, is a problem that will have to be addressed. Although a pretest-post-test structure seems to be antithetical to the nature of Homecourt, this type of research is the next logical step in determining Homecourt’s value. What is particularly needed is a comparative study between nondirective support groups and curriculum-bound support groups.

In the meantime, guidelines must be established for two particular issues regarding Homecourt. First, provisions should be made available for those students who are in a vulnerable state when the bell rings to end their Homecourt. The teacher is not in a position to provide follow-up attention because of his own classroom responsibilities and his obligations to his next
group of students. So, a policy utilizing Peer Helpers to accompany such
students to a counselor’s office may be the problem’s best solution.
Administrative support and staff communication to achieve faculty
understanding and acceptance of this policy is required for its successful
implementation. Second, greater efforts must be made to inform those students
who enter Homecourt after hospitalization about the differences in the nature of
Homecourt and about its lack of confrontation. Such students need either to
elect not to enroll in Homecourt or to enter it with complete awareness that the
program is not the type of group counseling that they have recently
experienced.

The greatest impediment to a successful Homecourt is the dishonesty of
some students. A method for dealing with this dishonesty, whether it is
intentional or not, needs to be developed. As the reputation of Homecourt
grows, it attracts the types of students who want to use it as a personal forum. In
addition, with the changing demographics of the student population, more and
more students with antisocial profiles are projected to enroll in Homecourt in the
near future. Effective ways of dealing with these students have not yet been
established in Homecourt. The future of Homecourt depends upon the
successful resolution of this issue of dishonesty.

Conclusion

Homecourt is constructive program. It seems to be beneficial for students
classified as “at-risk”, as well as for students who demonstrate no particular
need for a support group beyond the usual feelings of alienation and loneliness
associated with adolescence.

Some people, including teachers, students, counselors, and parents, may view Homecourt as a counseling program, a provider of psychological services. In reality, it is not a provider of anything and is actually an opportunity for each student to make of it whatever he or she wants to make of it. Homecourt is probably best summarized by the student who described it with these words, “Homecourt was a safe place, and there aren't that many in high school.”

Epilogue

On the door leading into the Homecourt room is a small rectangular window. Most teachers in the school put an opaque design in the window to prevent students in the hallway from staring into the room and disturbing their classes. During the fall of 1991, a student in Homecourt designed and put up a sign in the Homecourt class window. Although this sign is just a picture of an umbrella with some words above it, what it symbolizes is important to the students. It encapsulates what Homecourt has come to mean, and it gives the students a sense of continuity with all Homecourts. The sign simply offers, “Shelter from the Storm.”
APPENDIX A:

LIKERT EVALUATION SCALES

AND FREE RESPONSE SHEETS
LIKERT EVALUATION SCALES

NAME_________________________
PERIOD_______________________
DAY__________________________

RATE EACH STATEMENT WITH A SCORE FROM 1 TO 5

1. Strongly disagree
2. Disagree somewhat
3. In between, or can not say
4. Agree somewhat
5. Strongly agree

1. Homecourt made a positive difference in my life. ____________
2. The other students in Homecourt understood me. ____________
3. The teacher in Homecourt understood me. ____________
4. The other students in Homecourt liked me. ____________
5. The teacher in Homecourt liked me. ____________
6. The other students in Homecourt were honest. ____________
7. The teacher in Homecourt was honest. ____________

The best thing about Homecourt was

The thing about Homecourt that needs to be changed is
FREE RESPONSE SHEETS
FOR FORMER STUDENTS

NAME______________________________
Year you were enrolled in Homecourt_____

Do You remember Homecourt as a positive or negative experience? Why?

How did Homecourt affect you?

Have your views of Homecourt changed since you participated?

If given the opportunity, would you participate in Homecourt again?

Do you have any additional comments that would help explain Homecourt?
APPENDIX B:

CONSENT FOR RESEARCH FORMS
CONSENT FOR RESEARCH FORM

Dear Parents/ Guardians:

During the Spring semester of 1993, I will be conducting research on Homecourt. I request your permission for your child to participate in this study. The research will be a qualitative, case study of the effectiveness of Homecourt; it will not be an experiment.

Strict confidentiality will be maintained. Your student’s name will never appear in any report nor will the school or district be identified.

I plan to complete my analysis during the summer of 1993 and I will be glad to share the results when I have finished. In the meantime, if you have any questions about the research or about Homecourt in general, please contact me at school (phone number provided) or at my home (phone number provided).

Thank you for your cooperation.

Sincerely,

(Teacher’s signature)

THIS STUDY HAS BEEN REVIEWED BY THE UNIVERSITY OF NORTH TEXAS COMMITTEE FOR THE PROTECTION OF HUMAN SUBJECTS (PHONE # 1-817-565-3940)

*****************************************************************************

Please indicate whether or not you wish to have your child participate in this study by checking a statement below and returning this form to me as quickly as possible.

I do grant permission for my child, ___________________________ to participate in this study.

I do not grant permission for my child, ___________________________ to participate in this study.

________________________________________
Parent/ Guardian’s signature
APPENDIX C:

PERMISSION SLIPS TO ENROLL IN HOMECOURT
PERMISSIONS SLIPS TO ENROLL IN HOMECOURT

INTRODUCTION TO HOMECOURT

WELCOME: You have an opportunity to participate in Homecourt. Homecourt is a group of students who meet for one period each week for the rest of the current semester (as long as academic standards are maintained in any classes missed by the student). After checking in with their teacher, the student will report to (classroom number provided) to discuss various topics as determined by the students themselves. (The teacher’s name provided) will conduct the meetings.

THE PURPOSE: By allowing student to meet other students outside of their usual circle of friends in an environment of warmth and acceptance, we hope to provide an enjoyable and rewarding experience. Involvement in such a group often results in an elevation of self-esteem and a decrease of feelings of alienation and loneliness.

WHO MAY PARTICIPATE: Homecourt does not represent any identifiable group. Enrollment will not be limited to “students at-risk.” Many of the members will be successful students. All the wide variety of student interests and academic levels will be welcomed. There will be no stigma attached. The participants will have only one thing in common: a desire to be in the program. No credit or grade or extra responsibility or obligations will be involved.

WHAT WILL BE THE ACTIVITY: The group will discuss a variety of issues which will be determined by the group members. The emphasis will be on the future and the present; no one will need to delve into past traumas or reveal any secrets. Privacy will not be invaded; probing is not what the program is about. Expanding perceptions and understanding other’s view are the targets of the discussions.

A WORD OF CAUTION: Homecourt is not meant to replace any professional counseling or psychotherapy. Although it might prove to be complementary to such a relationship, any student who is seeing a therapist needs to discuss enrollment prior to admission.

WHY HOMECOURT: In athletic contests when a team has homecourt advantage, it means they are familiar with the court and that the stands are filled with supportive fans cheering their every success, appreciating their every effort. This description is an appropriate metaphor for what Homecourt is trying to accomplish.

QUESTIONS: If you have any questions, please contact your counselor or (teacher’s name provided). Parental permission is required for enrollment.

_________________________________________ Day of the week ____________
Student’s name
_________________________________________ Period of the day ____________
Parent’s signature
APPENDIX D:

ATTENDANCE CHARTS
## TABLE 1

**Tuesday Attendance**

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APPENDIX E:

DATA FROM EVALUATION SHEETS
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GRAND AVERAGE 4.4 3.9 4.4 4.3 4.6 4.1 4.8 30.50
APPENDIX F:
DATA ON EVALUATION SHEET
FROM FORMER STUDENTS
### TABLE 3

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APPENDIX H:

NARRATIVE OF HOMECOURT
Narrative Record of Homecourt for Spring 1993

First Period Homecourt

Approximately 35% of the students enrolled in Homecourt for the spring semester of 1993 were in a first period Homecourt. Although both first period and seventh period Homecourts had permanent Peer Helpers assigned to each day of Homecourt, only first period functioned as one Homecourt rather than three distinct Homecourts. In seventh period, four Peer Helpers were given Homecourt as their placement. Seventh period was too late in the day for a possible placement at an elementary school, so there really was no alternative to a Homecourt placement. In first period, five Peer Helpers asked to have Homecourt as their placements, because two of them had transportation problems, two did not like elementary age students, and one simply preferred Homecourt. Having a core of Peer Helpers as the center of each day’s Homecourts had not been a problem in the past, and it also had little effect on seventh period. However, the impact on first period was substantial. Tuesday, Wednesday, and Thursday blended together into one Homecourt. There were two reasons why this happened. First, seventh period Homecourts attracted other students not involved in the Peer Helper program, whereas first period Homecourts on Wednesday and Thursday were completely manned by Peer Helpers. Second, and more important, the Peer Helpers in seventh period were quieter and less needy than the Peer Helpers that made up the core of first period. These Peer Helpers, Student No. 1, No. 3, No. 4 and No. 10, became the focus of almost all of the meetings.

The semester in first period went through three distinct phases. The first
phase consisted of the first week, three of the most useless and discouraging Homecourts ever. The second phase was a very productive phase that lasted from the second week through the fourth week. During this period the students were open to each other and were sharing their private concerns and issues. Several students made self-disclosures that were constructive and helpful both to themselves and to Homecourt in general. The third phase was a downhill slide that began in the fifth week and lasted for the rest of the semester.

During the first phase of the first period Homecourts for the research semester, the first meeting of each Homecourt occurred. On Tuesday, January 26, 1993, the usual procedure for the first day of Homecourt was not followed, because Student No. 18 presented a problem about which she wanted help from Homecourt and her fellow Peer Helpers. Normally, Student No. 18 and No. 19 were in Homecourt on Thursdays only, but their placements were not to begin until the next week. No. 18's problem was both a family issue and an issue with her boyfriend of whom the family did not approve. While No. 18 shared her fears and concerns about her boyfriend and expressed the hurt she felt from her family's lack of trust in her, only the instructor and Student No. 7 were listening. Student No. 1 and No. 3 were working a crossword puzzle; No. 2, No. 5 and No. 17 were doing homework. No. 19 appeared to be sulking. No. 4 appeared ten minutes late to class. She brought a glass of water with her which she spilled. She then spent another ten minutes commandeering the center of attention while she cleaned the spill.

Usually during the first meeting, a definite procedure is followed. First the rules for Homecourt are explained. There are five rules:

1) If the instructor is absent, Homecourt does not meet.
2) **Confidentiality is to be maintained concerning the issues discussed in Homecourt.** Exceptions to this rule, such as “a danger to self or others”, are acknowledged. (For this study the researcher also made it clear at this point that the research for this paper would not sacrifice confidentiality.)

3) **Anyone may say anything that he or she wants without fear of being attacked, teased, or criticized.** This rule is an attempt to allow everyone to be free to express themselves in any manner they choose. In Homecourt it is safe to “try on” different ideas and to explore different feelings without fear of rejection.

4) **Although students can say anything, they do not have to say anything.** They are always allowed to pass on any topic. Probing and unwelcomed delving are not allowed. “I don’t want to talk about it” is a phrase that will always be respected in Homecourt.

5) **No violence was allowed.**

Second, each member of Homecourt introduces himself or herself, explains why he or she is in Homecourt and verbalizes what he or she hopes will happen in Homecourt—the “expectations of Homecourt”. Quite often, when these expectations are shared, many students have difficulty articulating or risking their expectations. So, it is normal for nothing of significance to be expressed. Usually the instructor follows the expectations with a little warning that no one should judge the present Homecourts by past Homecourts, because each Homecourt is a separate entity.

This procedure was followed on Wednesday and Thursday of the first week. The expectations expressed in the first period Homecourt on Wednesday were surprising. The first person to speak about expectations was Student No.
who said that she did not expect anything from this Homecourt. She went on
to imply that she did not get anything from Homecourt anymore. She was
followed by Student No. 3 who said the same thing. The cryptic manner in
which they spoke injected a negative tone into the proceedings. This negative
tone was further augmented by the fact that No. 1 and No. 3 were working a
crossword puzzle during the entire introductory process. On Thursday,
Homecourt went better, mainly due to Student No. 16's earnestness. No. 16
introduced a philosophical discussion concerning the nature of mankind. No.
16 sat opposite to the teacher while No. 2 and No. 17 sat to his left. These three
collected the most while the rest continued not to pay attention. In short, the
first week of Homecourt was abysmal. Student No. 1 and No. 3 seemed to have
no expectations and expressed negative feelings about Homecourt. Although
Student No. 18 risked some self-disclosure, the general lack of attention from
everyone else left a dismal aura over the proceedings.

On Friday, the instructor lectured the Peer Helpers about their lack of
attention in Homecourt. He explained that Homecourt was an attempt to give
them some "hands-on" experiences with the helping skills. He wanted them to
view Homecourt as the practical side of the class. In the meantime, Student No.
1 and No. 3 explained that their remarks about expectations were not meant to
be negative comments on Homecourt. They meant to say that they were not
putting expectations on the process, and they were ready to accept Homecourt
as it developed. Their explanations were not challenged.

The week of February 2 marked the second week of Homecourt. The
second, the most productive phase of first period Homecourt began.
The results of the lecture were immediate. The Peer Helpers paid attention to
everything that was said and gave appropriate feedback. The contents of the following four weeks in Homecourt reflected this new commitment by the Peer Helpers. Student No. 7 talked about her engagement and her wedding plans. She expressed the feeling that no one was very supportive of her plans. Only in Homecourt could she discuss them openly. Student No. 10 discussed the trouble and stress that she suffered trying to live up to other people's expectations of her. Student No. 2 discussed a type of global sense of stress but particularly emphasized his emotional attachment to a girl with whom he had a relationship that defied definition. Students No. 4, No. 7, No. 9 and No. 1 all discussed parental rules and communication patterns, and how they were affected by them. Perhaps most poignantly, No. 1, No. 4, and No. 7 discussed their feelings that they had never had a childhood. No. 4 blamed her feelings on the physical abuse of her brother that she had witnessed. No. 1 blamed her alcoholic father for the subsequent responsibility she had to shoulder at a very young age. No. 7 described the horrible loneliness throughout junior high school which had led her into drugs, sex, and an eventual suicide attempt.

However, the greatest progress during these four weeks was made by Student No. 3. On two occasions, No. 3 talked about her anger towards her mother and the effects that her silent rage has had on her. No. 3's revelations were particularly constructive, because she began to take responsibility for her own feelings and behaviors for the first time. (The week before Homecourt began, No. 3 made an attempt on her own life. When asked about this suicide attempt, she reported that it was the only thing she could do to get her father to take her seriously about being depressed. No. 3 revealed this to the instructor, but she never mentioned it in Homecourt.) No. 3 had a history of offending most
of her friends at one time or another. Their most consistent complaints about her were that she was insincere and that she always tried to be the center of attention. Student No. 1 and No. 3 had started the year as the best of friends. However, by the start of the second semester, their relationship was marked by hostility, although it was usually concealed. When asked, each said the same things to describe the other. Neither student trusted or believed anything the other said. On February 17, No. 3 talked about her anger. She was asked what she did with her anger, what her anger got her, and what options she had for dealing with the anger. She made a connection between her headaches and some other physical symptoms and her anger. The idea that anger is a choice was presented to her, and she agreed to consider that idea.

Student No. 10 empathized with No. 3 on many issues, and No. 10 also made some constructive steps in her personal development. She addressed the issue of “saying no to others” by making a stand and requesting not to have a placement for Peer Helper class. She reported that she had gone to therapy for her headaches and felt a connection with No. 3 on this subject. She, too, had a great deal of unexpressed anger. Her most touching self-disclosure came on February 23 and concerned a visit by her grandparents. She told specific examples of her grandparents rejecting her, causing her great pain. Their upcoming visit filled her with dread and anxiety. The other Peer Helpers gave her a great deal of support and assured her that the negative descriptions by the grandparents did not describe the person they knew her to be. Still, she was crying when the bell was about to ring. Closure was sought so that No. 10 could go to her next class and not be in a crisis state. “It is almost time for the bell,” the teacher said, “and I want to make sure you are OK before the next
class. What can we do to help?" She smiled through her tears and said that knowing that everyone cared helped. The entire Homecourt told her that they cared, and she was able to go to her next class.

The third phase of first period Homecourt began on March 2. During the rest of the semester there was a steady decline in the quality of the content in this Homecourt. Self-disclosure was minimal, and closeness ceased to develop. The time spent in Homecourt was dominated by two students, Students No. 1 and No. 4. No. 1 talked about three issues over the course of the next seven weeks. First, she talked about the difficulty in deciding which college to attend. The second issue she discussed was the bureaucratic red tape and confusion surrounding her financial aid and admission to college. At different times she reported that she had full scholarships to several universities. She reported that her admission to one university was denied because of a mistake in the registrar's office. She alleged that her SAT scores kept her out, but her essay and her ACT scores would have gotten her admitted--if they had not been lost. These two topics were No. 1's contribution to most of the remaining weeks in Homecourt; however, one other subject of importance was also mentioned with less regularity. No. 1 reported an ongoing battle between her boyfriend's parents and herself. Her version of the disagreement centered on the fact that she was not of the same religion as her boyfriend's family, and she felt she was being victimized by religious prejudice. The rest of the group was supportive of her in the conflict with his mother. Efforts by the instructor to get No. 1 to identify any role she played in the conflict with his mother were ineffective. The reactions by the other students reinforced her view that she was the one being victimized. The only time No. 1 ever cried in two
years in Homecourt was over this issue. On February 23, as Homecourt was ending, No. 1 talked about her relationship with her boyfriend’s family. She did so with a great deal of sarcastic humor. When the teacher asked her if she really thought that it was funny, she cried and said, “No. It hurts. I’m not a bad person.” The implications of this last phrase were never acknowledged by the rest of the group; and No. 1 never again spoke about her relationship with that family except in sarcastic, satirical, and self-serving tones. It was the last time in Homecourt that she took any type of honest look at her relationship. The importance of that phrase—"I’m not a bad person"—took on added meaning in light of developments outside of Homecourt that No. 1 never revealed in Homecourt. She never mentioned in Homecourt that she had been dismissed from the cheerleading squad early in the semester. She was the only cheerleader to ever be dismissed in the school’s 25-year history. There were other factors that were more of an issue to his parents than her religious affiliation.

Clearly, first period Homecourt was dominated by Student No. 4. From the fifth week on, every Homecourt began with and usually centered on No. 4. She always began talking about her current problem before anyone else had a chance to speak. In many ways her domination was due to the absence of anyone else taking charge. She really had only one large issue, but intertwined around it, were four side issues, each of which dominated an entire class period. These side issues were: 1) a trip to Nashville over spring break, discussed on March 3; 2) a trip to Washington, D.C. to visit her father, discussed on April 6 and later detailed on April 13; 3) Senior Prom plans, discussed during most of the month of April; and 4) her dilemma concerning a
visit from a friend, discussed on April 14. With each of these topics, it was clear
that more than the surface issue was involved. Attempts to get No. 4 to see the
underlying problems produced frustration. The really big issue for No. 4
centered on the need for family therapy. This issue surfaced on March 24 and
was not resolved by the end of Homecourt in May. On March 24 she revealed
that her family had received therapy in the past and that she presently felt a
personal need to enter therapy again. She planned to talk to her pastor about
her need for therapy after he convinced her that the family might benefit from
family counseling. However, she postponed calling the pastor to make an
appointment. On April 8, she finally made an appointment, and the first thing
the pastor assigned her to do was to write a journal of her feelings about her
father. It was not until April 14 that she reported to Homecourt that she had
started the journal, and she never did reach a point of closure on it. Student No.
4's relationship with her family, especially her father, was the dominant conflict
in her troubled life. She had attempted suicide before and still talked about
considering it as late as January. For her, introspection was a very slow
process.

Many of the other students in Homecourt, especially Student No. 3,
viewed No. 4 as "phony". Only Student No. 2 knew that she still thought about
suicide. No. 4 knew No. 10 before class; they had been in choir together. They
sat together all semester, and on most occasions, when No. 4 spoke she looked
at No. 10 for comfort or support or approval first. She often turned to No. 10 to
help her word her answers to questions. On at least one occasion she asked
No. 10 to explain for her why she smiled when she talked about serious
conflicts with her parents. Everyone in Homecourt believed that No. 4 and No.
10 were very close to each other. However, after Homecourt was over, an interview with No. 10 revealed that she hardly knew No. 4 before Homecourt; and she did not feel particularly close to her. No. 10 became No. 4's crutch unknowingly. Furthermore, the rest of Homecourt did not know that No. 4 was a special education student with learning disabilities. Her cheerful facade and outgoing persona managed to hide the severity of her learning problems. A great number of difficulties came from the fact that she could not pass the TAAS test, and yet her father would not let her accept a waver from TEA for her learning disabilities. The first period Homecourts included one of the "Top Ten" graduates, a National Merit finalist, and discussions about the difficulty in choosing the right college. Student No. 4 was all alone in worrying about simply graduating.

The negative, downward slide of these last weeks in first period had two notable exceptions: Student No. 12 and No. 17 were exemplary participants in Homecourt. Student No. 12, a junior girl and a Peer Helper, was enrolled in Wednesday's Homecourt, and by the end of March, she had become the leader in her Homecourt. There were two ways that her leadership showed. First, although seating was unassigned and was usually decided spontaneously, in all of the other Homecourts, the person who wanted most to speak usually sat opposite the teacher. However, on Wednesdays, the students who had the most to say often sat opposite No. 12. Remarks were often directed to her rather than to the teacher. Second, No. 12 responded to other students' self-disclosures with such skill that the teacher did not need to say anything. For example, on one occasion, No. 14 was talking about an incident during the preceding weekend wherein her father struck her. It was No. 12 who asked the
appropriate questions to ascertain if the incident was an example of child abuse. It was No. 12 that helped No. 14 devise a plan of action to deal with the father and to prevent future incidents. No. 12 gave No. 14 support, but her interventions transcended support. No. 12, also, became a role model for self-disclosure during an exchange on March 31. On that date No. 12 discussed her relationship with her ex-boyfriend who was continuing to call her and refusing to allow their relationship to end. He had become somewhat violent, as well, although not to a dangerous extent. No. 12's parents had talked to this boy and to his parents. No. 12 had even accompanied him to a counselor. The boy's parents refused to acknowledge his need for continued therapy, and he had used threats of suicide to try to manipulate No. 12; he had embarrassed her in public. No. 12 was coping as well as she could. However, she refused to totally abandon him. She was protecting herself, and she was asserting herself in the relationship. But she would not, could not, completely sever the bonds of the relationship. She seemed to have a healthy perspective on the issue, and when she was asked how Homecourt could help her, she replied, "It helps knowing someone else cares."

Student No. 17, a sophomore girl and a Peer Helper, was the youngest member of class. She was also a cheerleader and a class officer in Student Council. Very intelligent and compassionate, she was among the "Top Ten" in grade point averages for her class; and she spent the summer of 1993 doing charity work in Ecuador, helping the poverty stricken. On May 21, she disclosed her feelings about the dehumanizing and alienating atmosphere of the school. On May 19, a junior boy, not enrolled in Homecourt, committed suicide. In Homecourt the discussion centered on the loneliness that might have led to the
suicide. No. 17 talked about an intense loneliness she felt in the school, especially at the start of the year. She had felt like no one cared; everyone was selfish and self-centered; and no one reached out to make others feel welcomed. She said that Peer Helper class and Homecourt were the only exceptions, and she was not sure how she could have coped without them. To most objective observers, No. 17 was one of the most accepted and most socially adjusted students that the school had. For her to admit to this intense alienation was doubly disturbing. The teacher could not help but wonder how the students who did not have activities such as cheerleading, Peer Helpers, Student Council, or Homecourt must have felt? Did her revelations represent the tip of an iceberg?

Although first period had very promising beginnings, after the first week, first period Homecourts did not fulfill their potential. There were four reasons why these Homecourts were less productive. First, some of the experienced Peer Helpers alienated the newer Peer Helpers early in the year by making references to their past experiences and causing the new Peer Helpers to feel inferior. This was unknown to the teacher and was revealed to him later during the interviews. How much of this was projection on their parts was never identified, because this topic never actually surfaced in any of the first period Homecourts. It did affect the feelings and behaviors of the new Peer Helpers, particularly those of Student No. 13 who never felt safe enough to engage in any self-disclosure. This alienation also extended to some of the non Peer Helper members of Homecourt. Student No. 6, for example, could not relate to certain issues in the lives of some of the other students. She particularly had difficulty relating to No. 7’s discussion about wedding plans. Too often,
references to other Peer Helper Homecourts or Peer Helper business interfered with the workings of first period Homecourt.

The second reason that these Homecourts never lived up to their original promise had to do with the perceptions of dishonesty by some of the members about the behaviors of other members. Student No. 1, for example, lost almost complete credibility by the end of the semester, at least, with the teacher and with Student No. 3. No. 1 talked about the difficulty in determining which college to attend when it was doubtful that she could be accepted to any school at all. She talked about all of her scholarships when there were none. Most of the information that No. 1 lied about was very difficult to check. Many times the revelation that she was lying came from a confidential source. The teacher had several conferences about No. 1 with her school counselor. Although it was established that No. 1 did a great deal of self-serving distorting, it was never clear how to respond to it. No one could be sure whether she had “stepped over the line” and actually believed her own distortions or whether she was just so desperate that she needed to maintain a public image, even one that was so at odds with reality. Student No. 3 was sure that No. 1 was just lying, pure and simple. There were times that she stretched the truth beyond any ability to rationalize her stories as merely “psychological wish-fulfilling mistakes”. For example, when completing the form to announce each student’s honors at graduation, No. 1 listed receiving over $100,000 of scholarships. All of this was pure fabrication. Other students made outlandish claims, too, but they corrected them before the honors/baccalaureate ceremony. No. 1 never did correct her listings. Another example concerned the conflict between No. 1 and the cheerleader sponsor. No. 1’s version of the conflict was significantly different
than the sponsors version. There were many other examples, too, but the final conclusion was that she had lost all credibility with the teacher and with Student No. 3.

This loss of credibility affected Homecourt significantly. When No. 1 talked in Homecourt, the teacher seldom asked questions or sought clarification. The teacher never confronted No. 1 for a variety of reasons. During conferences with her counselor, they decided that confrontation did not have much likelihood for success. It would require more effort to disprove her versions of things than was possible. Besides, the counselor and the teacher were not quite sure what would have happened if No. 1's fantasy-world was taken from her. Furthermore, No. 1 was a very powerful and constructive force in the school at times. For example, on May 20 the Peer Helpers in first period were asked to roam the halls to find students who were upset and who needed to talk to the counselors about the suicide of a junior boy on the previous night. No. 1 was very effective in this capacity. She helped several students get to the proper counselors; she even helped a teacher. So she was a constructive force in the school at that time; however, she was not as helpful as she led Homecourt to believe. She told Homecourt that she was up all night for three nights in a row talking to distraught students about the suicide. However, the counselors felt that the student body had actually come to terms with the suicide by the next day. None of them had to talk to students at night. Without a doubt, Student No. 1 had also had a very troubled junior high school career, plus her family seemed dysfunctional. If graduating was producing some sort of emotional backlash or making her feel desperate, perhaps it was because she was losing her support group. Perhaps the discrepancy between who she was
academically and who she really wanted to be was too great for her to face alone. At any rate, she had entered school as an “at-risk” student, and she was graduating. She was even admitted to a college. Still, her issues needed long term therapy beyond the scope of public education or of Homecourt.

Student No. 4’s behavior was much more observable to the majority of students in Homecourt, and by the end of the semester, proved to be much more destructive to Homecourt. Her negative effect on Homecourt came from the fact that she often dominated Homecourt to the exclusion of everyone else and also from the fact that she never seemed to do anything about any of the problems about which she would talk. Many students commented during the interviews that No. 4 became very frustrating. She talked about needing to talk to a therapist, but then she postponed talking to her pastor about counseling. When she finally did call her pastor, she stalled another two weeks before making an appointment. She made the appointment and was assigned to keep a journal as part of her therapy, but when the other students asked her about her progress on her journal, she always reported that she was “too busy to work on it”. Many of the students in the first period Homecourts did not mind No. 4’s domination of Homecourt, but many others did. Student No. 3 confronted her very harshly on April 14 with the idea that her procrastination on the journal was really a “phony cop-out”. The teacher intervened by softening No. 3’s remarks. Still, No. 3 was speaking out of a frustration that others felt, too.

Both No. 1 and No. 4 had been in several previous Homecourts. No. 1 had been in at least one, and usually more, Homecourts every semester since the second semester of her sophomore year. No. 4 had been in three previous Homecourts. Therefore, they may have reached a point of diminishing returns
for Homecourt. Any possible personal benefits from a support group may have been exhausted. What No. 1 and No. 4 seemed to need went beyond support and into the arena of therapy. In fact, this final semester in Homecourt may well have been counter-productive for them.

A third reason for the failure of first period Homecourt to reach its potential had to do with its positive role models and leaders, Students No. 12, No. 16, and No. 17. These leaders were quiet and exerted their influences by subtle examples more than by overt, blatant behavior. Also, the leaders were in Homecourt only one day per week while No. 1 and No. 4 were in all three first period Homecourts.

The fourth reason for the lack of progress was the frequency with which first period Homecourt was canceled. Although Tuesday Homecourt was never canceled, Wednesday and Thursday were canceled a total of four times. Some of the cancellations were unavoidable. One cancellation was due to the teacher's absence on March 14. One cancellation was due to testing on March 10. On one other occasion, first period Homecourt was used to contact the new Peer Helpers on February 24. On both February 25 and April 1 the teacher used this period to conduct other business. Homecourt was also cut short several times due to testing and early release days on March 30 and April 14. On May 20 Homecourt was canceled so that the teacher and the Peer Helpers could walk around the school serving as a crisis team following a student's suicide. These cancellations made continuity difficult to achieve. They also made it more difficult to inspire a group commitment; it was difficult for students to be committed to a program that was so easily canceled.

Although some cancellations could not be prevented, others reflected a
lack of teacher commitment. By the end of the semester, the teacher was feeling very weary. The toll of not having a consistent conference period began to show. The strain of dealing with all of the Homecourts added to the tensions and frustrations of this particular Homecourt effected the teacher. To what extent the teacher's fatigue impacted the students was never as clear as the fact that it did play a part in the development of first period Homecourt.

Period 4 Tuesday Homecourt

The Homecourt that met on Tuesdays during fourth period was very small. There were only five students enrolled. Two of the five, Student No. 22 and No. 23, were very quiet and did not start any discussions during the entire semester. Three of the students were Peer Helpers, No. 3, No. 21 and No. 22. (Both No. 21 and No. 22 were on placement at a Junior High School on Wednesday and Thursday.) Originally, this Homecourt was expected to be larger. Student No. 24 enrolled in this Homecourt, but he never attended. He was referred by his counselor and he was a former Skinhead. However, between the time he enrolled and the first meeting of Homecourt, he dropped out of school. Student No. 51 was also referred by his counselor, but he dropped out of school after his first Homecourt. Before his departure though, No. 51 managed to make quite an impression. He dominated the first Homecourt of the semester. He had an extensive history that included hospitals and drug rehabilitation programs. He claimed to have been “kicked out of all of the junior high schools in the district”. In his latest institutional confrontation, he was “kicked out” of a drug rehabilitation program. He maintained that none of his expulsions were his fault and that he was just a victim of circumstances and
petty injustices. The counselor felt that Homecourt might give him a base in school while helping him learn to accept responsibility for his behavior.

Unfortunately, on Wednesday he was assigned to serve a disciplinary in-school suspension, and he chose to drop out of school rather than to serve it.

Student No. 20, a senior girl, was experiencing her fifth Homecourt. During her sophomore year, she had originally been referred to Homecourt by her counselor, because she was having problems at home that were affecting her grades. Her relationship with her mother was causing her great discomfort and anguish. She resented rules imposed by her mother and felt that the rules were arbitrary and overly strict. She had no father at home. When her brother graduated during her junior year, her relationship with her mother seemed to improve. She was also preparing to be a foreign exchange student after her graduation. During the research semester of 1993, her relationship with her father was the topic of two Homecourts. On February 9, she talked about seeing her father for the first time since she was five years old. She had seen him in a court room where her mother was suing him for nonpayment of child support. On March 23, she talked about a two-hour phone conversation with him during the previous week. At 18 years old she was reestablishing a relationship with the father she had not had for the past 13 years. The rest of Homecourt listened to her and gave her support in forming her new relationship. However, no one ever asked her any questions to follow-up how this new bond was progressing.

For Student No. 23 Homecourt seemed not to provide enough safety for her to disclose anything very personal. No. 23 was a junior girl and an honors student. She was referred to Homecourt by No. 21, a Peer Helper. No. 23 revealed that she was currently living with her father rather than her mother who
lived in a state on the East Coast. She indicated that this arrangement was purely for pragmatic purposes, and she never revealed any emotional components regarding her living situation. She expressed a sense of alienation from other students at the school, but she had friends and did not seem to be isolated to any extent that caused problems for her. In fact, she seemed to be handling her relatively new location and new family structure as well as could be expected. She seemed intelligent and mature, although she was very quiet.

Student No. 21 never started any discussions on personal issues either. Although, on February 23, she did report that she had broken up with her boyfriend whom she had dated since her sophomore year. By the end of March, they were back together. Her relationship with her boyfriend seemed to be very mature. She gave the appearance that she had a perspective on high school romance that was either due to intelligence or to a lack of passion. No. 21 had been in three previous Homecourts and had already revealed some personal issues, including the fact that she was in therapy. However, most of her personal problems stemmed from past events, and in the research semester, she never revealed or discussed them. Both she and No. 22 expressed concerns about a junior high school student that they were dealing with on their placements. They were worried that this student had some symptoms of an eating disorder. This issue of eating disorders became even more personal on April 13 when No. 21 brought up a potential eating disorder regarding a friend of hers. The student with the potential eating disorder was Student No. 48 who had signed up for a different Homecourt. Both No. 22 and No. 23 also knew this student as a friend and had different views about her
problem. No. 23 was sure that No. 48 had no problem; No. 22 was actually more concerned about No. 48's dabbling with drugs. No. 21 agreed to talk to No. 48 and confront her with her fears for her. The confrontation enabled No. 21 to determine that No. 48 was not presently in crisis, and even though her issues were not completely resolved, No. 21 felt comfortable with No. 48's behavior by the time Homecourt ended.

Student No. 22 never was the subject of any concerns. She brought other students to the teacher who were experiencing difficulties, but she herself never revealed any personal problems or issues. Although she was quiet, No. 22 was not shy, and her behavior indicated that she actually had no current real issues. It was also apparent that she did not feel inhibited by Homecourt. In fact, she evaluated her experience in Homecourt as being "very beneficial".

Student No. 3 was in Homecourts both first period and fourth period. She was not much of a factor in Wednesday fourth period Homecourt, and her impact in first period was limited to the previously mentioned experiences in which she discussed her anger toward her mother and in which she confronted No. 4. However, in Tuesday fourth period Homecourt, No. 3's behavior took on more dramatic and attention-getting overtones. Her greatest impact on Tuesday fourth period actually centered around another person, her friend, "L". L was a 17 year old girl who was not currently enrolled in any school and who had a history of psychological problems, including hospitalization and suicide attempts. L had become No. 3's best friend, thus replacing Student No. 1. As her new best friend, L occupied a central place in No. 3's life. February 2 was the second meeting for this Homecourt and was the first meeting that Student No. 23 attended. The students in Homecourt were concentrating on trying to
get to know No. 23 when No. 3 burst into the room very excited and frantic about L. Apparently L had a "psychotic exboyfriend", according to No. 3, who had threatened her at different times and had actually hit her on one occasion. No. 3 also reported that L had taken legal action and had placed a restraining band on him, although No. 3 was not quite about this. Prior to her dramatic entrance, No. 3 had received an emergency phone call on her pager-phone from L indicating that her exboyfriend was threatening her. So, No. 3 called from the Homecourt room. (A telephone had been installed in his classroom in order for the teacher to communicate with different district schools about placements for Peer Helpers.) When No. 3 called L, her boyfriend answered the phone and hung up. No. 3 did not know what to do next. She considered calling the police, but she called L again instead. There was no answer. She called back several times, and finally L answered and told No. 3 to call back later, because "everything was under control". This exchange took 30 minutes of time out of Homecourt, since No. 3 was nearly hysterical during the whole episode. The Homecourt tried to help her to decide what she needed to do and also tried to give her support, but the choices were limited. Mostly, the Homecourt students just watched as No. 3 paced back and forth hoping L would call her back. For No. 23, it was a dramatic introduction to Homecourt.

A similar incident happened on March 29. Although the date was not a day that this Homecourt actually met, the next day's Homecourt time was spent discussing this second event. No. 3 burst into the room again, this time reporting that L had called her to say "good bye"; she was going to kill herself. At this time, L was attending a psychological hospital for extensive therapy during the day and was then leaving every afternoon. She had called No. 3 to
say that she planned to commit suicide after leaving the hospital that afternoon. No. 3 used the telephone in the Homecourt classroom to call L’s psychiatrist, who was coincidentally No. 3’s doctor as well. She wanted to warn her not to let L leave the hospital. An answering machine and a secretary combined to keep No. 3 from reaching her doctor for most of the class period, although she finally did contact her. The doctor seemed neither surprised nor alarmed by No. 3’s revelations. In fact, the doctor mainly wanted to talk about why No. 3 had canceled her last two appointments. The whole episode left No. 3 feeling emotionally drained and very angry with her doctor.

The next time L was an issue in Homecourt was on April 13. Most of the period had been spent with No. 21 talking about her concerns about No. 48. However, toward the end of class, No. 3 revealed that she was “through with L”. Their relationship was over. No. 3 was planned to leave on a trip during spring break, and she wanted to spend some time with L before her trip. L had already made plans and had no free time to spend with No. 3. Homecourt tried to console her, but she was feeling very angry at L and was fed up with her.

No. 3’s behavior in period four was radically different than in period one. In period one, she was mainly uninvolved and did not talk very much. Some of this was due to No. 1’s presence in period one. In period four, she exhibited fear, anger, confusion and vulnerability which centered around L’s behavior. Her extremely animated reactions to L greatly impacted period four Homecourt on Tuesdays. Overall, in both periods, she displayed little interest in the concerns of the other students.
Period 7 Tuesday Homecourt

This Homecourt which met during the last period of the school day on Tuesdays, was one of the largest Homecourts and had eleven members. However, it also had one one of the highest absentee rates. The attendance rate of 86% is somewhat misleading. Calculated into this statistic is the attendance of Student No. 37 who only attended six of the twelve meetings. On the other hand, No. 36 attended ten of the twelve, although she had a history of chronic attendance problems. In fact, the reason she was enrolled in Homecourt was because her credit toward graduation had been denied first semester due to her excessive absences. Her attendance in Homecourt was to compensate for her absences during first semester. She was required to attend only five session of Homecourt, but she attended five more of her own volition. Of the eleven students enrolled in this Homecourt, four were Peer Helpers utilizing Homecourt as their placements. They were Student No. 29, No. 30, No. 31, and No. 32. No. 39 also became a Peer Helper by the end of the semester. Two outside visitors also attended Tuesday's seventh period Homecourts. One of these visitors dominated Homecourt on March 23. He was a former student in Homecourt, who was currently attending college in Los Angeles. He shared his fear and concerns over the Rodney King riots and how he was effected by them.

Other Homecourts seemed dominated by individuals, but this Homecourt seemed dominated more by themes or topics. Issues, rather than people appeared to generate the most intense interest. These topics tended to intertwine. However, they can be separated artificially, for analysis' sake, into four separate entities or subtopics. The first theme involved friendship and was
introduced during the first meeting on January 26. In this Homecourt the particular aspect of friendship that was initially broached addressed both the impact and the randomization of friendship. Everyone expressed that friendships had tremendous effects on their lives, but no one really knew how to make friendship occur. The best friendships seemed to have happened magically through chance rather than through conscious effort. For example, Student No. 33 reported that because his teachers made seating charts based on alphabetical order, he had an inordinate number of friends whose names were in the same part of the alphabet. No. 36 seemed to be particularly touched by the concept of chance determining her friendships. She reported that her best friend was very important to her and she did not know how she could have made it through high school without her. However, upon analysis, she realized that her best friend just happened to live next door to her. If her family had bought another house on another block, they might never have even met one another. When No. 36 graduated from high school, she had spent three of her six semesters in high school having direct contact with the instructor. However, this revelation about friendships was the first personal disclosure she made. It was rumored that she had an alcohol problem and attended AA meetings regularly, but none of these rumors were ever confirmed or even acknowledged by her. Her mother died during her junior year, yet she never expressed any sorrow to her teachers or to her counselor. One teacher in particular tried to express empathy and comfort and ended up crying. She felt that No. 36 was unmoved by her efforts. In fact, the descriptions of her from her teachers were consistently the same: she was a very intelligent student with a poor attendance record; and none of her teachers felt that they ever made any
real contact with her. She was remote and aloof. No one, including two
counselors who worked with her, felt that they knew her. Even though she was
an active participant in Homecourt, her disclosures were very rare and her
facade was impenetrable.

The second theme dominating this Homecourt was concern about the
future. The future was a topic on March 2, March 9, and March 30. At first the
issue of “the future” concerned mainly college plans. Student No. 36 and No.
38 were particularly caught up in this issue. Each was having trouble deciding
on a college. Their first choices focused on a college that would provide more
distractions than study time. No. 38 wanted to go to school on the West Coast,
because she had an unrealistic, romantic image of 1960s radicals and hippies
still existing on campuses there. No. 33 could not come to a decision on a
major. A look at the future for No. 37 brought her disturbing anxiety. No. 37, a
junior girl and an honors student, was a gifted musician with an excellent
academic future. She was undecided about whether she wanted to major in
music or in premedical studies in college. Both were realistic possibilities.
Although she realized that she did not have to make this decision soon, she
knew that whichever one she chose, the other choice would probably close for
her as a possible future. She did not want to close any of her doors and saw
decisions about the future as eliminating her options. Even discussions about
her family, which she gleefully termed as dysfunctional, never provoked the kind
of sobriety or the anxiety which discussions about her future did.

The subjects of friendship and future plans cropped up several different
times during the semester with differing degrees of seriousness and differing
degrees of time spent examining them. However, the third issue was always a
very serious issue for most of the participants. Whenever it came up, the
students would each approach the subject from different perspectives and
always passionately. The issue could be referred to as religion, but it was more
accurately a quest for spirituality. For three of the students, No. 29, No. 31, and
No. 32 commitment to the Christian religion was a dominant factor in their lives.
No. 32, a junior honors student and a National Merit semifinalist, was
considering becoming a pastor. His family could not understand his
commitment; and his intense passion for religion also separated him from most
of his fellow students. This alienation was very serious and painful for him.
Three other students, No. 30, No. 35 and No. 37, had recently come to view
their Jewish heritage as a very powerful and definitive force in their lives.
Student No. 33 was agnostic, although he was more articulate in defending the
skeptical part of his agnosticism. However, the dominant spiritual leader of the
group was really No. 34, a senior boy who was enrolled in some honors classes
and who had come to Homecourt via his A.P. psychology class. He was very
quiet and serious and he looked like a child from the 1960s with his long hair
and the hint of a beard on the tip of his chin. Whenever he talked, he usually
had very gentle and intense insights to share. His readings included Herman
Hesse and Carl Jung, he and attended lectures by Ram Dass. He spoke of
being overwhelmed by the humanity around him in school and by the amount of
love he saw. He was one of those rare persons who can say things like that
without being ridiculed or drawing laughter. A hint of drug use seemed to
accompany his descriptions of altered states of consciousness and his
perception of them as desirable. Whenever the subject of religion or spirituality
came up, No. 34 kept the group on a philosophical plane which offended no
one and yet stretched everyone in their respective searches for meaning. The discussion on February 23 became the longest, most intense period ever spent on this issue, but it continued to come up on several other occasions, particularly because it dove-tailed so neatly into the fourth issue, death.

Death was initially mentioned during the first meeting on January 26. During the preceding month, a junior at the school had died suddenly and unexpectedly during a simple surgery, and many of the students had attended her funeral. In the first meeting, No. 34 addressed the issue of death by disclosing that one of his best friends in seventh grade had committed suicide. By discussing his feelings, he led the group into the discussion of friendships mentioned earlier. On February 23, the subject of death again came up but in the context of religion. No. 38 discussed a religious conversion her father had experienced at his death. No. 38 could not understand either the emphasis her father had placed on religion or the peace and contentment he had received from it. In fact, the subject of religion really confused her, and she could neither relate to nor understand the other students’ views on religion. “I don’t see what the big deal is; I mean, why bother thinking about it?” she asked. Yet, at the same time she was awed by her father’s conversion and the peace of mind it gave him. On April 20, following the suicide of a junior boy, death was reexamined in the light of suicide. No. 33 and No. 38 both revealed that they had felt suicidal during junior high school, but neither one could identify what had changed to enable them to cease contemplating suicide. Interestingly, during these conversations on death and religion, Student No. 36 never mentioned her feelings concerning the death of her mother the preceding year.

To summarize, period seven Tuesday Homecourt was a very intellectual
Homecourt, and the conversations focused on topics rather than personalities. Perhaps this was not too surprising, considering the composition of this Homecourt. Of the eleven students, eight were enrolled in honors classes. Four of the students were, or went on to be, National Merit finalists and semifinalists. Of the remaining three, two were relatively poor students academically who did not speak out much in Homecourt because they were intimidated by the others. One particular student, No. 30, was fixated on No. 33's SAT scores. This fascination and obsession that he had with the SAT scores was just one example of a series of his behaviors that were disruptive and counterproductive for Homecourt. No. 30, a junior male, was a Peer Helper who was assigned to all three seventh period Homecourts. His behavior was disruptive in each Homecourt, however, in each it manifested itself in different ways. At first his admiration for No. 33's SAT score was just a joke. No. 33 had made a 1560 on the SAT, and No. 30 said he wanted to figure a way to get "some of those extra points that you don't need added to my score". The joke went on too long however, and soon it was a source of irritation not only to No. 33 but to the rest of the Homecourt. On March 2, No. 30 attempted to draw a parallel between David Koresh and Jesus Christ. It was neither humorous nor insightful and was actually offensive to many members of the group. During the April 20 discussion on suicide, No. 30 was alone in expressing neither sympathy nor compassion for anyone who commits suicide. During this Homecourt, the only time he initiated conversation was to bring up the SAT scores or his own inability to decide whether to enroll in pre-calculus or not. His lack of empathy during Tuesday Homecourt was merely considered an irritant. In other Homecourts, however, it was a much more serious issue.
Period 4 Wednesday Homecourt

Fourth period on Wednesday was a study in contradictions. It had the distinction of becoming the most uncomfortable Homecourt; however, it had the most observable progress made by any student in any of the Homecourts. It was the Homecourt with the least bonding, yet it produced the most touching self-disclosure of the semester. And it was largely dominated by one student whose contributions were confusing and frustrating. There were five students enrolled in this Homecourt. Three of the five were Peer Helpers, No. 26, No. 27, and No. 3. There was also another professional adult present in addition to the teacher, the interpreter for the two students who were hearing-impaired, No. 25 and No. 27. Student No. 28, a male junior, was the only student who was neither a Peer Helper nor hearing-impaired in fourth period Wednesday, but he was the one who was most frustrating, because he tried to make paradox his lifestyle.

This Homecourt was also shorter than the others. No. 28 came to Homecourt during his lunch period and ate his lunch during Homecourt. When the bell rang for him to return to his academic class, the rest of Homecourt left with him. The interpreter also had to leave at that point. With little being communicated, and even less communication was possible after the interpreter left. These two facts supported the rationalization the teacher used to dismiss this Homecourt 20 minutes early.

Student No. 25, a male sophomore, was a deaf education student who had also been in Homecourt during the fall semester. He was referred to Homecourt because he was having difficulty adjusting to high school. He had
cut classes, disrupted classes and was not doing any school work. He wore a baseball cap usually tucked down over his eyes, and he did not have any friends at the school. When he was first referred to Homecourt, he avoided coming for several weeks. When he finally appeared, the Homecourt gave him their attention. He was asked who he was and what he expected from Homecourt. He almost cried as he told how lonely and alienated he felt at school. He said that he was afraid in the hallways and that he did not have one friend in the school. The teacher asked, "How can we help?" He replied, "Just say "hello" in the halls." A Peer Helper, No. 21, asked, "How do you sign hello?" Everyone learned how to sign hello. As the first semester progressed, No. 21 would seek out No. 25 and greet him in the halls. Soon he acknowledged the other students from Homecourt when he encountered them in the halls as well. However, toward the end of the first semester, he started cutting Homecourt again. On February 17, after missing the first Homecourt of the second semester, he was questioned about his attendance and his feelings regarding Homecourt. He had told different people different things about the reasons behind his absences. To one person he had said that Homecourt was boring. To another he had said that Homecourt was something to which he could not relate. What he told the group was that he did not know what to say. He also apologized about never having anything to add to the group. The Homecourt asked him what would help him. He said that he did not know. The teacher said that the group did not know what to say either and that without his help or direction, the group would never know what to say. He agreed to inform his Homecourt if he thought of anything that would help. This exchange seemed to help to elevate his spirits. However, for the rest of the semester he never really
discussed anything. He never started a conversation, and he never volunteered any information. Despite these inactions, there was an observable difference in his behavior. On March 7 the Homecourt gave him a great deal of feedback on behavioral changes he had made. He now approached others in the hall to say hello. His cap was often missing, and even when he did wear it, it no longer covered his eyes like it had in the past. He attended some parties with the other deaf education students. In short, he was observably less alienated and less lonely by the end of the semester, and he smiled much more often.

The other deaf student, No. 27, had gone on the Peer Helper retreat the year before. He was the first hearing-impaired student in the Peer Helper program. He seemed to be the most socially adjusted of all of the deaf education students. He was a good-looking junior who was on the football team and he was a good student academically. During the first semester, he, too, did not speak unless he was directly addressed. He was able to talk without an interpreter and to understand when he was spoken to, if the speaker looked directly at him and spoke slowly. He did have a tendency, however, to tell stories that sometimes stretched credibility. For example, on January 27, the first day of Homecourt, he told a story about a friend who was in the hospital from an overdose of drugs. He said that he was going to look for the dealer and to tell him to leave his friend alone or else he would hurt the dealer. No. 27 did not appear to be either the kind of person who knew drug users and drug dealers or someone who could threaten them. Attempts to confirm his story had mixed results. Apparently there was something to his stories, but the faculty in the deaf education program were never able to prove or disprove them.
Another example occurred on April 28, the last day of Homecourt. He asked to leave early because he had to help a friend who was pregnant. He said that she had been raped and that the rapist and father was now in prison dying of AIDS. The Homecourt was never quite sure how to interpret what he said. However, No. 27 managed to really capture everyone's attention on February 17. After the Homecourt had talked with No. 25 about the need for communication to be a two-way street, No. 27 disclosed his difficulties being a hearing-impaired person living in a hearing world. As he spoke, the rest of the Homecourt was visibly touched. When he was asked how the group could help, he replied, "Just don't think we're stupid." The most painful aspect of being deaf, he said, was the way the hearing world treated him like he was stupid. The interpreter was also moved by his revelations. She knew that many of the students in the hearing-impaired program felt this way, but she had never known the actual depths of his feelings. The ironic fact was that in her class on sign language, No. 27 acted in a very immature and silly manner, actually causing many of the hearing students to view him as unintelligent.

Student No. 26, a junior female, was a Peer Helper. The only time she ever disclosed a personal problem or initiated a conversation was in Peer Helper class. She did, however, have one moment of clarity in which she summarized the entire semester for this particular Homecourt. After Homecourt on February 11, she asked the teacher, "Is it just me, or does No. 28 make no sense when he talks?" The confusion caused by No. 28's remarks had become the dominant image for this Homecourt. Perhaps because two of the other students were deaf and had difficulty communicating, No. 28 evolved as the person who talked the most in fourth period Homecourt on Wednesdays.
Student No. 28, a junior male, had been in two other Homecourts where he had been rather withdrawn and quiet. In this Homecourt, however, he became the central issue of most of the meetings. On February 10 he introduced a subject that became the main subject for almost all of the rest of the Homecourts that semester. When conversation lulled, he injected this subject: his parents made him study all day on Sundays so that between 12:00 noon until 10 pm, he could do nothing but study. However, he said that the more he studied, the worse his grades became. The less he studied, he reported, the better his grades became. This paradox seemed to provide him great delight, although he could not explain it. It was just one example of a series of things he said that were contradictory. He denied the contradictions and then enjoyed the confusion he created. Attempts to get him to take responsibility for this confusion failed. It seemed that he spoke "to conceal rather than reveal". His effect on the Homecourt was to frustrate those who really tried to listen and to understand what he said. On April 7, he finally admitted that he liked "to weird people out" but he still resisted explanations or elaborations.

Period 7 Wednesday Homecourt

The Homecourt that met on Wednesday during seventh period had 12 members. Its attendance rate was 75%, and it met for twelve sessions. However, one student, Student No. 40 only attended five of the meetings, and No. 45 only attended seven times. All twelve students were present together only twice on February 24 and March 10. Consequentially, this Homecourt never developed a cohesive identity. Each meeting was like a separate entity, so the best analysis of this Homecourt is done by looking at individual meetings.
The first meeting was January 27. After the customary first-meeting beginning which included reading the rules, introducing students to each other, and students expressing their expectations, Student No. 44 took over the leadership of the group by suggesting a topic: "How do all of you handle stress?" No. 44 was an oriental senior male who graduated among the top ten graduates. The other students, however, did not seem to be really interested in this subject. No. 30 kept repeating, "I don't do homework", in what appeared to be an attempt at humor. The teacher tried to stay focused on No. 44's question and believed that he might be feeling very stressed. However, the question turned out to be just his attempt to get the ball rolling, and he did not really seem too concerned about his own stress level. The last five minutes of class focused on No. 42 who had not been in Homecourt during the previous fall and expressed a great sense of relief to be back. At the end of this first meeting, he talked about his relationship with his brother, "the brother from hell". No. 42 had an ongoing hostility for his brother based on what he considered to be irresponsible and immoral behavior by his older brother. No. 42 had convinced himself that the reason his parents were so hard on him and would not give him a car and other privileges was that his the older brother had taken advantage of the freedoms he had been given. At times in the past there had been a hint of compassion in No. 42's rantings, but now that compassion seemed to have completely disappeared. No. 42 did not contribute any issues to the Homecourt again until February 24, and No. 44 never again initiated any topics although both continued to participate fully.

At the next meeting on February 10, the subject focused on racism, but no one really talked from a personal viewpoint. At that time it seemed that no
one felt comfortable enough or had a high enough trust level to self-disclose. That appeared to be the case again on February 17. However, 20 minutes into the period Student No. 45, a senior girl, made the first serious self-disclosure. She began by announcing that she had decided to return to a local drug rehabilitation hospital for outpatient day care. She had been through a drug rehabilitation program in the past, but she was not succeeding in her recovery. During the fall semester, she had admitted that she was smoking pot again, but she said that she felt she was in control. In fact, at one Homecourt the teacher asked her to abstain from drugs and alcohol for one weekend to test her control. She did. She reported later that she had actually had a better time straight. However, the lesson did not have a lasting effect. Now she was ready to admit that her drug use was an issue for concern. In fact, she was in trouble at home, because she had stolen jewelry to buy drugs. The theft seemed to be motivated more out of hostility than a need for drug money, but her parents were upset and told her that she would have to leave home as soon as school was over. The teacher asked her, “What can we do to help?” She replied that “just being here” helped. Several people in the Homecourt expressed support, and Student No. 18 provided a personal show of affection. The teacher told No. 45 that the Homecourt supported her and that he cared about her. She seemed comforted, although she was not particularly well-armed for the battle she was about to fight. There did not seem to be more that Homecourt could offer. She was receiving professional treatment, and Homecourt could only hope to supplement it.

The next meeting for this Homecourt was probably the pivotal one. Everyone attended, but events on that day, February 24, turned rather hostile,
and any closeness developing in the Homecourt seemed permanently damaged. The session started with a discussion on doctors. No. 42 began by generally attacking the medical profession. He claimed that all doctors were mercenary and cold-hearted. No. 40 and No. 30 defended the profession. Although all three of these students had parents who were doctors, only No. 42 did not acknowledge this fact. The teacher attempted to get him to realize that his feelings about doctors really described his feelings about his relationship with his father. The teacher’s efforts were interrupted by No. 30’s aggressive defense of his own father who he described as helping his patients and caring for them with more than simply professional interest. His father even lent money to some of his patients, he said. Interestingly, this description No. 30 gave was parallel to, but opposite of, the usual description he gave of his father. In the past he had described his father as very unsympathetic and cold to him, and one particular issue involved money. Whenever his father wanted to punish him or to exert control over him, his father used money as the primary tool.

The discussion shifted from this symbolic description of doctors to a more personal level, moving from judgmental issues to projections. This was one of the few times when the teacher abandoned his principles of nondirective teaching and employed an activity that utilized projections with No. 42. The teacher asked No. 42 what he thought the teacher thought of him. His answer was evasive and inconclusive: “The teacher thinks I am intelligent but hyper sometimes, and that’s all,” he said. The teacher went on to explain the theory behind the question, that people will act according to their projections, even if these projections are false. Before the teacher could ask No. 42 how his answers made him feel, No. 30 interrupted to say that he disagreed with the
whole premise.

No. 30 was asked, “What do you think the teacher thinks of you?”

“I think the teacher thinks I object too much and that I watch television too much,” he said quite caustically. The teacher was not prepared for the hostility expressed in No. 30’s answer.

“How does that make you feel,” the teacher asked.

“I don’t like it. I don’t like it at all. But projections don’t effect the way I act,” he responded.

“They will,” the teacher said, “until you check them out to see if they are true.”

“You will only get lies,” he countered.

Tension was building in the classroom. The teacher felt attacked, and he was not sure how to respond. Then No. 32 asked No. 42 what he thought of himself. No. 42 could not think of an answer. So, the teacher repeated the rationale behind the projection exercise, “If you can answer what you think others think of you, you will describe what you think of yourself.” No. 30 disagreed. However, No. 29 agreed with the teacher and shared an example from her past. The period ended with No. 45 confronting No. 18 using a personal projection. No. 45 said that she felt stupid around No. 18 because she was so sarcastic. No. 18 apologized for her sarcasm.

At the next meeting on March 3, No. 45’s announcement of her fifth day of sobriety was greeted with support and approval from the group. Then, attention again turned to No. 42. Because No. 45 and No. 42 were both in the same psychology class and because the teacher had observed how other students reacted to No. 42, the teacher attempted to be more directive in pursuit of a
specific goal with him. The teacher told No. 42, “I really value you, but I feel that the best thing I can do for you is give you feedback about how you are coming across to others.” At one point he asked No. 42, “How are you like the other people in Homecourt”. He responded that he was not like them and that he was different from everyone else. He felt he had more differences than similarities. The teacher made the point that he must feel very lonely. Then No. 43 interrupted and took the focus off of No. 42 with the opinion that the question “would be hard for anyone to answer”. Since this interaction was not proving to be profitable, the teacher returned to his original nondirective approach with No. 42.

On March 10 Homecourt discussion centered on the upcoming spring break and nothing else. On March 24, No. 32 expressed a feeling of being “burned out” by school. He seemed to have a low energy level. When the teacher asked if this “burned out” feeling was more generalized or even physical in nature, No. 32 had difficulty answering. However, the group refused to focus on his issues even when No. 29 returned the spotlight to No. 32 by asking some open-ended questions. His efforts to self-explore and look at the alienation he felt were not supported by the group. Instead No. 44 expressed a positive attitude about life, while No. 42 wanted to talk about his feelings that he had no control over his life. Then No. 41 expressed sympathy for No. 42. Only the teacher and No. 29 tried to stay focused on No. 32. This effort was further demolished when No. 41 announced that she would be moving before school ended.

From March 31 through April 14, the next three meetings, nothing of substance was discussed. For example, No. 29 tried to avoid a discussion on
abortion when it came up, but No. 30, totally ignoring the emotional intensity of No. 29, wanted to argue the issue. Another example involved the pictures that No. 41 brought of her new house. In fact the most significant fact for these three Homecourts was that No. 45 did not attend any of them. She had resumed to using drugs and did not want to face Homecourt.

At the April 21 meeting, a new student attended Homecourt. He was referred by No. 29. Normally, a new student would not have been allowed to join this late in the semester, the next to last meeting. However, a suicide had occurred earlier in the week, and the teacher felt that the new student might be in a crisis situation. He was not. Although nothing of particular interest was discussed in this Homecourt, the new student related to No. 42, and both expressed an appreciation of each other’s feelings of loneliness and alienation at school. They were later seen eating lunch together.

The last meeting for this Homecourt was on April 28. The usual good feelings that the last meeting produces with the “warm fuzzies” was jeopardized early in the period when No. 45 confronted No. 30. The teacher had made a special point of asking No. 45 to attend because he felt that she needed some “warm fuzzies”. Then she criticized No. 30 for putting his head down on his desk while she was giving a compliment. She was angry and told him that “people could not open up and talk if someone was ignoring them”. Her experience in groups came from her hospitalization where directive confrontation was the norm. No. 30 was startled and did not know what to say, although he did defend himself by declaring that Homecourt was a place “for people to be free and put their heads down if they wanted to”. The teacher reluctantly supported No. 30, but he added that No. 45 also had the right to
express her feelings of anger at his behavior. The rest of the period progressed
smoothly, and No. 30 did not put his head back down on his desk. No. 45 did
receive some nice compliments. During round four, she asked for hugs from
No. 18 and from the teacher and received them. She felt good after the final
Homecourt ended; however, she did not graduate nor did she complete
summer school. She was subsequently admitted to a residential psychiatric
and drug rehabilitation hospital during the summer.

Period 7 Thursday Homecourt

The last Homecourt of the week began as the most intense of all of the
Homecourts and ended as the least intense. It had the lowest attendance rate,
72%, and was canceled three times. There were four Peer Helpers at the
beginning of this Homecourt and five were enrolled by the end. Eight other
students were enrolled in this Homecourt at one time or another, including a
"no-show", Student No. 55, and two students who attended only one meeting,
Student No. 48 and No. 50. Two more members joined during the last month,
and then missed two meetings after they joined. In addition, this was a
Homecourt marked by diminishing leadership.

The first meeting of Thursday seventh period Homecourt began with a
very intense emotional disclosure by Student No. 47, a senior male. After the
rules of Homecourt were explained and during the introductions, No. 47
expressed hostility toward school. This anger was unusual for him, so the
teacher asked him to elaborate on his feelings about school. As he spoke, No.
47 cried but was able to identify his anger as pain. He felt very hurt that his
friends did not seem to take him seriously. The rest of the Homecourt
expressed support and offered comfort. Of the seven Homecourts during the first week, this Homecourt was the most intense and the most serious. Although two students never returned, neither maintained that this intensity scared them off. Both were on the swimming team and had to miss the next three or four meetings. At the end of that time, one felt uncomfortable rejoining after so many absences, and the other no longer had a ride home. Nonetheless, the leadership displayed by No. 47 in modeling emotional introspection was short-lived. At the next meeting, he refused to talk further about the situation that was troubling him. An attempt to get him to realize that his behavior and his body language were the causes for his friends not taking him seriously failed. He had received a great deal of positive feedback for being happy-go-lucky and for always smiling in the past. He could not understand how the friends that he felt so close to and so loyal to could not understand now how badly he felt, even though he continued smiling when he talked to them. Never again during the rest of the semester would he discuss such a personal subject. His attendance became sporadic, and he only came to four more meetings, usually late. Although this lack of commitment was not caused by reactions to his self-disclosure, his early leadership ceased for the semester.

Similarly, the leadership displayed by Student No. 29 did not exert the kind of influence that could have produced a more cohesive and productive Homecourt. On Tuesday and Wednesday, No. 29 performed as a model Peer Helper. She was very effective at reflecting other students' feelings. On several occasions, she was more accurate in her restatements than was the teacher. For example, when No. 47 was explaining his feelings on January 28, she clarified them for him accurately. She also paid attention without being
distracted by other students. However, during Thursday Homecourt she allowed herself to demonstrate self-disclosure and risk-taking by being vulnerable. After Thursday period 7 Homecourt had been canceled two weeks in a row, February 4 and 11, she talked about some feelings she had, because she had felt she had cheated in one of her classes. Actually, what she had done would be considered cheating only under the broadest definition of the word. She had let someone in her study group copy her homework, a practice which was usually within the rules for the class but not for that particular assignment. As she talked, she was obviously very depressed and sad. No. 30 tried to make a joke out of her feelings and told her that her behavior was not cheating but "shrewd time management policy". No. 32 and the teacher realized that her problem was not so much with her behavior as with herself. She felt that she had let down her own standards and principles, and that was what bothered her. She had exposed her guilty feelings to the group, had developed a plan for what to do about them, and had utilized Homecourt to help in the process.

On February 25, the next meeting of Thursday Homecourt, No. 29 revealed the dilemma she was facing with her boyfriend. The boyfriend was jealous of her and was already dreading her departure for college after her graduation next year. No. 29 was an excellent student and was planning on attending a first-rate university. She was in all honors classes and would graduate with honors, while her boyfriend was having difficulty at a local junior college and had barely graduated from high school the year before. Her boyfriend had also attempted suicide during his senior year, so any argument between them scared her. She felt responsible for her boyfriend in a way that
was not healthy for either of them; however, she was at a loss to know what else to do. She was weary from the strain of dealing with him, but she expressed concern and fear for him, as well as a deep loyalty to him. Taking about this in Homecourt, she began to see the problem in a different way and to formulate a plan of action. She wanted her boyfriend to talk to a professional counselor. Although he had gone to counseling for a short time following his suicide attempt, she wanted him to see a counselor again to help their relationship and even offered to go with him. As it turned out, No. 29 and her boyfriend discussed these issues together, but they never received professional counseling. By the end of the semester, she was not as concerned about her boyfriend's obsessive behavior as she had been in February when she had discussed it with her Homecourt. The group leadership demonstrated by both No. 47 and No. 29 during the first three meetings of this Homecourt failed to sustain itself. Neither exerted much influence again nor introduced any other personal issues.

In the meantime, No. 30's negative behaviors which he demonstrated the least on Tuesdays continued to escalate during the rest of the week. For example, on February 4, he argued about sex education with No. 29 and showed little appreciation for the emotional concerns she expressed. The conversation was purely an intellectual exercise for him. On February 25 when No. 29 was experiencing peak vulnerability about her boyfriend, he observed, in what might have been his most revealing remark of the year, "Things get messy when emotions come in." On Thursdays, the only topics he ever introduced concerned the aforementioned SAT scores and his indecision about enrolling in pre-calculus.
The April 1 meeting began the last month for spring semester Homecourt to meet. Two new students were allowed to join at that particular time. The first student was Student No. 53, a sophomore girl who attended some Homecourt meetings during the fall semester. She also attended on February 25, because she occasionally relied on No. 31 for a ride home. By April 1, she had become a Peer Helper, so she was invited to join Homecourt. She attended only one meeting after joining. The second student, No. 55, was a senior boy who had asked to join, because he had heard so many positive comments from No. 34, a student in Tuesday Homecourt. The teacher allowed him to join, because a rumor was spreading around school that he had run away from home after he was absent for two days. The rumor turned out to be false, and No. 55 only attended three of the last five meetings.

The final two meetings of the Thursday seventh period Homecourt demonstrated of how much the atmosphere had changed over the course of the semester. On April 22, not only did no one mention the suicide that occurred earlier in the week, no one discussed anything seriously. The last meeting on April 29 began with Students No. 30 and No. 31 denouncing the giving of “warm fuzzies” as phony. Thus, this Homecourt for the spring semester of 1993 came to an anticlimactic end.


Smith, A., "Final evaluation report of the student assistance program core team training project, school year 1987-1988", Technical Report to the Washington Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction, University of Washington's Center for the Study and


