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Abstract

AN EXAMINATION OF INTRA-SECONDARY SCHOOL CONFLICTS IN COMPLEX EMERGENCIES: THE CASE OF SIERRA LEONE

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This study describes how selected teachers and students in secondary schools in urban Sierra Leone perceive and manage interpersonal conflicts during complex emergencies, with a view to identifying the challenges for building a culture of peace and for further research. Using a qualitative research paradigm, the study examines how the interview subjects understand the meaning of interpersonal conflict and its effects on student-student and student-teacher relationships. The study also examines what types of conflicts the interview subjects experience in school, the root causes of these conflicts and how they respond to them. The data for this study were collected using semi-structured and unstructured interviews, documentary analysis, and the researcher's personal observations and lived African experiences. Key concepts such as the meaning of intra-school conflicts, adult education, peace, peace education, structural violence and structural conflict, non-violence and complex emergency, used in the study are also defined. Due to the relatively limited research on how African students and teachers perceive and manage inter-personal conflicts, the study uses conceptual frameworks mostly from a North American context and elsewhere.

The data reveal that nearly all the interview subjects perceive conflict from a negative perspective. Very few of them perceive conflict as having any positive values. The study indicates that interview subjects experience conflicts that are mostly related to
basic human needs, particularly – adequate food, safe drinking water, adequate school supplies, conducive classrooms, respect for human rights, gender equality, peaceful relationships, safe school environment and reasonably good and regular teachers’ salaries. According to the study, most of the interview subjects’ respond to conflict violently. Very few use non-violent responses. In order to build a culture of peace particularly in the secondary schools in Sierra Leone, the study proposes the integration of a Transformative Peace Education (TPE) Programme in the school curriculum. The study suggests thematic areas for TPE including, *critical awareness building on gender equality, anti-tribalistic education, democracy and human rights and training on constructive conflict resolution*. The study highlights some of the major challenges of TPE, raises questions for further research and concludes with a prayer for enlightenment for all Sierra Leoneans.
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Dedication

Dedicated to my family (the living, dead and yet unborn), the victims of the rebel war in Sierra Leone and to all ‘peaceless’ people and non-human environments around the world.
Chapter 1: Introduction

Prologue

Gbubun! Gbubun! Gbubun! Sounded the gunshots from the Revolutionary United Front (RUF) and the Armed Forces Revolutionary Council (AFRC) rebels. It was 2:00 a.m. on January 6, 1999. “Get up everybody the rebels have finally invaded Freetown,” my host shouted. “Come everybody lets get down to the basement,” my host advised. There were thirty of us living in the five-bedroom house at the time of the invasion. The telephone lines went off, so were the lights and the water system. There was very little food left with us. Hells got lose! Freetown was on fire! Over six hundred houses were burnt down. Nearly five thousand people were butchered and burnt alive. About three thousand young boys and girls and women were abducted, hundreds of innocent women and girls were raped and the limbs of hundreds of civilians were brutally amputated. If I had not moved from the east-end of the city (the entry point of the rebels) to the west of the city, just a day before the invasion, perhaps I would have not survived the rebel onslaught. Each time I reflected on the horrors of the rebel invasion, I shed tears. I thought I saw hell! This study contains horrifying experiences.

Introduction

In this Chapter, the socio-economic, political, historical and demographic characteristics, the purpose of the study, overview of the study, statement of the problem, significance of the study, my special interest in this study and definition of central concepts used in the study are presented. This background of the research is quite important because it provides the context, which informed the participants'
understandings of the meaning of conflict, the types and causes of conflicts they were faced with in their schools and the methods they used to respond to these conflicts.

**Brief Background on the Socio-economic, Historical and Political Contexts of Sierra Leone**

**Historical and demographic characteristics.**

Sierra Leone is located on the West Coast of Africa. It became a British colony in 1808 and gained its independence from Great Britain on April 27, 1961. English is the official language as well as the medium of instruction at all levels of the formal educational system. The country has an estimated population of 4.4 million people and a total area of 71,740 sq. km (The World Guide 1997/98). There are 13 ethnic groups, each with a different language but with a lot of similarities in cultural practices. "It is an extremely poor country, with a market-oriented economy and per capita income less than US$100 per year" (U.S. Department of State, 2000:2). It is ranked on the UN’s Human Development Index as the least developed country in the world, with an estimated life expectancy of about thirty years. The U. S. Department of State’s 1999 Human Rights report on Sierra Leone vividly describes the deplorable state of the country:

Only an estimated one-fifth of adults is literate. Although the country is rich in natural resources, and mineral resources and minerals (particularly diamonds, gold, [titanium], and bauxite) and has large areas of fertile land suitable for farming, the 9-year insurgency brought mineral extraction and agricultural production almost to a standstill. There is little manufacturing, and there are few exports; approximately 70 per cent of the Government’s budget come from foreign assistance. Years of fighting, corruption, and mismanagement resulted in a crumbling infrastructure (2000. 2).

There are other factors that have led to this appalling situation. For example, lack of democratic governance; exploitation by multinational corporations; gender and ethnic
inequality; lack of accountability by the political leaders both at national and local levels; unemployment; poor health and educational facilities; food insecurity; high illiteracy rates, and neglect of rural communities. Women, children and youth are the most marginalized and vulnerable during national crises. They are usually subjected to all kinds of physical, emotional and psychological abuses.

**Brief background of the rebel war.**

In March 1991, a group of Sierra Leonean dissidents in Liberia, later known as the Revolutionary United Front (RUF), launched a war against the regime of the All People’s Congress (A. P. C.) Party. Due to decades of neglect of the young adults by successive governments, hundreds of youth saw the RUF as a vehicle through which they could vent out their anger and frustration against the government for not doing enough to enable them share the country’s abundant natural resources. The RUF therefore found it relatively easy to recruit students from all levels of education. As the war intensified, students from elementary to tertiary levels were either abducted or forced to fight or willingly joined the rebels to fight against the government forces. On the other hand, the government forces also recruited children as young as eight years to help them fight against the rebels. These young fighters became known as child soldiers (Kaplan, 1994). I argue that the involvement of these young people in the war has influenced them to use war and violence as legitimate means of bringing about social transformation and justice in their country.

Atrocities committed by some of these youth include: raping women and young girls, maiming civilians, killing their own parents and mass burning of people’s homes.
and properties. Notorious in these inhuman acts were the rebels of the so-called RUF. The Government of Sierra Leone (GOSL) forces, Civil Defense Forces (CDF) and the Economic Community of West African States Monitoring Group (ECOMOG) that have been supporting the democratically elected government have been blamed for similar human rights abuses. U. S Department of State’s (2000) Human Rights Report for 1999 on Sierra Leone confirms:

The Government’s human rights record was characterized by serious problems. Both government forces and ECOMOG forces operating in support of the Government committed extra judicial killings and summarily executed suspected rebels and their collaborators. Government, CDF, and ECOMOG forces at times beat noncombatants...Government and ECOMOG forces continued to occasionally to arrest and detain persons arbitrarily (p. 2).

The war has made the state ungovernable. The Lome Peace Accord, which was signed by GOSL and the RUF in July 1999 virtually, died in May 2000 when the RUF held hostage five hundred UN peacekeepers. Building a culture of peace in post-war Sierra Leone is a Herculean task. There are many challenges facing the country today. The first reality is that the rebel war is still going on. The diamonds that are the main source of government revenue are still being mined and controlled by the rebels who sell them to multinationals in exchange for guns and other ammunition. In fact the rebels currently control the bulk of the Northern and Eastern Provinces. This means that the government only has jurisdiction in the Southern Province, small parts of the Eastern Province, Freetown and its environs (including the Lungi International Airport).

The war has also caused nearly all the Paramount Chiefs, government ministers, parliamentarians and top civil servants from the provinces to live in Freetown. In rebel-controlled towns and villages, ‘jungle justice’ rules an innocent civilian population. In so-
called rebel-free rural areas, CDF have imposed itself as the voice of the national government. Human rights abuses in the CDF-controlled areas abound. The war has largely eroded the social fabric of the society. RUF and CDF courts have replaced most of the local institutions that managed and resolved conflicts. Physical violence has been the most common method used by the rebels, the CDF and sometimes the military forces, to handle conflicts.

Therefore, to provide a ‘fix-it’ formula for handling conflicts in a complex emergency such as Sierra Leone will be a day dreaming venture. Rebuilding the country will take decades. “Years of fighting, corruption, and mismanagement resulted in a crumbling infrastructure” (U. S. Department of State, 2000:2). No sustainable development can take place in a war situation.

This war has caused the deaths of over 70,000 people, displaced over 2 million Sierra Leoneans and forced about 500,000 refugees into neighbouring countries in the sub region. I have argued elsewhere that as a result of the involvement of the youth in this war, both as victims and perpetrators of violence, “indigenous values such as respect for old age, spirituality, women, the sacredness of life and moral discipline…” have been eroded (Turay, 1998:5).

The negative effects of this war therefore, have serious implications for any post-war efforts to re-train and re-integrate these youth into society. I argue that the people of Sierra Leone cannot meet the challenges of the 21st Century if this culture of youth violence is not transformed into a culture of peace and reconciliation. Some suggestions regarding how this could be done are provided in the concluding chapter.
Urgent Need for Humanitarian Assistance and Basic Human Needs

Sierra Leone is experiencing a humanitarian crisis. In a recent conference organized in Ottawa, Canada, by Partnership Africa Canada, the Network Movement for Justice and Development and the Sierra Leone Working Group, on the Crisis in Sierra Leone, Fortune (2000:1) laments on the difficult times Sierra Leoneans are faced with:

Financial difficulties are the main problems preoccupying people: how to survive the daily onslaught of needs. Most people’s time is fully occupied trying to make a living. How do you feed your family for the day, pay school expenses, medical bills and help the extended family? Rent is due and the landlord wants money for a year – where does that cash come from? More displaced family members are arriving – how are we going to lodge them and feed them? These are the major domestic problems concerning the bulk of the population.

As earlier mentioned, about half a million refugees are still living in Guinea, Liberia, Gambia and Ghana (Bash-Taqi, 2000:1). Recently, refugees in Guinea and Liberia were being molested and maltreated because their host governments accused them of harbouring rebels who were a threat to the security of their host countries. In a visit I made to three of the refugee camps in one of these countries, I observed that refugees were living in terrible conditions. Many were malnourished, sick and traumatized. There were three categories of people who desperately needed humanitarian assistance. These were the refugees, internally displaced people and those trapped in rebel-held territory. There were two and a half million internally displaced persons living in Freetown and safe havens in the Northern, Eastern and Southern parts of the country (Bash-Taqi, 2000). The worst affected are the people living in rebel-held areas. These people lack food, medicines, clothing and other basic human necessities. They desperately require humanitarian assistance.
It is also important to note that decades of misrule, corruption, lack of accountability and transparency by successive governments have denied the bulk of the population, their basic human needs. I argue that meeting basic needs is a human right. I strongly argue that meeting basic needs must pay special attention to the disadvantaged women and children, the physically challenged, the amputees and the elderly. Both before and during the war, the women, the physically challenged, the elderly and the children have been the most marginalized groups in the society.

What are basic needs? Because of the current war, Fortune (2000:3) argues that "the primary concern and need of most of the people is security, then all other activities can follow." This concern is in direct response to the on-going war. In the light of this I argue that basic needs should be defined according to the socio-economic, political, spiritual and cultural context of people. For example in the current national context of Sierra Leone, Fortune (2000) provides a very good summary of what constitutes basic needs (in order of priority - my emphasis):

1. Security – ending the war (including disarming and demobilizing the warring factions);
2. Material needs – food, clothing, shelter, medical support, water;
3. Rehabilitation and reconstruction of homes;
4. Reintegration, reconciliation of ex-combatants with the civil society;
5. Good governance, etc.

Human rights particularly, the rights of women and the children to good quality of life, accessible and affordable educational facilities and environmental sustainability are other basic needs that must go side by side with those aforementioned. To sum it up,
Galtung (1990:120) argues, "[basic] human needs are the guiding light for human right[s]."

**Brief background of the educational system.**

Both during the colonial period and three decades after independence, Sierra Leone's educational system was modeled on the British system of education. In fact “...up to barely thirty years ago Sierra Leone’s educational profile was the most impressive in West Africa" (Department of Education, 1994:3). Fourah Bay College, which was opened in 1827, became the first university in Africa South of the Sahara. Many of the pre-colonial and early post-colonial African educated elite in British West Africa and other parts of Africa had their tertiary education at Fourah Bay College. Its high academic reputation earned it the title of ‘Athens of Africa’. But gone are those glorious days! The educational system has been deteriorating since the first decade after independence. The Department of Education (1994) agrees and further explains this gloomy picture with frustration and despair:

Education in Sierra Leone is in a crisis situation. Almost every education index shows the country to be at, or near, the bottom of the international league table...The 1994 national illiteracy rate is over 80 per cent; school participation rates have fallen to 35 per cent for the primary sector and 10 per cent for the secondary. There are significant geographical and social disparities in respect of accessibility to schools - some communities have no accessible primary schools – and the enrollment, attendance and retention of girls in all levels of schooling is markedly inferior to that of boys. Selective secondary and higher education, including teacher training, are out of touch with the development needs of the country (p. 3).

What caused this downward trend? According to the Sierra Leone Department of Education (1994:3) “gross under funding and poor standards of management have been
major causes of the sharp decline in all sectors of education in Sierra Leone." There is a high level of corruption, mismanagement and lack of transparency and accountability among politicians, senior civil servants and other government officials.

Since 1958, several attempts have been made to reform the educational system the country inherited from Britain. In her foreword message, to the New Education Policy for Sierra Leone, former Secretary of State, Department of Education, Christina Thorpe laments on the unrealistic nature of some of these reforms and the slow implementation of some of the recommendations made:

Since the publication of the last policy White Paper on Education in 1970, there have been many changes and developments in education. In 1976, an Education review... was published. It contained many educational ideas that were far ahead of their time... Over the period 1970 to 1990, the socio-economic situation of the country deteriorated very seriously and this has had an adverse effect on educational development throughout the country... The outputs of institutions at the technical/vocational and teacher education levels have also been found wanting in terms of meeting the nation's demand for skilled and well trained personnel (Thorpe, 1995:1).

The 6-3-3-4 system of education.

The 6 – 3 – 3 – 4 system of education was introduced in September 1993 (Sierra Leone Department of Education, 1995). It replaced the old system, which consisted of seven years of primary education, seven years of secondary education (five years up to General Certificate of Education Ordinary level, followed by two years of Advanced level). The 6 – 3 – 3 – 4 system consists of six years of elementary education (ages 6 – 12 years), three years of junior secondary education (ages 11 – 13 years), three years of senior secondary education (ages 13 – 15 years), and four years of university education (ages: 15 – 19 years). The first block of nine years (i.e. 6-3) constitutes the formal part of
the Basic Education System (Sierra Leone Department of Education, 1995). Students who successfully completed junior secondary school could either proceed to vocational centers or to senior secondary. Several post-secondary programs (non-university level) were proposed for students not continuing their education up to university level. A very unique feature of the 6-3-3-4 system was that it approved the teaching of four Sierra Leonean languages - *Krio, Limba, Temne* and *Mende*.

**The aims and objectives of the new education system.**


The general aim of education...is the integral development of the individual for the building of: -

- a cohesive, healthy and strong nation with a sustainable and dynamic economy;
- a free, just and peace-loving society;
- a democratic and harmonious society;
- a moral and disciplined society.

The overall direction of the new educational system and how the specific needs of the individual and the society are further explained below:

In this regard, education is to be operated on the basis of partnership. It shall also be fair, universal, life-long, free of unwarranted discrimination and accessible to all both in the formal and non-formal sectors. It shall focus on providing every citizen with an education, which takes full account of: -

- the rights of each individual/child to basic education;
- character development and the cultivation of desirable attitudes;
- his/her interests, abilities and aptitudes;
- the [person] power needs of the country;
- the need to correct gender imbalances;
- economic resources of the State with a view to ensuring that the education provided is of use to the country and the same time of value to the individual in terms of achieving success in life (Sierra Leone Department of Education, 1995:1).

As shown in Chapter 4, the realization of most of these objectives remains a dream. The general neglect of most of the needs mentioned above remains the primary source of most of the intra-school conflicts identified by this study.

**Proprietorship of the schools.**

Both religious institutions, such as Christians and Muslims and other non-religious agencies, run schools. Proprietors manage both the primary and secondary schools. Each elementary and secondary school organizes a Parent-Teacher Association (PTA) to ensure the active and informed participation of the parents in the running of the schools. In order to ensure that the schools implement the Ministry of Youths, Education and Sport’s (YES Ministry) policies, and curriculum guidelines, Regional Education Offices and Inspectorate offices were set up at provincial and district levels and charged with the responsibility of supervising the schools. Due to inadequate financial and material resources, and poor communication between the rural and the urban areas, supervision of schools in the remote rural areas of the country is almost non-existent.
Post-secondary and tertiary education.

Two colleges constitute the University of Sierra Leone, which includes Fourah Bay College (F. B. C.) - opened in 1827 and Njala University College (N. U. C.) - opened in 1964. Another institution of higher learning is the Milton Margai College of Education (opened in 1963). This college, which only used to offer Higher Teachers Certificate Courses for secondary school teachers, now offers Bachelor of Education (B. Ed) degrees.

There are five Teacher Training Colleges (one in Freetown, two in the North Province, one each in the Southern and Eastern Provinces). These primarily train teachers to teach in pre-schools and primary school. Some of these colleges and N. U. C. were either completely or partially destroyed by the war. With the exception of two Teacher Training Colleges, all the other colleges including N. U. C. have been forced to operate in Freetown because of the rebel occupation of their regions. These institutions are operating under very frustrating and difficult times. Lecturers most times go for months without salaries and grants from the government. Because of the war and lack of the necessary financial and material support from the government, the teaching profession, which was once regarded as a noble profession, has now become the nation's laughing stock.

Mechanism for settling conflicts between the teachers and government.

The executive of the Sierra Leone Teachers Union (SLTU) and representatives of the YES Ministry negotiate conflicts between the government and teachers. Such conflicts are mostly about issues such as late/non-payment of salaries, salary increases
and improving teachers’ conditions of service. Sometimes, several teachers are not paid for a period ranging from two months to one academic year.

Another source of conflict between the teachers and the government is about the growing corruption and mismanagement of educational funds by certain officials of the ministry and the nonchalant attitude of government to punish the culprits. Protests by teachers and students against such malpractice were usually met with military and or police brutality, arrests and detentions without fair trial of the leaders of such protests.

Another strategy that the late President Siaka Stevens used in the 1980s, to avoid conflicts with the SLTU, was that he used his executive presidential powers and appointed the then General Secretary of the SLTU to serve as a member of Parliament. This strategy was also used to weaken the capacity of the union to organize civil disobedience in the wake of public resentment of the government’s ineptitude. The current government went a step further in 1999 by appointing the General Secretary as a full Minister of Labour and International Relations. Prior to this, the SLTU had been engulfed with intra-union conflicts that resulted in the establishment of a new splinter group. To sum up, the SLTU is presently in disarray and lacks the capacity and authority to lobby and advocate for the thousands of teachers they are supposed to serve and protect. It is without doubt that this kind of situation gives a breathing space to the government, because teachers and students remained the only civil force that has been consistently challenging successive governments’ abuse of power and mismanagement of public funds and properties. As shown in this study, this “divide and rule” strategy by the government is not the best way to deal with the conflict situations existing between the government and the SLTU. The government’s neglect of the educational system has bred
a fertile ground for the growth of intra-school conflicts. This point is exemplified in Chapters 4 and 5.

**The role of the Board of Governors**

Commenting on the appointment and tenure of the Board of Governors, Sesay and Labour (n.d: p. 15) write:

The Education Act 1964 makes it mandatory for Boards of Governors to superintend the general administration of the secondary schools. Section 16(4) of the Act empowers the Honourable Minister of Education to make all appointments. There should be twelve members who shall hold office for three years and are eligible for re-appointment.

The responsibilities of the Board members include discussing and recommending to the Ministry of Education for approval of the following:

- Annual leave for the Principal and Vice Principal, appointment of Senior Teachers and Heads of Department, Promotion and termination of teachers, staff retirement, application for study leave, consideration of teacher’s grievances, suspension and expulsion of pupils, budget proposals, scrutiny of financial statements, audit reports, curriculum [and] infrastructure etc.

**School discipline and corporal punishment.**

The YES Ministry advises, “every school [to] have rules and regulations which must be few, simple, clear and practical” (Sesay and Labour, n.d, p. 30). The Ministry currently approves corporal punishment in the schools. It is however, gradually working towards its complete eradication. The present guidelines include:

- Only a female teacher may inflict corporal punishment on a girl.
- Only by the Principal or on his [or her] expressed authority, may corporal punishment be inflicted.
The maximum permitted punishment is six strokes with a light cane (Sesay and Labour, n.d: pp. 31-33).

**Suspension**

May be for a fixed or indefinite period. Principal must inform the parent/guardian of the suspended student regarding the nature of the offence and the length of the suspension. All suspensions should be properly documented (Sesay and Labour, n.d: pp. 31-33).

**Expulsion**

- Neither the Principal nor the Board of Governors can expel a [student]. Only the Minister of Education has the authority to order expulsion for cases, which are extremely serious. A [student] may only lose his/her place after the first three years of secondary school (Sesay and Labour, n.d: pp. 31-33).

All parents and guardians are expected to encourage their children to strictly observe such rules and regulations.

**Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study has been to describe how selected secondary school teachers and students in urban Sierra Leone perceive and manage inter-personal conflicts during complex emergencies with the ultimate goal of identifying the challenges for building a culture of peace and for further research.

**An Overview of the Study**

This study is divided into six Chapters. Chapter 1 consists of the introduction. It begins with a brief background on the socio-economic, historical and political contexts of Sierra Leone. A brief background of the rebel war and the educational system follows
this. Next, the Chapter describes the purpose of the study, overview of the study, statement of the problem, the significance of the study, my special interest in the study and the definition of the operational terms are presented. The operational terms defined include the meaning of intra-school conflicts, adult education, peace, peace education, structural conflict and structural violence, nonviolence and complex emergencies.

In Chapter 2, the relevant literature is reviewed. It examines the conceptual framework of the study including African perspectives of conflict and its various manifestations. The specific conceptual frameworks examined include the meaning of conflict, causes of conflict, types of conflict and methods of managing conflicts from an African perspective. These issues are examined within the contexts of student-student and student-teacher inter-personal conflicts in three urban secondary schools in Sierra Leone.

In Chapter 3, the methodology of the study is presented. It began by briefly analyzing of qualitative research in education. Other themes examined in this chapter include, the research questions, data collection and ethical review protocol, interviews, data analysis, data access, uses of interpretation, research bias, selection of sample, instruments, filed work in a war situation and limitations of the study.

In Chapter 4, the findings of the study are presented. The Chapter begins with a brief background of the three schools studied and the interview subjects. This is followed by a detailed description of the participants’ understandings of the meaning of conflict and its effects on student-student and student-teacher relationships, the types of student-student and student-teacher conflicts and their causes and how they were managed.

In Chapter 5, the findings of the study are critically analyzed and discussed. The key themes analyzed in this Chapter includes the meaning of conflict, the types of
conflicts, the causes of conflict and conflict management methods. Sub-themes or categories of what sense I made of the findings are presented in this Chapter. The Chapter also examines relevant literature to either validate the findings or identify new categories that emerged.

The challenges for Transformative Peace Education (TPE) in post-war Sierra Leone and for further research are discussed in Chapter 6. This Chapter begins by conceptualizing the meaning of TPE. This is followed by a description of suggested themes and methodology for TPE. The Chapter concludes with a summary and conclusion. In this section, questions further research and suggested and the Chapter closes with a prayer for all Sierra Leoneans. The appendices and the references for the study follow.

**Statement of the Problem**

The term conflict has no clear single meaning. Its meaning needs to be contextualized. In the same vein, the types of conflicts, their causes and how individuals respond to them vary according to the prevailing socio-economic, cultural, political and religious contexts in which the individuals are located at a point in time. Also, conflicts are classified in a variety of ways – intra- and inter-personal, intra- and inter-community, and intra- and inter-state conflicts, to name but a few examples. The bulk of the research to date on conflicts in Africa focuses largely on violent intra- and inter-state conflicts that have engulfed the African continent in the last two decades. The continent’s conflicts that once in a while make the headlines in the Western media are mostly about civil wars.
For example, the ten-year rebel war in Sierra Leone has categorized the country as one of the most deadly conflict zones in the world, with the largest United Nation's Peacekeeping force in recorded history. Very little research is being carried out in Sierra Leone to examine the local people's understandings of the meaning of conflict, the different day-to-day interpersonal conflicts they are faced with and how they deal with such conflicts. For example, studies by Richards (1996) and Lord (2000) generally focused on various dimensions of the rebel war. While such studies are extremely important and relevant, there is need to recognize that conflict is not just about the presence of war. There is need to conceptualize conflict from an inclusive perspective. The literature reveals that scholars studying conflicts in Africa seem to “disagree on the nature, sources, and appropriate categorization of the conflicts in Africa” (Obasanjo, 1991:xvii).

Zartman (1991:319) also argues that, “there are many studies about the nature of current conflicts in Africa and elsewhere but they tend to be either historical or polemical.” He further notes, “...there is little study of the conflicts as a problem, requiring imaginative ideas and propitious conditions for a solution” (1991:319). The bulk of the current literature on conflict and its management is based on North American and European values and realities. “Most of the current literature leaves aside traditional [conflict management methods] that can be observed elsewhere than in North America and Western Europe” (Faure, 2000:153). Zartman (1991) therefore, calls for a better understanding of the “mechanisms and process of conflict management and resolution...[based on lived African experiences]” (p. 318). Albert, Awe, Hérault and Omitoogun (1995:2) agree, “[the] origin and nature [of conflict] are best explained within
the framework of human nature and the environment in which [human beings] live.”

While this may sound logical, the reality has been quite different. Therefore, Obasanjo (1991:xix) argues that:

The greatest challenge of policy makers in Africa is to identify the prerequisites for durable peace, stability, justice in their own countries...The search for the solutions to Africa’s conflicts has to be pursued on at least four fronts: the socio-economic, political, ideological, and institutional.

Therefore, Rahim (1986:2) argues, “...studies of conflict should address who the actors are and how they define their needs and goals [in order to examine whether] those needs and goals conflict with those of other actors.” This problem has been addressed by this study through the frames of analysis of selected students and teachers in three senior secondary schools in Freetown, Sierra Leone.

Significance of the Study

Why is this study significant? The significance of this study is manifold. My home country, Sierra Leone, is at the moment struggling to end an extremely violent ten-year intra-state conflict. Since the outbreak of the rebel war in 1991, a culture of youth violence has increased at an alarming rate. Sierra Leoneans must opt for non-violent conflict resolution alternatives. Post-war peacebuilding initiatives by both the local and international NGOs, government agencies and educational institutions, to name but a few examples, must begin by investigating Sierra Leoneans’ perceptions of conflicts, the daily inter-personal conflicts they are faced with, what causes them and how they respond to them. Such information is absolutely necessary for developing non-violent conflict resolution programs both at the formal and non-formal sectors of the society. I have
argued elsewhere (2000) that African scholars involved in conflict and peace research must intensify the search for African perceptions of the meaning of peace and conflict. This study is an answer to this scholastic call. As a Sierra Leonean peace activist for the last twenty years, this study is quite important for my future work in promoting nonviolence and social transformation.

Secondly, I would like to argue that, “analysis of conflict in the public schools should increase our understanding of the teaching profession by expressing those problems confronting educators which are due to the kinds of organizations in which they work” (Corwin, 1966:6). This study also addresses a concern by Faure (2000:153) that “there lies a whole human heritage of empirical know-how that should be collected before it vanishes and its memory fades.” The United Nations has recognized that this issue is quite important for Africa’s quest for building a culture of peace. It has recently put a lot of emphasis on the need to address the root causes of Africa’s crises by supporting research that articulates indigenous African approaches to conflict and its management (Albert, Awe, Héraul and Omitoogun, 1995).

In fact, in 1995, at a symposium held at Ouagadougou by the World Bank/UNDP, it was decided that a pilot study on informal judicial (conflict resolution) channels in three African cities – Ouagadougou, Abidjan and Cape Town, be undertaken (Albert, Awe, Hérault and Omitoogun, 1995).

Although this study did not focus on this area, at least it brought an awareness of African perceptions of conflict and its management (Zartman, 2000). The study therefore, complemented the findings of the research mentioned above. Limited in scope though it
may be, this is important because “when conflict is truly understood, it can become an opportunity to learn and create” (Schrumpf, Crawford, Donna and Usdel, 1991:5).

Therefore, this study focuses on specific and manifest conflicts (Stedman, 1991). Its findings therefore, have provided some useful data for policymakers, school administrators, board of governors of schools, teachers and educationalists interested in creating peaceful school environments in particular, and nurturing a culture of peace in African societies and elsewhere, in general. “Theory-building in this new discipline is on going and in an exciting phase for scholars of the field” (Leal, 1995). In the light of this, the study has highlighted African views about the nature of inter-personal conflicts in educational institutions, which have helped to broaden the development of such a field of study (Corwin, 1966:7).

The study also support Goldman, De Zeeuw and Hagen (1992:10) that:

...Beliefs and attitudes about conflict, the definition of conflict, responses to conflict, and the consequences of those responses are invariably culturally determined. Though human conflict is inevitable, individuals respond to conflict in the service of their cultural rules, rules [that] are usually implicit.

As earlier mentioned, the bulk of the literature in social conflicts is grounded in mainstream North American cultural values and beliefs (Goldman, De Zeeuw and Hagen, 1992). By bringing the African perspectives to the nature of conflict and conflict management discourse, this study has contributed to our knowledge of the world (Leal, 1995). Finally, as shown in the last chapter, the study has proposed a Transformative Peace Education approach for secondary schools in Sierra Leone and at the same time, raised pertinent questions for further research.
My Personal Interest in this Study

I am a Sierra Leonean peace activist and former Director of Caritas Makeni (Diocesan Catholic Development Office), and Director (on study leave) of the Center for Development and Peace Education (CD-PEACE), Sierra Leone. "[My] research interests include peace education and social change, local capacity building and sustainable development" (Turay, 2000:50).

I understand life to be a mixture of struggles, challenges, joys and sorrows and conflicts. It involves making choices and dealing with the inevitables. Conflict is one of such inevitables. There are various interpretations of what conflict means. There are also various types of conflicts including social, political, religious, ethnic, environmental and economic. These conflicts cannot be avoided, but can be transformed to enrich human experience. This implies that the methods we use to resolve conflicts are choices we make ourselves. I therefore, argue that individuals in each society need to develop a deeper understanding of the meaning of conflict and how to resolve conflict in a very constructive and productive manner.

This study is part of my ‘life-long peace journey’. It provided me with an opportunity to develop a deeper understanding of how indigenous Africans conceptualize the meaning and nature of social conflicts, their causes, and different conflict management styles. The study was intended to enable me focus on specific aspects of this complex yet interesting field of inquiry.

My long-term dream is to establish a Peace and Development Education Centre in Sierra Leone (my home country) that would contribute to individual, community, national and global peace, justice and social transformation. I am deeply concerned about
the culture of violence that has engulfed Sierra Leone throughout the 1990s and the early part of this century as a result of the ten-year rebel war earlier mentioned. Before the war, Sierra Leoneans believed they had the most peaceful society based in West Africa. What influenced this way of thinking? This certainly has to do with their perceptions of the meanings of peace and conflict. The fact that the country is experiencing the worst human crisis in recent history indicates that Sierra Leoneans had a false sense of peace. Building a culture of peace in the post-war period requires a deeper understanding of how Sierra Leoneans understand/perceive the meaning of conflict, what types of daily conflicts they experience, who are involved in these conflicts, what causes them and how they manage them. The causes of the current intra-state conflict are rooted at the interpersonal and micro-level conflicts.

I brought into this study my lived experiences of the meaning and nature of social conflicts and their effects on human relationships. To assist me in this journey, I took diverse courses both in my Masters and Ph.D. programs. To broaden my understanding of peace and conflict, I took courses such as, Conflict Resolution (audited), Principles of Anti-racism Education, Introduction to Transformative Learning, African Development and Indigenous Knowledge, Participatory Research in the Community and Workplace. Conflict Mediation (Individual Research Reading), to name but a few examples. My master’s thesis was on “Peace education and social change in Africa: The role of NGOs in Kenya.”

In December 1997, I received an award from General Motors, Canada, to attend an intensive two-weeks’ course on: “Creating Common Ground: Peacekeeping Negotiation and Mediation,” at the Lester B. Pearson Canadian International
Peacekeeping Training Centre in Nova Scotia, Canada. I have been a member of the Canadian Association for Studies in Adult Education (CASAE) Peace Group in the Adult Education, Community Development, and Counselling Department (OISE/UT) since 1994, and have made several presentations on peace-related issues in the annual conferences (1995 – 1997) organized by CASAE. During my life at OISE/UT, I also volunteered for organizations involved in peace and conflict-related training services, such as the St. Stephens Community Conflict Resolution Centre, CUSO Toronto and delivered peace talks to students at McMaster University, high school and elementary school students in Toronto and Halifax. I have also made presentations in peace-related seminars organized by the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA), the Canadian Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade and Co-operation and Partnership Africa Canada (PAC). I currently serve as a member of the Board of Directors for Peacefund Canada.

In 1998, I went to Sierra Leone to facilitate a Peacebuilding Training of Trainers workshop for about eighty participants from grassroots organizations (including women, youth, the elderly, ex-combatants, farmers, government workers, journalists, etc.). This was a programme, which was funded by CIDA and co-ordinated in Canada by PAC and the Sierra Leone Working Group (SLWG), a group I joined since 1997. While I was in Sierra Leone, the rebels invaded my hometown in December 1998 and Freetown in January 1999. In Freetown, I lived the horror of the rebel war. My own personal observations of the atrocities committed by the rebels and other militia groups validated the findings of this study.
My thesis journey has been full of conflicts. Upon my return to Canada in mid-January 2000 with our three daughters, I was faced with many challenges:

- Moving into a new house in Toronto.
- Helping my children cope with schoolwork and adjust to the Canadian winter.
- Completing my thesis.
- Finding ways to meet my domestic and university financial commitments.
- Teaching adult education, conflict resolution and training of trainers' courses at the Coady International Institute, St. Francis Xavier University, Antigonish and at the same time trying to settle down in our new environment.
- Supporting my wife during her undergraduate studies and my three daughters during their high school education.
- Raising funds to support our families in Sierra Leone who are still trapped in the bloody rebel war.
- Healing my physical self, which almost fell apart during this thesis journey.

The above-mentioned conflict situations also informed my positionality in the frames of analysis presented in this study. These lived intra- and inter-personal conflict experiences have provided me with a great opportunity to deepen my knowledge and understanding of how to respond to life's daily conflicts in a constructive and nonviolent manner. The rationale for highlighting the above experiences of 'my peace journey' is not merely for self-glorification but to show that I have a committed passion and love for global peacbuilding.
Definition of Key Terms Used in the Study

The Meaning of Intra-school Conflicts

Intra-school conflicts refer to conflicts that occur among the members of the same school community. They generally occur among students, teachers, members of the disciplinary committee, the school’s daily wage workers, and between students and teachers, teachers and the administrative staff, teachers and the Principal, the administrative staff and the Principal, and the schools’ daily wage workers and the students, teachers, administrative staff, and Principal. The focus of this study has been on the conflicts among students and between students and teachers in a complex emergency such as Sierra Leone.

What is adult education?

According to UNESCO (1997:2):

Literacy and Adult Education are a means for people to overcome poverty and exclusion, establish and reinforce democracy, achieve justice and comprehensive peace, enhance economic and social well-being and improve their health and ensure their food security. Adult education helps to prevent and eliminate gender and racial disparity, and other social problems such as violence against women, drug addiction, environmental destruction, and HIV/AIDS.

In the light of this I argue that both formal and non-formal adult education can play a significant role in the building of bridges for sustainable peace. Adult education offers opportunities for the adult populations to articulate their lived experiences, make their own history and participate fully in the socio-economic, ecological, political and spiritual advancement of their local communities and societies at large. In the school context, it
empowers the students and teachers to develop critical consciousness of the world around them and work for social transformation. It is a life long process (UNESCO, 1997). Freire (1972) therefore calls on adult education to empower the oppressed in society so that they could emancipate themselves and radically transform the unjust structures in their societies.

**What is Peace?**

Why is peace a central concept in my study? In my view, the main goal of resolving conflict is to create a peaceful environment where individuals in conflict can recognize that conflict is a fact of life and must be dealt with in a non-violent manner. I understand peace to be either relative or absolute. Relative peace describes the state of the real world, while absolute peace refers to the ideal peace that every one strives to achieve. Absolute peace means perfect harmony among human beings and between them and the non-human environments, and the spiritual world. This is my utopian view of peace. In defining peace therefore, it is important to contextualize its meaning. It is also important to examine these questions such as whose and what peace? For example, Brock-Utne (1985:1) argues, "how we define peace influences what we have to say about it." Peace can be examined from both positive and negative perspectives (Tandon, 1989 and Brock-Utne, 1985). O'Connell (1989) and Brock-Utne (1987) describe positive peace as a state of mind, not only the absence of war/conflict. Therefore, I argue that positive peace is the absence of both war and structural violence (injustice) and the presence of just procedures for handling conflict. On the other hand, Assefa (1993), Kekkonen (1981), Brock-Utne (1985) and Galtung (1975) understand negative peace as the absence of war or violent conflict. Therefore, "the absence of overt violence in any given society
or community must not be seen as the presence of [positive] peace" (Turay, 1996:20). In fact according to Assefa (1993:4-5) "peace is a philosophy, and in fact a paradigm, with its own values and precepts, which provide a framework to discern, understand, analyze, and regulate all human relations in order to create an integrated, holistic, and humane social order." For the purpose of this study therefore, I understand peace to mean a way of life that encourages respect for human and earth rights, social justice, freedom, absence of gender bias, and equitable distribution of resources and power. Similarly, Adams, 1994:2) views peace as "...[a state of mind that] value[s] acceptance of others, [diversity, tolerance], cooperation, positive expression of emotions, and creative conflict resolution." Positive peace is therefore fundamental to any development process.

**What is Peace Education?**

In this study, I understand peace education as defined by (Brock-Utne, 1987:72).

She states that:

Peace education [is] the social process through which [positive] peace...is achieved. This includes the practicing of equality of rights and equal power sharing for every member of a given community. It further includes the learning of skills [roles and responsibilities] of non-violent conflict resolution.

Teaching people about the "equality of all human beings regardless of color, [gender], class, or creed" (Brock-Utne, 1987:73) is central to peace education.

**What do Structural Violence and Structural Conflict Mean?**

Structural violence 'kills' without the use of the gun or overt violent means. Its relative invisibility masks the real social injustices the majority of dis-empowered peoples throughout the world are faced with. According to Assefa (1993:3):
Structural violence has been defined as social and personal violence arising from unjust, repressive, and oppressive national and international political and social structures. According to this view, a system that generates repression, abject poverty, malnutrition, and starvation for some members of a society while other members enjoy opulence and unbridled power inflicts covert violence with the ability to destroy life as much as overt violence, except that it does it in more subtle ways.

It is disheartening to note that "[this type of violence]...is responsible today for the death of approximately 15 million children per year (14,000 per day) in the world..." (Handa, 1992:24). In Africa, for example, there are external and internal factors that perpetuate structural violence. Structural violence in West African schools refers to the teachers' and prefects' misuse of their power and authority. I strongly agree with Handa's argument which states, "in the world today the worst form of violence is the violence of poverty, the structural violence, that is, the violence as a result of social structures which create, maintain, and tolerate mass poverty (1992:70)."

On the other hand, structural violence refers to misunderstandings or disagreements over unjust social structures, systems, mechanisms and policies. With particular reference to the West African school context, structural conflicts include misunderstandings over the high cost of teachers' private classes and pamphlets, poor library facilities, high student-teacher ratio, high cost of school materials, poor recreational facilities and infrastructure.

**What is Nonviolence?**

I find Pelton's (1974) perceptions of nonviolence quite helpful in my understanding of the meaning of nonviolence. He argues that:

Non-violence means that we do not violate anybody. It means that we do not exploit or oppress anybody. Nonviolence means that we regard life as
too sacred to be destroyed for any reason. But beyond that, it means that we do not tolerate injustice anywhere or anyone, that we do not turn our backs on the suffering of others (pp. 267-268).

Students and members of a local community need to learn how “...to seek, discover, create, and demonstrate nonviolent alternatives” (Pelton, 1974:256) when handling their conflicts. For the purpose of this study, I understand violence to mean actions that hurt, harm, destroy people through physical, verbal, emotional, psychological (Bey and Turner, 1996), and structural means.

The Meaning of Complex Emergencies

In this study, complex emergency is defined as:

... a major humanitarian crisis with many causes which requires many different responses at once, such as peacekeepers, humanitarian aid systems, and conflict resolution strategies. Complex emergencies are political, economic, and social in nature. Socio-economic stress and marginalization are often the root causes” (Prendergast, 1996:14).

In my view, Sierra Leone is in a complex emergency because:

1. It is faced with the most brutal war in recent times.

2. It has over two million internally displaced persons, out of a total population of 4.4 million.

3. It has over five hundred thousand refugees.

4. It has been a dysfunctional state since 1991. Currently, over three fourths of the country is ungovernable because it is under rebel control.
5. Its people are faced with unthinkable human suffering due to the war, malnutrition, diseases and hunger. No medical facilities and safe drinking water are available for the bulk of the population.

6. It lacks the rule of law in most parts of the country. In rebel-held territory, people practice jungle justice. The judicial system is corrupt and inefficient.

7. Food production and other socio-economic, political and religious activities in most parts of the country are almost non-existent. There is food insecurity because food is not accessible, affordable and available to the bulk of Sierra Leoneans.

8. The ideology of survival of the fittest or might makes right, prevails even during the rebel war.

9. There is rapid increase in deforestation. Forests are disappearing rapidly, as the collection of fuel wood became the most vibrant economic activity for the internally displaced persons. In Freetown for example, the local population cut down hundreds of trees in order to sell and make ends meet.

10. The culture of youth violence is on the increase.

11. Corruption, embezzlement and mismanagement of public funds by government ministers, politicians and senior civil servants are on the increase.

12. The end of the war is unpredictable.
13. Most of the educational and health institutions have been destroyed. Most parts of the country have had these institutions closed for several years now.

The situation in Sierra Leone is so complex and in such a mess that it would be naïve to attempt to provide a comprehensive list of what had gone wrong. What I have mentioned above is just a tip of the iceberg.
Chapter 2: Literature Review

Scholars may disagree on the nature, sources, and appropriate categorization of the conflicts in Africa. Such disagreements may in fact lead to eventual clarification of the critical issues by applying new thinking and a fresh approach to analyzing old problems (Obasanjo, 1991: xviii).

Introduction

The purpose of this study has been to describe how selected secondary school teachers and students in urban Sierra Leone perceive and manage inter-personal conflicts during complex emergencies with the ultimate goal of identifying the challenges for building a culture of peace and for further research. In this Chapter, a review of the relevant literature is presented. The main aim is to provide the conceptual framework of the study. Understanding other similar or related research, previously conducted, enabled me to understand what was already been known about the topic and what needs to be further investigated. This literature review focuses on social conflict. Social conflict refers to a process of social interaction involving struggle over claims to resources, power and status, beliefs, and other preferences and desires” (Bisno, 1988:13). In a nutshell, social conflict is conflict between persons (Bisno, 1988). Against this background, the review focused on:

- The meaning of conflict and its effects on inter-personal relationships within the school;

- Types and major causes of intra-school conflicts;

- Conflict management styles.

Organized and structured formal and non-formal conflict education programs for students and teachers in Sierra Leone are virtually non-existent. Studies on indigenous
African approaches to conflict and its management are quite limited. Conflict research in Africa by Copson (1991); and Prendergast (1996) have been largely based on broad and regional violent conflicts. For this literature review therefore, I had to rely heavily on published studies on conflict education in North American schools, from 1970 – 2000. This is because “conflict resolution programs in the schools [in North America] first emerged in the early 1970s...” Girard and Koch (1996:11). For the relevant literature on indigenous African approaches to conflict and its management, I drew lessons from relevant studies including those of Deng and Zartman (1991), Zartman (2000), Albert, Awe, Hérault and Omitoogun (1995). Although Bickmore’s (in press, 1999a, 1999b, 1998, 1997 and 1991) studies were based on a North American context, they were quite relevant for this review.

**African Perspectives on the Meaning of Conflict**

I argue that understanding how people perceive conflict is fundamental to understanding the types of conflicts they deal with, their root causes and how they respond to them. I consider ‘conflict’ as a blanket term because it has no single clear meaning (Rahim, 1986). “[I]t is an omnipresent phenomenon in human interaction” (Moore, 1996:373). Johnson and Johnson (1991) argue that conflict is not easy to define. According to Rahim (1986:12), “much of the confusion has been created by scholars in different disciplines that are interested in studying conflict.” Brown (1983:6) cites the case of the social sciences:

Much of the social science literature can be divided into two perspectives on conflict. In one tradition, in which social integration and stability are emphasized, conflict is seen as disruptive, dangerous, and indicative of underlying social pathologies. In another important social science tradition, in which diversity and development are emphasized, conflict is seen as energizing, creative, and evidence of social dynamism.
Supporting the above argument, Johnson and Johnson (1991:1:6) state that “some psychologists have focused on frustration, others have focused on decisions among attractive or unattractive alternatives, and some have concentrated on the feelings of the people involved (rage, anger, distress, and rejection).”

I argue that the literature is generally silent about the relevant contexts influencing how individuals perceive the meaning of conflict, the types of inter-personal conflicts they grapple with and how they manage them. As shown in this study, individuals’ understanding of the meaning of conflict, the types of conflicts they deal with and how they manage them are informed by their experiences, knowledge, skills, socio-economic, political, cultural and religious backgrounds. Against this background, this review is limited to the secondary school contexts in West Africa, with specific focus on Sierra Leone.

**What do Indigenous West African Secondary School Students and Teachers Mean by Conflict?**

The research to date in conflict-related issues has done very little or nothing to address this question. As mentioned earlier, studies on conflicts in Africa done so far largely focused on the types, causes and conflict management styles (Albert, Awe, Hérault and Omitoogun, 1995, Zartman; 2000, and Prendergast, 1996).

Findings in a study conducted by Brown, Arbus, Edwards, Kearns and Harris, (1995); Brown, Arbus, Haris and Kearns (1996) on behalf of the Research and Assessment Department of the Toronto Board of Education reveal that “school conflict consisted of a widespread level of dispute including rumour and gossip” (p. 45). The
researchers used questionnaires to collect these data. This limited the participants’ freedom to articulate their perceptions adequately. Student-Student conflicts could also mean a disagreement over who should do what or how certain things should be done. Johnson and Johnson (1991:1:1) agree:

Students disagree over who to sit with at lunch, which game to play during recess, when to work and when to play, when to talk and when to listen, who is going to pick the paper off the floor...and who has done the most work in a group project.

Based on the student-student conflicts that they deal with in school on a daily basis, most West African teachers, especially those in Sierra Leone, define “conflict [as an] incompatible behaviour between [two or more persons] whose interests differ” (Brown, 1983:6). Such interests include, space, time, power, food and money (Johnson and Johnson, 1991). This perception will shift if the focus is on a different reality and context. This is because individuals perceive things or situations in the light of pertinent experiences (Gibson, Ivancevich and Donnelly (1979:68). Conflict also means a disagreement over ideas, opinions and information. Articulating this view further, Johnson and Johnson (1991) states that a “[conflict] exists when a [student’s or teacher’s] ideas, information, conclusions, theories, and opinions are incompatible with those of another [student or teacher] and the [parties] seek to reach an agreement” (1:7). Conflict also exists when the patterns of behaviour of two or more individuals or groups clash because they are mutually incompatible. Although the issue of mutual incompatibility of patterns of behaviour is important, the definition does not address the element of awareness. What if any of the parties is not aware of the fact that their behaviour is conflicting with someone else’s behaviour? I do not think that a conflict exists in this
situation. At non-structural levels, I argue that the parties need to be aware of the incompatibility of their behaviour patterns and the effect it might have on their relations before a conflict is said to exist between them. With structural conflicts, the situation is different. Sometimes, rich people are ignorant of poverty – a form of structural conflict.

At this point, I would like to note that the issue of scarce resources and power sharing are central to any definition of conflict. In this regard, Laue (1987:17) defines conflict “as [an] escalated, natural competition between two or more parties about scarce resources, power and prestige.” It is about a misunderstanding over access and control of critical resources (Jones, 1998). In a West African school environment, students experience conflicts over the use and control of such critical school resources such as playground space, chalk, duster, soccer balls, school benches and chairs, library books and science equipment. These resources are usually inadequate and as Jones (1998) argues conflicts arise because such resources are not managed in a productive and sustainable manner.

Conflict also occur when “parties in a conflict believe they have incompatible goals and their aim is to neutralize, gain advantage over, injure or destroy one another” (Laue, 1987:17). Generally speaking, intra-school conflicts in West Africa tend to be of this nature. But conflict has another dimension. It is a state in which the students’, teachers’, administrators’ and parents’ interests, needs and values become incompatible. Conflict could also mean a situation in which students, teachers, administrators and parents hold different views/ideas about contested issues. Bickmore (1998) stresses the inevitable nature of conflict:

Conflict – perceived incompatible objectives between two or more people or groups...occurs in every social system, including schools (p. 59).
For example, certain students, teachers and parents in a particular school might argue that conflict resolution must be taught as a separate subject, while others might argue that it should be integrated into the other subjects. Such different opinions could lead to a conflict situation. But the differences in opinions are not in themselves bad. The critical issue is how the stakeholders in this conflict situation deal with their differences. Their choices could either be constructive or destructive.

Against this background, Bozeman (1976:3) states that "...conflict is valued not so much as an end in itself but rather as a process that serves to clarify issues in dispute and narrow areas of concentration so as to induce some measure of ultimate conciliation or accord." There is very little evidence in the literature to show that adequate recognition has been given to how people's understanding of the meaning of conflict is influenced by their ages and experiences. For example, how do students and teachers, with a big difference in age and experience, define the meaning of conflict? Recognizing this developmental difference, Johnson and Johnson (1991:1:7-1:8) state that "...a conflict exists when recurrent incompatible activities between adult and child, based on the opposing forces of stability and change within the child, cycles in and out of the peak intensity as the child develops cognitively and socially."

As mentioned earlier, the social and political realities individuals live in also influence their understanding of the meaning of conflict. O'Sullivan (1999:168) therefore, cautions that "peace and conflict are words that cannot be looked at without a context." For instance, broader understandings of the conflicts that West African teachers and students face daily must recognize their realities, such as the lack of regular monthly
salaries, poor conditions of service and overall neglect of the educational sector by their governments. Therefore, Bisno (1988) argues that individuals in such dilemmas would generally understand conflict to mean, “…situations [which] are frequently sources of intense frustrations and discomfort, and they often entail significant risks” (p. 12).

There is some vagueness in the above definition because; it does not put things into context. For example, the intense frustrations of an African student in a rural school in Africa would differ from those of her/his counterpart in a Canadian School. Similarly, while a teacher in a Canadian context will be frustrated with her/his government’s educational policies, a teacher in Sierra Leone would be frustrated with her/his government for not paying their salaries for over three months. The differences lie in the different realities and contexts in Africa and Canada.

**West African Views about the Positive Effects of Conflict**

There is limited research about Africans’ perceptions of the positive effects of conflict. However, there is a body of Western/North American literature that argues that conflict has positive social effects (Moore, 1996, Johnson and Johnson, 1992, Bickmore, 1997) which, is very relevant to the African context. In this section, the main arguments supporting this claim are summarized. Conflict “perform[s] many important social functions” (Dahrendorf, 1972:62). For example, “[it] contribute[s] to the organization, unification, change, and progress of human society” (Himes, 1980:28). This means that conflict in itself is not necessarily evil but rather, an inevitable ingredient of human experience (Pelton, 1974, Zartman, 1991). It is a fact of life and cannot be avoided (Drew, 1995; Johnson and Johnson, 1987, 1991 and 1992; Kreidler, 1984; Kearns et al., 1992; Girard and Koch, 1996 and Chetknow-Yanoov, 1997;). In fact, Bickmore, (1997:3)
argues that "in democratic life, conflict is everywhere." I totally agree with Bickmore (in press) that "[conflict] is part of being alive." Therefore, I argue that it is not a choice, but how we respond to it is our choice. Conflict, by its nature, is a dynamic phenomenon (Fraser and Hipel, 1984:283). "[It] can lead to productive and positive changes or growth" (Moore, 1996:373).

From the above arguments, it is obvious that there are positive outcomes of conflicts. In Brown's (1983) views, these include:

- Expanded understanding of the issue;
- Mobilization of parties' resources and energies;
- Clarification of competing solutions;
- Creative searches for alternatives, and
- Enhanced ability to work together in the future (p. 7).

Therefore, conflict can create opportunities for change and provide challenges for the parties involved in a conflict (Cornelius and Faire, 1989). In the North American context, Close and Lechman (1997) critiqued the available literature and the field of conflict resolution for failing to detail the experiences of students and teachers (my emphasis) and for not providing the forum for them to articulate their views about the nature of conflict and its manifestations. The situation is even worse off in West Africa. This study has attempted to provide such a forum for both students and teachers to share their lived experiences of inter-personal conflicts.
**West African Views about the Negative Effects of Conflict**

Research has shown that “most [African] people will probably find it easier to identify the destructive or negative effects of conflict: its ability to provoke anger, anxiety, distress, fear and aggression [and that] it often breaks down relationships” (Tillet, 1991:5). Describing the general perception of conflict in non-western contexts, Abu-Nimer (2000:145) notes that “conflict [is being viewed as] negative, threatening, and disruptive and should be settled soon or avoided.” In fact, this negative way of perceiving conflict is a common human trend. This is because “conflict can... lead to the destruction and degradation of relationships” (Moore, 1996:373). In the school context, I support Girard and Koch (1996:1) that “conflict is part of the hidden curriculum in all our educational institutions...[and therefore] it exists in the classrooms, lunchrooms, and teachers’ lounges, in the Principal’s office, in the hallways, and on the playgrounds.”

In most schools in West Africa “…teachers and administrators spend much of their work-day arbitrating conflicts among students by deciding who is right and who is wrong and what each participant has to do to end the conflict” (Legg, 1993:4). Little wonder that they view conflict as being antagonistic in nature (Brown, 1983). In fact Legg (1993) observes that this influences them to shun conflict. Also, teachers and school administrators find it quite frustrating to deal with the multitude of conflicts students refer to them while in school.

In West Africa, as in North American schools, both the teachers and students associate conflicts with fights or violence. This is because “the stress of conflict provokes strong feelings of anxiety, anger, hostility, depression, an even vengeance” (Beer and Stief, 1997:12). I argue that the excessive use of the cane in African schools to maintain discipline makes conflict look the evil part of humanity. Challis (1995:5) agrees that,
"when teachers overuse traditional authoritarian responses, student conflicts sometimes escalate resulting in anger, resentment, damaged relationships and further violence." In the light of this, many West African administrators, teachers and students construe conflict as a force that pulls people apart instead of uniting them (Brown and Selzmck, 1963). The literature is not quite clear about why conflict is viewed so negatively in West Africa. This study threw some light in this regard.

**Typology of Conflicts: An African Perspective**

There is no single method of classifying conflicts. For example, there are typologies for conflicts that occur within an individual, a family, an organization, a community, and a school, a club or country or nation. They can also occur among or between individuals, families, organizations, communities, and villages/towns/cities. The classification of conflicts is based on the perceptions and relationships of the parties involved in conflict, as well as the causes of the conflicts. These types of conflicts are referred to as social conflicts (Bisno, 1988, Quincy, 1990, Tillet, 1991 and Rahim, 1986). According to Schrumpf, Crawford and Bodine (1997) these types of conflicts could be further classified into intra- and inter-personal conflicts, and intra- and inter-community/group conflicts. Further more, they state that "intra-personal conflict involves an internal discord between parties, and [intra-community/group] conflict involves discord within a community/group, [while inter-group conflicts involves discord]... between groups of people" (Schrumpf, Crawford and Bodine (1997:15). The focus of this study has been on inter-personal conflicts within urban secondary schools in Sierra Leone, West Africa.
Types of Intra-school Conflicts

Various types of intra-school conflict are referred to in the literature (Deutsch, 1973, Johnson and Johnson, 1992 and 1994). Such literature is grounded on North American experiences. Some of it though has relevance to a West African context. For example, the types of conflicts identified by Johnson and Johnson (1992:1:7-1:8) are relevant to the Western African school context:

- Controversy – exists when one person's ideas, information, conclusions, theories, and opinions are incompatible with those of another who seek to reach an agreement.

- Conceptual conflict – occurs when incompatible ideas exist simultaneously in a person's mind or when information being received does not seem to fit with what one already knows (Berlyne, 1957, 1966, cited in Johnson and Johnson, 1992:1:7).

- Conflict of interests – exist when the actions of one person attempting to maximize his or her wants and benefits prevent, block, or interfere with another person maximizing his or her wants and benefits.

- Developmental conflict – exist when recurrent incompatible activities between adult and child based on the opposing forces and change within the child in and out of peak intensity as the child develops cognitively and socially.

Kreidler (1984) and Kearns, et al. (1992) agree with the above classification, but simplified their own classification to include three main types:

- conflict of resources,
- conflict of needs, and
- conflict of values.

Moore's (1996) typology of conflicts supports the above list but further identifies structural conflict as a major type of intra-school conflict. Further descriptions of these types of conflicts are summarized below.
Conflict of limited resources

This type of conflict is over possession of limited resources or ownership of something. A conflict of resources “...is...very fundamental in the African classroom situation, where students fight over a pencil or a desk or a textbook” (Kearns, et al. 1992). My experience as a primary and secondary school teacher in Sierra Leone in the 1970s and 1980s support this argument. For example, in the schools where I taught, we had limited supplies of school materials such as textbooks, blackboards, dusters, footballs, desks and chairs. In some instances we were given a packet of chalk per term. This usually lasted for less than half the period. And when we complained, we were told by our Principal to ‘manage’ or ‘improvise’ because government did not pay its school grants. Teachers had to compete for these mutually desirable items. Recreational opportunities both in terms of space and equipment were also limited.

Therefore, conflict of limited resources in a West African context would be mostly about competition for the basic human needs – food, shelter, water, clothing, safety and space. Filley (1975:3) agrees, “when parties seek real or perceived scarce resources...and when they have a mutuality of interests, the relationship is competition.”

Structural Conflict and Conflict of Interests

According to Moore (1996:61) structural conflict occurs when:

- roles in a group are not clearly defined;
- behaviour patterns are destructive;
- there is an unequal ownership, control, or distribution of resources;
- unfair decision-making process;
- time constraints.
Structural conflicts generate structural violence. This type of violence is less visible (Bickmore, 1999). For example, structural violence in schools in Sierra Leone would include teachers' overuse of corporal punishment, unfair punishment of students, and teachers' creation of mechanisms which somehow exploited students. It also includes sexual harassment of girls (Bickmore, 1999) and unfair punishment (such as awarding of failing grades) to male students who compete with certain teachers for love relationships with certain female students.

On the other hand, "conflict of interests exists when the actions of one person attempting to maximize his or her wants and benefits prevent, block, or interfere with another person maximizing his or her wants and benefits" (Johnson and Johnson, 1991:1:7). "Within the conflict literature, the term interest is used with the meaning of need, goal, benefit, advantage, concern, right or claim" (Johnson and Johnson, 1994:333). In a school situation for example, when five students all want to play hand tennis at the same time in a tennis court that only accommodate two plays at a time, a conflict of interest develops. Conflict of interests in schools can also exist:

When teachers place students in competition with each other over grades,

When certain resources are scarce,

When competition for rewards and privileges are taking place...[among] students and teachers and between students and teachers (Johnson and Johnson, 1991:1:7).

According to Johnson and Johnson (1994:332), "conflicts among interests can be based on (1) differences in needs, values, and goals; (2) scarcities of certain resources, such as power, influence, money, time, space, popularity, and position; or (3) rivalry." All these elements of conflicts of interests need to be contextualized. This is because, "within any
group different persons will have different interests and at times they will be in conflict with each other” (Johnson and Johnson, 1994:333). At the level of inter-personal conflicts, the general literature on conflict is silent about conflict of interests specific to the African context. It has been one of the aims of this study to address this very important issue.

Conflict of Values

“Those of us involved in school conflict resolution program[mes] have long acknowledged that differences in values can contribute to conflicts in schools (Goldman, De Zeeuw and Hagen, 1992:10). Conflict of values occurs when the belief systems of one individual clash with another person’s belief systems. “Conflicts resulting from a clash of values are the most difficult to solve” (Kearns, et al., 1992:12), because they are the most difficult to detect and explore. For instance, in Sierra Leone, conflicts of values between students and teachers often arise over whether the teachers have a right to devote their energies to teaching private classes and to charge students exorbitant fees, or use such energies to teach more effectively during school hours. Conflict of values also occurs between parties that strongly believe in traditional African religions and those who believe in Islam or Christianity. Unlike conflict of resources, “conflict involving values tends to be difficult to resolve because when people’s values are different, they often perceive the dispute as a personal attack” (Schrumpf, Crawford, Usadel, 1991:8). Conflicts of values are also much more difficult to resolve because they are not easily detectable. The degree of incompatibility of values depends on the educational, cultural, socio-economic and political and religious backgrounds of the parties in conflict. To a
large extent, the general literature on conflict does not reflect the significance of this argument.

**Conflict of Ideas**

Conflict of ideas occurs when individuals or groups of people hold different views/ideas/opinions over an issue or ideology being debated (Moore, 1996). They also include incompatible goals between two or more persons. For example, a student’s goal for going to school could be to learn skills and knowledge systems that will lead to immediate employment. On the other hand, a teacher’s goal could be to enable the students appreciate learning for the sake of learning. If students are not taught to recognize and accept that nobody has a monopoly of knowledge, they are likely to be in conflict with others who might hold different opinions regarding some of the views that they might hold about a particular issue.

**Conflict of Basic Psychological Needs**

These types of needs refer to basic human needs such as “the needs for power, friendship and affiliation, self-esteem, and achievement” (Kreidler, 1984:11). They also include needs for “…control…a sense of belonging, love…self-actualization [and] happiness” (Kearns, et al., 1992). Other needs that are worth mentioning include the needs for respect, rewards and recognition. School environments that do not provide such opportunities for teachers, students, administrators and parents are potential breeding grounds for destructive conflicts. Therefore, Bickmore (1991:5) cautions that “conflicts
of needs or interests, which are not taken into account may hurt some students and teach nobody.”

Meeting basic psychological needs is fundamental to human growth and living peace. It must be recognized however, that in West Africa, particularly in Sierra Leone, the physical basic human needs earlier mentioned must be dealt with first and foremost before dealing with psychological needs. This is because most Africans live in abject poverty (Albert, Awe, Hérault, Omitoogun, 1995, Copson, 1991). In societies such as Sierra Leone where people are living below the poverty line, material needs are more urgent than psychological needs.

Conflict of Relationships

Conflicts of relationships occur when a person’s strong emotions about another person are incompatible with the other person’s emotions. Moore (1996) agrees and further states that conflict of relationships occur as a result of:

- repetitive negative behaviour;
- misconceptions or stereotypes;
- poor communication or miscommunication.

Examples of repetitive negative behaviour include name-calling, pushing, hitting and threats (Brown, Arbus, Harris and Kearns, 1996). Tribal and gender stereotypes are other examples of negative behaviour. Such stereotypes hurt people’s feelings and integrity.

In West Africa, conflict of relationships among students and teachers occurs when certain male teachers or students constantly harass female students for sexual relationships. These types of conflicts also occur as a result of put-downs, physical
aggression and fights, insults and teasing (Legg, 1993). Rivalries over boyfriends or
girlfriends among girls and boys are also common examples of conflict of relationships in
West African schools.

**Major Causes of Student-student and Student-teacher Conflicts**

Various causes of conflicts are found in the literature. The causes of each type of
collision are influenced by the nature of the conflict and the relationship between the
parties involved in the conflict. For the purpose of this study, the literature review
focused on causes of conflicts in the secondary schools with particular reference to West
(1991) and Albert, Awe, Hérault and Omitoopun (1995) on African conflicts have
examined causes of the continent's conflicts at intra- and inter-state and non-formal local
community levels. Although their works focused on these levels of conflicts, their
findings are very useful for my analysis of the causes of intra-secondary school conflicts.
Other relevant North American studies by Bickmore (in press, 1999b, and 1998),
Kreidler (1984), Johnson and Johnson (1994) and others also provided very useful
information for this literature review on causes of student-student and student-teacher
conflicts.

What are the major causes of student-student and student-teacher conflicts within
the school environment? Kreidler (1984) identifies six causes of conflicts that are
relevant to the conceptual framework of this study. These causes are summarized below.
Competitive Atmosphere

“...A highly competitive class can create room for students to work against each other rather than value and help each other” Kreidler (1984). This occurs particularly in competitive situations where students develop selfish attitudes and lack trust in either the teacher or classmates. In a competitive environment, the main goal of each student is to win at all cost. But some form of competition is necessary because this is part of real life. In real life situations, competition for limited resources is a fact of life. The key point to remember here is that competition must be healthy, where each competitor realizes that in life, win-lose is a fact of human experience. It is also important to note that what might make competition healthy would be limiting and balancing competition with caring, equity and fairness. I also acknowledge that co-operation and community are facts of life.

Intolerant Atmosphere

On the other hand, an intolerant atmosphere can also be a source of conflict. I understand an intolerant atmosphere as one that is unfriendly and mistrustful. Such an atmosphere can involve intolerance for racial, cultural, religious, gender and sexual orientation differences. An intolerant atmosphere can also cause resentment of the accomplishments, possessions and qualities of others (Kreidler, 1984). Support of each other is limited.

Poor Communication and Inappropriate Expression of Emotion

Poor communication breeds destructive conflict resolution. This is especially true for students who don’t know how to articulate their needs and interests effectively. It also applies to those who cannot listen to others and lack the skills to observe carefully. It also
exists when individuals do not have a forum to express their feelings, interests and fears and concerns. Similarly, inappropriate expression of emotion can escalate conflicts when, for example, people’s emotions are suppressed. Individuals can also inappropriately express their emotions if they don’t know non-aggressive alternatives to expressing anger and frustration or lack self-control (Kreidler, 1994).

**Lack of Conflict Resolution Skills**

I argue that many teachers and students in West African schools lack constructive conflict management methods (Johnson and Johnson, 1994:1-6; Kreidler, 1984). Conflict resolution education in West African schools, particularly in Sierra Leone, is still a dream. Against this background, “some students [and teachers] believe that physical force is the procedure by which conflicts are resolved” (Johnson, Johnson and Dudley, 1993:4). Because conflict resolution in schools implies “sharing authority with students” (Bickmore, in press), most teachers and school authorities are reluctant to embrace it because they fear they would lose their power over students. It is important for school authorities to realize that “all students need to be taught a basic negotiation procedure, and be given experiences in negotiating resolutions to their own conflicts and mediating the conflicts of their classmates” (Legg, 1993). I argue that conflict resolution education should be part and parcel of educational reform in West African schools. Bickmore (1998:53) agrees, “…there is a need for educational innovation – for example how to improve diverse students opportunities to learn skills and concepts relevant to managing conflict in a pluralistic, imperfectly democratic world.” When students learn and practice effective conflict resolution skills, they also improve their self-esteem (Challis, 1995).
Misuse of Power by the Teacher

Teachers can also escalate classroom conflicts by misusing their power. Challis (1995:5) agrees, “when teachers overuse traditional authoritarian responses, student conflicts sometimes escalate resulting in anger, resentment, damaged relationships and further violence.” As argued by Johnson and Johnson (1987:1-2), “the teacher is the center of conflict in the classroom.” Teachers who manage their classrooms with inflexible rules, fear, mistrust and authoritarianism are potential sources of destructive conflicts (Kreidler, 1987). In West African schools, especially in Sierra Leone, teachers also misuse their power by excessively using corporal punishment. This instills fear among the students and forces them to obey whatever the teachers tell them. Teachers also misuse their power when they sexually harass their students (Bickmore, 1999).

In addition to the above-mentioned causes, there are other major causes of conflicts among students and between students and teachers in secondary schools in West Africa that are generally not mentioned in the Western or North American literature on conflict. These causes, which are more prevalent in countries in the South, (especially in Africa) and less visible in the countries in the North, include the following.

Poverty

As earlier mentioned, in Sierra Leone, like in most African countries, the bulk of the population lives below the poverty line. In this context, I understand poverty to mean a condition of life in which an individual is deprived of a decent quality of life. The income differences existing between the haves and have-nots “are a major underlying cause of conflict that will not soon disappear” (Copson, 1991:21). There is therefore, a very serious competition for the available limited resources (Deng and Zartman, 1991).
This breeds conflict situations. "Resource shortages can increase the tension" (Jones, 1998:1).

Based on my teaching experience in Sierra Leone in the 1970s and 1980s, I would like to argue that poverty is the most predominant cause of intra-school conflicts. In the schools where I taught for example, most of the students were poor because their parents earned relatively very low incomes and so were incapable of meeting the basic school needs (e.g. books, shoes, pencils, pens, decent school uniforms, school bags, tuition fees and lunch money). This condition influenced some of these students to steal from their colleagues some of the school materials they lacked.

**Social Injustice and Human Rights Abuses**

Social injustice and human rights abuses are among the most predominant causes of conflict in Africa. Deng and Zartman (1991) agree that African conflicts are largely caused by gross inequalities in the distribution of power and wealth. The greed and selfishness of African politicians also cause many of Africa's conflicts. Copson (1991:21) agrees, "the tendency of many African governments to rule through arbitrary and repressive means has provoked violent conflict and armed resistance in many instances."

How does this kind of tendency also affect inter-personal relationships within a school? The literature does not adequately address this important question. There is need to investigate how the attitudes, behaviours and values of the political leaders affect not only the needs of society but individual needs and aspirations as well.
Gender Bias

Before I examine how gender bias causes conflict; let me define what I mean by gender. By gender, I mean, "the expectations people have from someone because they are a female or male" (Mackenzie, 1993:16). All over the world, there is gender bias against women and girls. African societies, like most other societies throughout the world, are predominantly patriarchal. The men have considerable power to shape women's roles in society. Women's roles and contributions to the socio-economic development of their societies are generally unrecognized and un-rewarded. Everywhere, women suffer all forms of oppression, including physical violence, low wages, lack of informed participation in major political decisions and lack of ownership and control of resources (such as land) critical to their existence. In fact "women's work and opinions are undervalued" (Mackenzie, 1993:17) in most societies.

In some societies, especially in the South, girls do not have the same educational opportunities. For example when the first primary school was opened in my chiefdom, the then Paramount Chief mandated each family to send a certain number of their children to school. In my family of three brothers and two sisters, I was the only one selected at the time. Out of five of us, who were selected, there was only one girl. Although the number of girls increased over the years, not a single girl was able to complete elementary school. On the other hand most of the boys completed high school and some even pursued post-secondary education. Mackenzie (1993:18) explains why education for boys was preferred more than that of the girls:

Girls often have to leave school before their brothers if there is not enough money to for education. There is a belief that boys have more of a right to education and need it more than girls do. Many people believe that women should grow up, marry and have babies. They think boys need an education so they can get good jobs.
The educational system in most societies are designed either intentionally or other wise to train women as domestic servants for the men. Subjects such as Home Economics, Needlework, Nutrition, Sewing and Music, to name but a few examples, are considered as girls' subjects. On the other hand, subjects such as Math, Physics, Chemistry, Biology and Statistics, are considered as boys' subjects. Generally, there is a common stereotype that girls are less intelligent than boys are. Boys generally believe that these stereotypes are true and this influences the way they treat girls. It is very important to highlight these points because the literature is very silent about how gender bias causes conflict. The literature on conflict resolution programmes in schools to a very large extent, does not include gender awareness. As shown by this study later on, many a time girls experience conflict due to some of the stereotypes and biases mentioned above.

Teachers' and Students' Conflict Management Methods: An African Perspective

Conflict management styles throughout human history have been informed by each society's culture - values, customs, traditions and belief systems. In this section, conflict management systems in West African secondary schools are examined. The most common conflict resolution/management styles identified in the literature include avoidance, compromise, accommodation, arbitration, negotiation, mediation, litigation and violence (Moore, 1996; Johnson and Johnson. 1991:1:1; The Colorado School Mediation Project, 1994:46; Cornelius and Faire, 1996). For the purpose of this study, conflict management methods such as violence, avoidance and arbitration, are examined. This is because these methods are the most common in West African schools.
Violence

There is abundant literature that indicates that in schools, students use violence to deal with their conflicts (Kreidler, 1984; Johnson and Johnson, 1991; Kearns, et al., 1992; Bodine and Crawford, 1997; and Schrumpf, Crawford and Usadel, 1991). However, very little is mentioned regarding the various types of violence. More emphasis is placed on physical violence, which is overt. But there are many other forms of violence such as structural, emotional, verbal and psychological, which occur in the school and go unnoticed. There are various forms of verbal and non-verbal responses to intra-school conflicts. For example, Johnson and Johnson (1991:1:1) states that students faced with conflicts “...put each other down, call each other names, torment and even physically attach each other...and ‘fester’ about perceived grievances.” I consider put downs, name-calling and provocation as emotional violence because they hurt the feelings of the student being nick named or provoked. Common verbal utterances from both students and teachers which label other individuals as being stupid, idiots and unintelligent are also forms of psychological violence because such labels abuse the thinking capacity of those affected.

It is important therefore, that teachers and adult educators commit themselves to teaching their students non-violent ways of dealing with conflict. Students should be taught the positive aspects of conflicts and the procedures and skills necessary for managing conflicts constructively (Johnson and Johnson, 19987). Bickmore (1997) agrees with this argument and goes further to argue, “...if youth are not involved in conflict, there is no meaningful opportunity for them to learn conflict resolution” (p. 8). In other words, teachers should create a classroom environment that would enhance the
students’ will to practice the non-violent conflict resolution skills they are being taught (Bickmore, 1997, Lewis, 1996).

**Arbitration**

Arbitration is a nonviolent conflict management method. It is a process in which “a neutral third party person acts as a judge and decides how the disputants’ problem should be solved” (The Colorado School Mediation Project, 1994:46). This definition lacks many key elements of the arbitration process. For example, is it a voluntary or mandatory process? How binding is the agreement reached by the parties? Moore’s (1996:9) definition addresses these issues:

> Arbitration is a generic term for a voluntary process in which people in conflict request the assistance of an impartial and neutral third party to make a decision for them regarding contested issues. The outcome of the decision may either be advisory or binding. Arbitration may be conducted by one person or a panel of third parties. The critical factor is that they are outside of the conflict relationship. Arbitration is a private process in that the proceedings, and often the outcome, are not open to public scrutiny.

Although the above definition is quite comprehensive, it makes certain assumptions that this is true for all cross-cultural contexts. A distinction needs to be made regarding when the arbitration process can be private and when it becomes a public matter. As in the case of mediation, arbitration in African societies is not strictly a private process. My own reconstruction of knowledge from memory of growing up among the Limba and Themne ethnic groups in Sierra Leone tells me that minor inter-personal conflicts which do not pose a threat to social harmony and community cohesiveness are arbitrated privately (Tuso, 2000). These include minor jokes, jealousy, gossip, name calling, and refusal or late payment of loans. More serious conflicts such as disobeying
community norms, accusations of witchcraft and sorcery, infidelity, stealing, verbal and physical violence are considered as a threat to community peace. Arbitration of such conflicts is a public affair. These types of contradictions between Western and non-western understandings of whether arbitration is a private and or public process need further research.

**Avoidance**

In Non-Western societies, especially in Africa, conflicts are, generally speaking, avoided. This is because, "conflict is [perceived as] negative, threatening, and disruptive to the normative order and should be settled soon or avoided" (Abu-Nimer, 2000:145). According to the Colorado School Mediation Project (1994) avoidance in this context means several things:

- withdrawing from the conflict.
- avoiding people and issues that may cause conflicts.
- refusing to co-operate with the other party in resolving the conflict.
- pretending that in fact a conflict does not exist when in reality there is a conflict.
- being afraid to deal with the conflict.
- postponing to deal with the conflict [my emphasis].

"[Avoidance] usually comes from the attitude that conflict isn't nice and that people won't like you if you disagree with them" (The Colorado School Mediation Project, 1994:15). Certain cultural beliefs, values and norms also influence this method of handling conflict. For example, in Sierra Leone, like in most Non-Western cultures, a
young person is not expected to argue or disagree with someone older than her/him. If she/he does, such behaviour will be seen as disrespect for old age. I was raised to accept whatever an elderly person says as ‘gospel truth’. As a child, I was expected to listen and not to talk when elders were speaking to me. To date, many African wives still cannot speak publicly in the presence of their husbands because this will be interpreted as a lack of respect for their husbands.

Similarly, in the school, students are not expected to challenge the views of the teachers because the teachers are believed to be the producers of knowledge. On the other hand, students are regarded as empty vessels and are only good for receiving the knowledge produced by the teacher. To avoid conflict of ideas/views with the teachers, many students resort to withdrawing and suppressing their feelings of disagreement (Cornelius and Faire, 1996). I argue that avoidance is not a nonviolent approach to conflict management, because it is an effort to not deal with the conflict. Sometimes, it hurts the other party interested in dealing with the conflict. Avoidance could therefore, lead to emotional, structural and psychological violence. The literature does not clearly distinguish avoidance from nonviolent approaches to confront or handle conflict. I also argue that the literature has very little evidence of which types of student-student or student-teachers conflicts involve avoidance as a common conflict management style. This study addressed this issue.

**Summary of Literature Review**

The main purpose of this review was to provide the conceptual framework of the study. The review began by recognizing that relevant literature on intra-secondary school
conflicts with particular reference to Sierra Leone and West Africa in general, is virtually non-existent. Against this background, the appropriate Western and Non-Western literature was reviewed. The review focused on four main themes, the meaning of conflict and its effects on inter-personal relationships within the school, the types of intra-school conflicts, their major causes and how they are managed.

Regarding the meaning of conflict, the review noted that conflict is a serious disagreement between two or more parties over the use, control and ownership of limited resources such as time, money, school materials/items, and food. Conflict has also been defined as deep differences in views, ideas and values. I critically examined two main schools of thoughts regarding the effects of conflict on inter-personal relationships.

While one school of thought perceived conflict from a positive point of view, the other perceived conflict negatively. From a positive point of view, conflict was conceptualized as an essential ingredient in human life. Conflict was also seen as an opportunity for the disputants to deepen their understanding of each other. This school of thought also argued that it is not the conflict in itself that is bad, rather, it is how it is resolved and managed that could be problematic. From a negative point of view, conflict has been perceived as a source of disharmony, disunity, tension and disruption of healthy relationships among people. This view regarded conflict as something to be avoided because of its destructive nature.

The review went on to examine the root causes of these types of conflicts. The main causes identified included social injustice and human rights abuses, poverty, misuse of power, scarcity of essential resources and poor quality of life. The review finally examined common conflict management methods of secondary school teachers and
students with particular reference to West Africa. Three major management styles were examined: violence, avoidance, and arbitration.
Chapter 3: Methodology

The rapid changes of the twentieth century have increased human conflict to the point that our sensibilities toward each other are becoming numb...The first step in developing an effective personal system of conflict management requires sensitizing ourselves to what has happened and what is happening around us (Robert, 1982:3).

The purpose of this study has been to describe how selected secondary school teachers and students in urban Sierra Leone perceive and manage inter-personal conflicts during complex emergencies with the ultimate goal of identifying the implications for building a culture of peace and for further research. In this Chapter the research paradigm and methods used to collect, analyze, interpret and validate the data for this study are described. By paradigm I mean, "...a loose collection of logically held together assumptions, concepts, or propositions that orient thinking and research" (Bogdan and Biklen, 1992:33). The Chapter also describes how I dealt with my biases as a researcher, as well as how I ensured that the study has credibility and validity. I also shared my field work experiences in a war situation. The limitations of the study are presented at the end of the Chapter.

Qualitative Research

Why did I choose qualitative research as the most appropriate approach for this study? First of all, I understand qualitative research to mean an inquiry that focuses on a descriptive and inductive study of people's meanings and understandings of their own realities. It emphasizes grounded practice derived from a rich descriptive data.

Bogdan and Biklen (1992:49) argue that the "qualitative research's goal is to better understand human behavior and experience." This has been exactly what this study
attempted to accomplish. I was interested in exploring the participants' perceptions of the meaning of conflict and its complexities, and how they managed the different types of conflicts they encountered in their day-to-day school life. The qualitative research paradigm satisfies these interests. Bogdan and Biklen (1989:29-32) articulate well my rationale for choosing this paradigm for my study:

- Qualitative research has the natural setting, as the direct source of data and the researcher is the key instrument...
- Qualitative researchers tend to analyze their data inductively...
- Meaning is of essential concern to the qualitative approach. Researchers who use this approach are interested in the ways different people make sense out their lives.

I would also like to argue that the qualitative approach was suitable for this study because it allowed me to search for patterns and seek for pluralism and complexity (Glesne and Peshkin, 1992). Also, "I believe that research focused on discovery, insight, and understanding from the perspectives of those being studied offers the greatest promise of making significant contribution to the knowledge base and practice of education" (Merriam, 1988:3). As I discover new meaning and develop deeper understanding and insights of the interviewees' perceptions and experiences, I learn new knowledge and gain experience that can enable me to be creative and flexible.

**Research Questions**

The central research question of this study has been, "How do selected secondary school teachers and students in urban Sierra Leone perceive and manage inter-personal
conflicts during complex emergencies and what are the challenges for building a culture of peace and for further research?"

In order to address this central research question, the following specific research questions were critically examined:

1. How do secondary school teachers and students in urban Sierra Leone understand the meaning of conflict?

2. What are the effects of conflicts on student-student and student-teacher relationships?

3. What are the major types of student-student and student-teacher conflicts?

4. What are the major causes of these conflicts?

5. What methods do the students and teachers use to respond to student-student and student-teacher conflicts?

6. What are the challenges for building a culture of peace and for further research?

**Ethical Review Protocol and Data Collection**

I collected the primary data for this study from human subjects. Therefore, prior to my data collection, I completed an ethical review protocol. The data collection methods I used included, in-depth semi-structured and unstructured interviews, documentary analysis, personal observations of the students and teachers during classes, lunchtime and breaks (Turay, 1996). I used different methods not to negate the utility of, say, a study based solely on interviews, but rather to indicate that the more the sources
tapped for understanding, the more believable the findings (Glesne and Peshkin, 1992). I also kept field notes as an additional tool for data collecting. The reason for this is clearly explained by Glesne and Peshkin (1992:45):

> The field notebook or field log is the primary recording tool of the qualitative researcher. It becomes filled with descriptions of people, places, events, activities, conversations; and it becomes a place of ideas, reflections, hunches, and notes about patterns that seem to be emerging. It also becomes a place for exploring the researcher’s own biases.

I took very detailed descriptive, analytical notes that were as much as possible accurate but not judgmental (Glesne and Peshkin, 1992). My observations included what I saw, heard, felt in the participants’ natural setting, as well as gestures, and issues raised during our conversations and interviews. To help me crosscheck the accuracy of my observations I audiotaped my observations immediately after the interviews. I also collected secondary data from non-confidential school records such as school, rules and regulations, functions of the Disciplinary Committee and New Education Policy documents from the YES Ministry. Information taken from these records provided the background information about the schools and policies regarding school discipline and education in general. On the whole, the data collection process took about seven months.

**Selection of Schools and Interview Subjects**

**Schools**

Upon the advice of officials of the secondary division of the YES Ministry, three senior secondary schools in Freetown were selected. The rationale for this was that schools in the urban areas were more ethnically and socio-economically diverse in many
respects than those in the rural areas. Also, the three schools I chose met most of these criteria:


2. Co-educational

3. Diversity - Diverse in gender and ethnic composition, and religious orientation.

4. Recommended by the YES Ministry as a very co-operative and academically outstanding school.

5. Christian/Muslim run-school.

6. At least established not less than 10 years ago.

7. Age of participating students and teachers: 18 – 24 (Students of these ages were considered as young adults and capable of signing their own consent forms without the approval of their parents) and 25 – 55 years respectively.

8. Teachers must have taught in the schools for at least one academic year. I assumed that at least one academic year would have enabled them to be quite familiar with their school environment. Students must have attended the school for at least a year and should be either in forms 5 or 6.

Initial informal contacts were made with the officials of the YES Ministry. They recommended five schools in order of priority. I initially visited these schools, presented the letter of recommendation from the YES Ministry to the Principals, and then
introduced my research proposal and myself. I chose the three schools that showed the initial enthusiasm, interest and willingness to participate in my research. Formal letters requesting for administrative consent were written to the Board of Governors of all the three schools in care of the Principals. These letters explained the purpose of the research and its relevance, and indicated that their schools could withdraw from the study at any time the felt uncomfortable to continue. The letters also indicated that the names of their schools would be coded to ensure their anonymity.

Interview Subjects

During my initial informal visits to the Principals, I informed them that I was interested in interviewing Form Masters/Mistresses, members of the Disciplinary Committee, heads of the Guidance and Counseling Departments, and student prefects. In total, I interviewed four female teachers, five male teachers, four female prefects and five male prefects. They were selected after consultations with their Principals. Participants from diverse backgrounds – ethnic/cultural, gender and religious were selected. They signed two completed consent forms - one copy for their records and one for me. My copies were destroyed upon completion of my study.

Instruments, Interviews and Observation of Teaching Sessions

The instruments I used in this study included unstructured and semi-structured interviews, documentary analysis and personal observations. In most cases, participants were asked the same types of questions in order to triangulate the data collected and validate their responses. According to Sierra Leonean customs, a person visiting a strange place for the first time is required to present a Samba (a gift) to the host/hostess. Being a
stranger in all the three schools where I did my study, I made sure that I observed these customs. In return, I was given all the hospitality, support and co-operation I needed as a 'stranger'.

Interviews were held in the Guidance and Counseling rooms, classrooms and science labs. Each participant was interviewed twice first for one hour and thereafter for half an hour. The second interview provided an opportunity for the interviewees to clarify issues raised during the first interview that were unclear and also to validate the summaries I made during the first interviews. The first interviews began with brief self-introductions by the participants and myself. Participants were encouraged to share only what they felt comfortable to share about themselves. The interview questions were open-ended and were developed as the interview process progressed.

In order to make more sense out of the interviews; I observed three teaching sessions per school and made twenty visits per school. I stopped observing classes when I realized that the participants' themes kept repeating themselves. The observations were pre-arranged with the Principals/Vice Principals and the teachers concerned, and were done in an un-intrusive manner. Observations were also less formal. I took copious field notes during the general and class observations. During my classroom observations, the teachers concerned briefly introduced me to the students. After each introduction, I greeted the students and thanked them for welcoming me into their class and then briefly explained to them the purpose of my visit. To avoid distracting the students, I sat at the rear of the classrooms. In classes where there were not enough chairs, I refused to take students' seats. Instead, I either stood at the back of the class or sat on one of the unused slabs.
Data Analysis

During the half an hour unstructured interviews which followed the first interviews, I encouraged the participants to review, verify and validate the initial interpretations I made out of the data (Turay, 1996). I continuously analyzed the data from the beginning of the fieldwork to the report writing stage. I transcribed and analyzed all the recorded interviews. The major themes or categories that emerged out of this study are presented in Chapter 4.

Data Access, Uses and Interpretation

Only the members of my thesis committee and myself had access to the raw data. To ensure the confidentiality of the raw data, the names of the interviewees and the three schools were coded. Any information that would easily reveal the identity of any of the three schools was discarded. Transcripts were stored in a filing cabinet and locked. Upon completion of the study, the raw data and transcribed materials from the audiotapes were destroyed. All relevant school records received from the schools were returned before my return to Canada.

As a way of providing feedback to the participants, I requested them during the unstructured interviews to verify my initial analysis of their responses. We agreed that a summary of the final report would be made available to the participants upon request. Participants were aware of the potential evaluative interpretation of their responses. They were alerted to withdraw from the study at any time they felt uncomfortable and unwilling to continue.
Researcher Bias

I brought into this study my informed several years of experience as a peace activist and peace and conflict resolution trainer in my home country, Sierra Leone. While in Canada for the last five years, I have volunteered for a few non-governmental organizations (NGOs) involved in peacebuilding and conflict resolutions in their communities. I therefore brought into this research my own perceptions and understandings of the various issues related to conflict and its management. Such perceptions and understandings had the potential to influence the types of interview questions and data I elicited from the interviewees. I was certainly aware of these potential sources of bias and therefore, designed the research to address these concerns (Turay, 1996).

Field Work in a War Situation

The purpose of this section is to share my experiences as an indigenous researcher in a war situation. As earlier mentioned, I conducted this research immediately after the January 1999 rebel invasion of Freetown. To be honest, I was not too sure whether I would make it. Initially, I felt that it was not fair to engage the students and teachers who were just coming from such a brutal and traumatic experience in this study. By participating in this study, they were faced with the potential of having to recall some of the unpleasant conflict experiences they encountered with the rebels. I recognized this concern and made sure that during my first meetings with the Principals of the three schools I shared my concern with them. I was very cautious not to start talking about the rebel invasion until they started to share their experiences. I empathized with them and shared my own traumatic experiences whenever it was appropriate to do so. I did more
listening than talking throughout my meetings with the Principals. They were quite appreciative of my being sensitive to the realities of the rebel invasion.

When I realized that they were quite approachable, I took the chance to explain my thesis topic, its purpose, objectives and significance. Each of the Principals expressed their deep enthusiasm and interest in my research because of its timeliness and the relevance. They indicated that such a research was quite significant. They hoped that its findings would enlighten the school community, policy makers, government and private institutions, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and educationalists committed to building a culture of peace in the schools in particular, and the society in general, about the nature and complexity of intra-secondary school conflicts.

Throughout the data collection process, there were constant threats and rumours that the rebels would invade the city again. Sometimes interviews were cancelled because of such rumours and threats. Nobody was certain about what would happen next. To deal with this situation, I was very patient, flexible and tolerant. I showed a lot of understanding if I went to a particular school and found out that my interviews had to be cancelled due to one reason or the other. Because of the uncertainty of the situation, I made brief summaries during the interviews and shared them with the participants to get their quick opinions. I also rewound the tapes immediately after each interview to enable the interviewees to listen to some key sections of the audiotapes so as to make any clarifications.

During the interviews, there were moments when some of the participants would shed tears as they recollected some of their traumatic experiences of the war. During such moments, I remained silent and sometimes shed tears too. I stopped the interviews at that
point and continued when the interviewees felt comfortable to do so. Sometimes, I realized that some of the participants needed some moral and financial support. I tried to be generous with the little resources and time I had. This helped to build a better understanding between the participants and myself. Hospitality to people in need is one of the fundamentals of the Sierra Leonean culture. I argue that a researcher needs to be culturally sensitive and realistic. It pays a lot!

I would also like to note that I experienced a lot of stress and peacelessness throughout the different stages of this ‘thesis journey’. This journey was a constant nightmare for me. Some times I had flash backs of the terrible scenes I saw and heard while in Sierra Leone. Those flash backs sometimes brought tears and sad memories. Sometimes I prayed and meditated for divine strength and wisdom. This helped me right through the thesis journey. I am grateful to God and the many family members and friends both in Sierra Leone and Canada for their support.

I learnt many important lessons doing fieldwork in a war-torn situation. For example. It requires a lot of flexibility, patience, understanding of the realities of the participants, tolerance, empathy, humility and dedication. It also demands a lot of creativity, self-confidence and a commitment to researching for social change and human advancement. Let me conclude by arguing that doing field research in a war situation must not just be for the sake of contributing to a better knowledge of the problem being researched. The researcher must also make a commitment to contribute in one way or the other, towards the transformation of the issue(s) studied.
Limitations of the Study

I was in Sierra Leone at a very dangerous moment when the rebels invaded Freetown, where I did my study. During the invasion, many schools were destroyed. Many teachers and students in the schools I interviewed witnessed horrific human rights abuses. Some of them were either direct or indirect victims of these atrocities. A good number of them were deeply traumatized. Their experiences of the war might have greatly affected their perceptions of conflict and its management. To address this concern I did my interviews in a very relaxed and less threatening environment. I empathized with them when appropriate and joined them when they initiated moments for some fun. I also varied the questions as the interviews proceeded and encouraged them to focus on intra-school conflicts each time I realized the discussions were getting off the main topic.

Another limitation was that the participants were not randomly selected. There was the probability that those selected through negotiations provided biased information. To address these concerns, I designed the study to include interview subjects from diverse ethnic and socio-economic backgrounds. I also designed the study to include tape recordings of my observations immediately after the interviews.

The study also focused only on the voices of the prefects and teachers belonging to the disciplinary committees and Guidance and Counselling Departments in the three schools. It excluded the voices of the marginalized students and teachers, and the Principals. Therefore, it would be inappropriate to use the findings of this study to make generalizations about each school.
Chapter 4: Presentation of Findings

I am the only child in my family. My father was an elementary school teacher. My mother was a petty trader. She used to sell fish. During the January 6 invasion of the city, the rebels went to our house and asked my father to give them some money. My father had no money, because at that time he had not been paid his salary for two months. Then they searched the rooms and found my mother trying to hide her basket of fish. They took away her fish and asked her to hand over the money from her sales too. She told them she did not sell fish that day. The rebels did not believe her so they shot my father and mother in front of me. Then they asked me to leave the house immediately. As soon as I left the house, they set it on fire. Then they asked me to join the crowd and dance along the street saying “we want peace, we want peace.” While we were dancing with hundreds of other people, I managed to escape with just the clothes I had on. Now I live with my auntie in one of the filthy displaced camps in the east. She too lost everything. In the camp we live on the meager food the World Food Programme gives us. It is not enough for everybody. Most times I went to bed hungry. It is hard to study in the camp. I come to school without eating anything. My friends help me with food, clothes, books and pens because I have lost everything. If the rebels did not kill my parents, I won’t be living like a beggar today [She burst into tears] (Frances, an extract from Frances’s interview, 1999).

The purpose of this study has been to describe how selected teachers and students in secondary schools in urban Sierra Leone perceive and manage interpersonal conflicts in complex emergencies, with a view to identifying the challenges for building a culture of peace and for further research. In this Chapter, the findings of the study are presented. The Chapter is divided into five sections. Section 1 begins with a quotation from one of the interview subjects followed by a brief background information on the schools and the interview subjects. Throughout the presentation of the findings and the discussion of the findings, I used students and teachers instead of interview subjects. Section 2 focuses on the students’ and teachers’ meanings of conflict and the effects of conflict on their interpersonal relations. In Section 3, the major types of student-student and student-teacher conflicts are described, while Section 4 highlights the students’ and teachers’
understandings of the major causes of student-student and student-teacher conflicts. The last section describes the methods the students and teachers used to respond to the conflicts mentioned in Section 3.

The Schools

Three senior secondary schools participated in the study. To maintain their confidentiality, they are coded as Western Area Secondary School (WASS), Northern Area Secondary School (NASS) and Southern Area Secondary School (SASS).

Western Area Secondary School (WASS)

This school was opened nearly eighty years ago. It is co-educational and runs a double-shift system, 8:00 a.m. – 12:00 p.m. and 12:00 p.m. – 5:00 p.m. Its student population is estimated at about two thousand. The school used to have one of the most well built and modern buildings. The YES Ministry recommended WASS for this study because of its outstanding academic record and good discipline. Many years ago, the school had flush toilets. Years of mismanagement and lack of maintenance have left these structures dilapidated and unusable. Worse still the water pipes have been damaged and so there is no water supply. In a nutshell, the school has no toilet facilities. Both the students and teachers have to leave the fenced school compound to beg the neighbours to allow them to use their toilets. The school has not had regular electricity for several years.

WASS has very limited school land and so has no soccer field. Therefore, recreational facilities are very limited. Students have to use the estimated 100 sq. feet open space used for general assembly for their recreation. The major recreational
activities are hand tennis and soccer. The school has library and science laboratories that are poorly equipped. WASS lacks adequate chairs and desks. There are many students that do not have a place to sit during classes. Since the school operates a first come first serve method regarding sitting arrangements, students who do not have seats either beg to squeeze with their friends or have to remain standing or sitting on a slab throughout the lesson. WASS does not have a school-feeding program. Those who could afford it buy food from the petty traders.

Northern Area Secondary School (NASS)

This school was opened in the 1920s. It is co-educational. Its current students roll is about three thousand. The school runs a double-shift system due to the large influx of internally displaced students. The morning shift runs from 8:00 a.m. to 12:00 p.m., while the afternoon shift runs from 12:30 p.m. to 5:00 p.m. The YES Ministry rated NASS as one of the most disciplined senior secondary schools in the country. Its academic record has been quite outstanding.

NASS has one soccer field and a well-paved assembly area that the students use during the breaks and lunchtime to play hand tennis. It used to have well-equipped science laboratories. The school was forced to abandon its science curriculum in the senior grades because it could not afford the cost of science equipment and materials. The science laboratories have been transformed into ordinary classrooms. NASS also has a poorly equipped library. The school does not have a feeding program. Students and teachers buy food from the petty traders. The school has not had regular electricity and water supply for several years.
Southern Area Secondary School (SASS)

This school was established about eighty years ago. It is co-educational. It does not run a double-shift system. The school has a student enrollment of over two thousand. The school has a lot of pressure from the YES Ministry and parents to continue to accommodate the internally displaced students. It has functional Chemistry, Biology and Physics laboratories, although not well equipped. The school has one soccer field and a volleyball court. The school lays a lot of emphasis on cleanliness. The school compound is always well swept and maintained and the school gate is closed during school sessions. It has one of the best toilet facilities of the three schools studied although they are inadequate. Electricity and pipe borne water supply are virtually non-functional during my study. Prior to the rebel invasion, the school used to have sporadic electricity supply.

SASS has a nice Guidance Counseling office for helping students with problems. I had some of my interviews in this office. The office had only one table and two chairs during my interviews. The school also has very nice offices for the principal and staff. Furniture in the staff room was inadequate. SASS also has a library, which, like the other two schools, is poorly equipped with lots of out-dated books. The school does not have a school-feeding program. Petty traders (mostly women and young girls) sell foodstuffs and water outside of the school gate.

The Role of the Disciplinary Committee

The Principal of each school institutes a Disciplinary Committee in her/his school to assist her/him maintain good school discipline. The specific duties of the Disciplinary Committee include:
1. To review all “serious breaches and persistent offences such as fighting, stealing, gambling, distribution of pornographic literature and stabbing” (Sesay and Labor, n.d. p. 32) and recommend to the principal for appropriate action.

2. To administer appropriate corporal punishment as approved by the Principal.

3. To review all cases of suspended students and recommend to the Principal for appropriate action, such as upholding the decision, amending it, annulling it, or issuing a transfer certificate to the affected student (Sesay and Labor, n.d).

4. To arbitrate serious student-student, student-teacher and teacher-teacher conflicts (Field Notes, April 19, 1999).

**Major School Rules**

The main rules in the three schools are summarized below.

1. All students must wear the approved school uniforms and the school badge/crest.

2. No smoking.

3. No fighting and use of abusive/obscene language.

4. No eating in class.

5. No truancy.

6. No stealing and cheating.

7. Misuse and willful destruction of school property is prohibited.

8. Use of illegal drugs is prohibited.
9. Violent behavior is prohibited.

10. Students must obey and respect the school authorities, teachers and school prefects (Field Notes, April 19, 1999).

**Background on Interview Subjects**

**Table 1**

**Code Names of the Interview Subjects**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>WASS Students</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>WASS Teachers</th>
<th>Age</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>John</td>
<td>22 years</td>
<td>Joan</td>
<td>40 years +</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thomas</td>
<td>19 &quot;</td>
<td>Phillip</td>
<td>45 years +</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jane</td>
<td>23 &quot;</td>
<td>Joe</td>
<td>About 50 years</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>NASS Students</th>
<th>NASS Teachers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Marie</td>
<td>Dolly</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mark</td>
<td>Andrew</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eddie</td>
<td>Peter</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SASS Students</th>
<th>SASS Teachers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Frances</td>
<td>Patricia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Christina</td>
<td>Margaret</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Charles</td>
<td>Jack</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

According to Table 1, four female prefects, one each from WASS and NASS and two from SASS, participated in the study. On the other hand, five male prefects, two each
from WASS and NASS and one from SASS, took part in the study. All the female prefects were sixth form students. John, Mark, Eddie and Charles were also sixth form students. Thomas was the only fifth form student. The students’ ages ranged from 19 – 23 years. In Sierra Leone, the official adult age is 18 years and above. The students came from different ethnic groups including Krio, Sherbro, Susu, Limba, Mende, Themne and Fullah. Each one of them has been at least a year old in her/his school. All the students spoke at least two indigenous languages and English. Prefects were selected because they dealt with student-student and student-teachers conflicts.

**An example of a profile of a male student.**

I am nineteen years old. I am currently the prefect in Form 6. I am in the Arts stream and I want to study law at Fourah Bay College. I am the only boy and first child of three in our family. My younger sister is seventeen years old and the youngest is fifteen years old. Both of them are also attending secondary school. Our father used to run a taxi for a businessman in the city but the rebels burnt it when they invaded Freetown early this year. Our mother died many years ago. Our father married another woman with three sons. Our stepmother likes her children more than us. She gives them whatever they ask for. When we ask for money to buy food during lunch, she will always grumble that she has no money. But she buys new clothes for her own children. When we complain to our father, he says we are not telling the truth. Our father has no job. Our stepmother runs a small rice store. The rebels looted it. Now we are just managing life. Right now in school, my father has not paid the school fees. I only have one pair of shoes and one set of school uniforms. My friends provoke me. They call me wan kanda because I wear the same pair of shoes and school uniform all the time (Charles, an extract from Charles’s interview, 1999).

**An example of a profile of a female student.**

I am nineteen years old. I am one of the school prefects. I am in the Arts stream. My future career goal is to work in a Bank. I hope to further my education at Fourah Bay College. I have two brothers and no sister. My brothers are all attending secondary school. I am the second child of my
parents. I live with my father and mother in Freetown. My parents are from the provinces and they are from two different tribes. They are both teachers. During the rebel invasion, we lost some of our properties but nobody was killed or injured. We're very lucky because some of our neighbours lost everything, including some members of their families. Since my parents are both teachers, times are very hard for our family because they get their salaries late. Worst of all, we came from the provinces. We had to run away when the rebels took over our town. Our family does not own a house here. We rented a very small house. It's not convenient but we have to manage. My parents are very religious and I believe it is their faith in God that is sustaining our family. I like reading and dancing (Marie, an extract from Marie's interview, 1999).

**Teachers.**

According to Table 1, four female teachers, one each from WASS and NASS and two from SASS, participated in the interviews. On the other hand, five male teachers, two each from WASS and NASS and one from SASS also took part in the interviews. The teachers' ages ranged from 40 - 50 years. All the teachers were parents. Some of them were former students of the schools they now work. Teachers selected came from five ethnic groups – *Limba, Themne, Mende, Krio and Fullah*. They spoke at least two indigenous languages and English. Two also spoke French. The teachers selected had taught in their schools for periods ranging from 1 – 15 years. Three of the teachers were Guidance Counselors and the rest belonged to the Disciplinary Committee. They were selected because they were responsible for handling intra-school conflicts and assisting the Principals for maintaining law and order in the school.

**An example of a profile of a male teacher.**

I am about fifty years old. I am married with three children, two boys and one girl. The boys are 19 and 17 years and the girl is fifteen years. They are all attending secondary school. I had my secondary education in this school and I have taught here for over ten years now. I am a senior teacher and a member of the Disciplinary Committee. I teach mostly Arts subjects.
I studied Arts in my undergraduate programme. My wife teaches in an elementary school. We used to work in the provinces but because of the war, we had to move to the city. I heard that the rebels have burnt our hometown. Right now, I do not know the fate of my relatives and my wife’s parents. We rented a backhouse of three small rooms. When the rebels attacked the city in January, we ran away and stayed with a friend for sometime. After the rebels were driven out, we returned to our house but found nothing. But we thank God we are live. Many of our neighbours lost their lives. Some lost their properties just like us. Since both of us are teaching, times are very difficult. The salaries for both of us cannot even feed us. This is already the second week of the new month and we have not yet been paid for last month. You know the Permanent Secretary of the Ministry of Education squandered millions of Leones of teachers’ salaries. Last week some displaced relatives came to stay with us. In order to earn extra income I run private classes after school. My wife sells ‘cold water’ and rice cakes in school. You know we have to do Mammy Coker business. Wel, Aw j d u? [Well, what can one do?]. The rent is killing us. The Landlord wants his rent paid in US dollars. That is the problem all over the city. But where can people get dollars? Life is very difficult for teachers. In school I spend a lot of time trying to solve students’ problems (Andrew, an extract from Andrew’s interview, 1999).

An example of a profile of a female teacher.

I am about forty years old. I have been teaching in this school for the past seven years. I taught for some years before coming to this school. I am married but currently living separately, because my husband and I have a very serious conflict that I would not like to talk about at this moment. I have no children. I was born in one of the provincial towns. My parents are still alive. I have several brothers and sisters and many friends too. I am the breadwinner of my parents. They are living in one of the provincial towns. I visit them at least once every month to find out about how they’re doing and assist them financially. But as you’re aware of, sometimes we’re not paid regularly and so I cannot meet my financial obligations. However, our extended family is very supportive. This has been our main strength. I do not want to look for another job because I love teaching children. I am interested in your research because I would like to learn new ways of building peace in our schools. I love peacemaking. My hobbies are listening to music, and reading novels (Patricia, an extract from Patricia’s interview, 1999).
Students' and Teachers' Understandings of the Meaning of Conflict and its Effect on their Interpersonal Relationships

This section describes the students' and teachers' meanings of conflict. The effects of conflict on student-student and student-teacher relationships are also highlighted. The section begins with the students' understandings of the meaning of conflict and its effect on their interpersonal relationships with their colleagues and teachers. This is followed by a description of the teachers' definitions of conflict and their views on how conflict affects their interpersonal relationships with students. A summary of the main themes of the section is also provided.

Students' Understanding of the Meaning of Conflict

I started my interviews with the students by asking them to define what conflict meant to them. Their responses were varied with both positive and negative connotations. Jane defined conflict as "a misunderstanding or disagreement between family members in a society." In her view, "disagreements or misunderstandings occurred among students in school, between students and teachers, among teachers, between teachers and the principal, and between children and their parents."

Christina agreed but emphasized the negative aspect of conflict. She argued, "conflict is an aggressive disagreement between two parties." From another negative perspective, John understood conflict as "a fracas between two or more people about issues of common interests." Marie perceived conflict both negatively and positively. She argued that conflict means "a disagreement, a fight or a quarrel about different views or opinions about things." I observed throughout the interviews that the ten-year rebel war
has had great impact on how people generally perceived conflict. This was manifested in
Mark’s understanding of the meaning of conflict:

I would like to define conflict as a situation that occurs when a country or
community is somehow problematic. I look at conflict in two ways. There
is national conflict that is, when the country is in problems. For example,
the present situation facing our country, I mean the rebel war. We can say
our country is in a conflict situation.

Eddie shared another negative view of the meaning of conflict with particular
reference to the school context. According to him, “conflict basically means an element
of discord between two parties, say in school, among pupils of the same class, among
athletes during for example, inter-secondary school sports.” Marie emphasized the
diversity of the meaning of conflict. She argued, “conflict has various definitions such as.
a struggle, a collision, or opposition to incompatible wishes.”

Students’ Views about the Effects of Conflicts on Student-Student and Student-
Teacher Relationships

I asked the students to tell me how conflicts affected their relationships with their
colleagues and teachers. Frances had a very positive view. She said, “when the conflict
was over; our bond of friendship became stronger.” She gave an example to illustrate her
point:

I have a friend who likes to make me feel stupid even though I can say I
am cleverer than he is. One day he gave me a physics problem in
‘energetics’ to solve. So I was solving it in my own way. And he said it
was wrong. He kept telling me to stop working because according to him,
I was using the wrong method. So I got confused and angry because he did
not give me a chance to do what I wanted. But in the end he found out he
was wrong. So when I solved the problem, he said “Oh! This is a cheap
thing, in fact, I was just trying to fool you.” He went on to tell me that I
liked to feel too important among my fellow girls. We developed a grudge
against each other. One day he came to me and wanted to tell me
something. I shouted at him in front of the whole class. He felt ashamed
and came to me later and told me he was not happy the way I treated him. I also told him how I felt about the disrespectful way he treated me earlier on. We forgive each other. Now we’re the best of friends.

On the other hand, most of the students felt that conflicts had negative effects on their inter-personal relationships with their colleagues and teachers. According to Christina, conflict was bad because “it led to physical fights.” Charles agreed and noted that “sometimes conflicts could cause physical injury.” Thomas said he did not like conflict because “it leads to malice among students and teachers.” Similarly, John pointed out that conflict was not good because “it creates bad feelings amongst friends and relatives.” According to Jane a conflict was a terrible thing because “it makes you feel funny and sometimes stupid in front of your colleagues when you don’t win.”

Jane also felt that conflicts sometimes “discouraged some teachers from teaching certain classes where there were troublesome students” (Jane). Similarly, Marie, Mark and Eddie also felt conflicts destroyed good student-teacher relationships. For example, “some students hardly forgive some of the teachers who punished them unjustly during their school days” (Mark). Marie also noted that students who were always in conflict with teachers risked losing the teachers’ co-operation and support. Similarly, “some students disliked working with teachers and students they’ve had a conflict with” (Eddie). Christina also argued that conflict leads to tribal hatred. Charles agreed, “conflicts sometimes create discord and lack of unity between students and teachers from one tribe and those from other tribes.” “In fact, it builds grudges against one another” (Frances).

**Teachers’ Understandings of the Meaning of Conflict**

The nine teachers interviewed understood the meaning of conflict from different perspectives. From a negative point of view, Patricia and Margaret described conflict as a
disagreement that leads to violence. On the other hand, Dolly stated that “a conflict is a quarrel over limited essential resources.” When asked to give an example, she pointed out that a common example was the daily quarrel over chairs and desks amongst students.

Jack’s definition of conflict was based on his observations on what went on during the week amongst students and teachers. According to him:

In the school situation conflict normally means problems involving students. For example, students fighting in class for a problem they cannot solve amicably. Amongst us teachers, conflict generally means argument over general issues, such as political and social issues. Sometimes these arguments result in blows.

Peter held a similar view:

As Chairman of the Disciplinary Committee, I see conflict as a kind of disagreement, opposing views on certain issues. Sometimes, these disagreements lead to hot-tempers. Conflict also means arguments, which lead to fighting.

On the other hand, Philip understood the meaning of conflict beyond the confines of disagreements over physical or material needs. He said, “I always perceived conflict as a situation where there is an opposition between one side and the other in terms of principles, beliefs, approaches and of course, roles.” From another perspective, Joe and Andrew described a conflict as a situation when people could not see eye to eye because their needs and rights have been threatened.

**Teachers’ Views about the Effects of Conflicts on Student-student and Student-teacher Relationships**

According to the study, only three (all female) out of the nine teachers interviewed perceived conflict as an opportunity for psychosocial and emotional
development. As will be shown in later sections of this study, these overall negative attitudes towards conflict have had overwhelming impact on the ways teachers handled conflicts.

On a positive note, Joan felt that "conflict creates a learning opportunity for both parties." Dolly was also positive about the importance of conflict. She argues, "lessons learnt in one conflict could help in dealing with other conflicts in future." Patricia agreed, "a conflict helps people to face the realities of life, disagreements, fights, quarrels, malice and so on." On another positive note, Margaret felt, "conflict creates a learning opportunity for both parties." Joan gave reasons why she thought conflict was necessary:

Lessons learnt in one conflict can help in dealing with other conflicts in future. As Guidance and Counseling teacher, conflict enables me to understand students' and teachers' behaviours better. When I listened to students who came to me to complain others, I got to know them better.

On the other hand, all the male teachers felt conflict had negative consequences on the relationships among students and between students and teachers. For example, Joe felt that conflict "leads to unnecessary anger and frustrations." Philip agreed and argued that "conflict also creates feelings of animosity amongst students, between teachers and amongst teachers." According to Dolly, "solving conflicts is disturbing." She also felt that solving student-student conflicts sometimes wastes her precious teaching time. On the other hand, Andrew feels, "persistent conflicts forced some students to develop truancy." Peter agreed and noted that "conflicts create disciplinary problems in the school and even at home." Jack stressed that "sometimes conflicts lead to malice and hatred amongst students and teachers." He further observes that "conflict leads to violence and limits progress."
Major Types of Student-student Conflicts Identified by the Students

This section summarizes the major types of student-student conflicts in the three schools. This summary is based on the students' views and my personal observations. Since these types of conflicts were mostly common to all the schools studied, no attempt has been made to discuss them according to each school. However, in some instances distinctions were made regarding some schools with peculiar types of conflicts.

Misunderstanding Over the Use of School Furniture

This was the most obvious type of conflict I observed in all the three schools I studied. The first manifestation of this type of conflict occurred at WASS on March 25, 1999 at 8:00 a.m., when I visited the school to discuss my research proposal with the Principal and solicit his school’s participation. It was during the morning devotion. Seconds before the Principal could end the devotion and allow the students to go to their classes, the issue of the quarrel over the use of school furniture unfolded:

I saw about two hundred students, mostly those in the junior forms running to their classes as if they were competing for the hundred meters Olympic Gold Medal. There was pushing and shouting, “Look you boy, you have dropped my books,” screamed the smaller boys. There was no time to turn back and say, “I’m sorry.” It was a battle for who gets first to the classroom gets a place to sit and a desk to write on. Books, pencils, pens, school bags of the smaller boys could be seen dropping as the battle for survival of the fittest continued. Upon arrival in the classrooms, I heard screaming and shouting: “give me my chair, I came first.” “This is not your chair.” “It’s mine,” The noise died naturally when the teacher-in-charge moved to the classes with a cane in his right hand and yelling, “keep quiet,” I was shocked and could not believe my eyes that urban schools would be faced with such a problem. “Things were better off when I was a teacher in the elementary and secondary schools in the 1970s and 1980s,” I said to myself (Field Notes, March 25, 1999).
Misunderstandings among students over the use of school furniture were common in all the three schools throughout my six months' observations. When in subsequent interviews I asked the participants to identify the major types of student-student conflicts, all of them were quick to mention the quarrel over who grabbed the chair or desk first, as one of the major types of conflicts among students. Eddie agreed:

One major problem in our school is lack of adequate sitting accommodation for students. For instance in school, we have a first come first serve policy regarding sitting accommodation. Nobody has any permanent seat in class. After assembly, most guys rush to class for spaces. The strong ones get seats. The weaker ones go without.

Similarly, Jane narrated her sad encounter with the fight for chairs:

The chair that was given to me by the teacher, I wrote my name on it. But unfortunately, someone I don’t know took it. And I decided to take another one, which belonged to another person. As a result, we got into a conflict that created a lot of problems for the other pupil and me. We decided to fight. But the other student took the matter to the Principal instead.

It was quite common for students to move from class to class to grab the first empty chair or desk they could set their eyes on (John, Charles and Frances). Thomas cited a similar situation in his school:

Well in our situation here, you see children fighting over the ownership of a chair. For example, since the population is more than the available chairs, so if a student comes early in the morning and takes a chair from one class to the other, somebody might tell that student that somebody from that class came to take your chair. And they will go and identify that chair. The students believed that once they’ve been using that chair, it’s their own property. But we have a rule in this school that nobody owns a chair. Conflict will come there. One will say, “it’s not your personal property.” And the other one will say, “I’ve been using this chair for a long time.”
Eddie expressed a deep concern about the lack of adequate chairs and desks for the students because “sometimes in the struggle for the chair or desk, a fight might erupt and one of the pupils might hit another one and cause injury,” he concluded. Jane had similar concerns:

In the morning as soon as general assembly is over, students rush to the classroom to secure furniture. The furniture is not enough. Maybe one boy will say “this is my chair” and the other one will say, “I came first,” and from that point they start quarreling. Sometimes it gets even serious because they fight and some of those chairs are metal. Sometimes they inflict injuries on themselves.

I observed though that this type of conflict was more prevalent amongst students in forms one and two in all the three schools. In WASS, this type of conflict was also common amongst the form six students offering Economics. The Economics class in this school had over one hundred students (Field Notes, June 10, 1999). In SASS, the rush for chairs and desks amongst the senior grades was common among those offering Chemistry, Biology and Physics (Field Notes, March 25, 1999).

**Misunderstanding Over Provocation, Naming Calling or Teasing**

Another major type of student-student conflict that the students identified was provocation or name calling or teasing. According to the students, students provoked their colleagues for all kinds of reasons. For example, Thomas noted that certain male students were nicknamed *woman lapa* because they were very fond of hanging around too many girls. “This nickname was also given to boys who had many girl friends in the same school” (Charles). I observed that the use of this particular nickname was most common during breaks, lunchtime and at the playground.
According to Frances, the nickname *gongosa bɔks* was also given to “students who revealed to the teachers and other students the unpleasant things other students said about them in secret.” According to John, Mark and Charles, there were certain students in their classes who were considered as spies for teachers. John explained further:

In our class, sometimes we discussed about teachers who did not teach well or came to classes very late. We also discussed about teachers who made love relationships with some of their female students. Some of the teachers always ended hearing whatever was said about them. So we monitored the movements of the suspected students and we caught them revealing our secrets to the teachers. So we called them *gongosa bɔks.*

According to Frances, Jane and Eddie, most students who behaved like the students described above did so purely to gain favours from the teachers and destroy the characters of some of the students they were in conflict with.

I observed that students found every opportunity to tease their colleagues with all sorts of nicknames. The rebel war was not an exception. Mark agreed, “students who argued in favour of negotiating with the RUF rebels for a peaceful settlement of the war were nicknamed *rebel collaborator.*” They must have picked this argument from the government owned Sierra Leone Broadcasting Services, remarked Marie. Because, even the government called any one who supported a dialogue with the rebels and the former military regime, as a *rebel or junta or collaborator,* she concluded. “*Junta* referred to the former military government [The Armed Forces Revolutionary Council – AFRC] which overthrew the democratically elected government in May 1997, but in turn was overthrown by ECOMOG [The West Africa Peacekeeping Force]” (John). A student who was
seen to be sympathizing with the *junta*, or suggesting for the government to talk to the former soldiers so as to end the war was nicknamed *junta* (John, Mark, Frances and Christina). According to Eddie, “Students who argued in favour of the inclusion of interested AFRC members into the new Sierra Leonean Army were also called *junta*.”

Thomas also pointed out that “students whose actual names were the same as that of *Foday Sankoh* [the rebel leader of the RUF] were nicknamed *Foday Sankoh*, just to tease them.” Similarly, any student who had the same first or last name with any of the rebels or renegade soldiers was nicknamed the same. Some students were nicknamed *Kanja Sandy*. Thomas explained why:

*Kanja Sandy* was one of the army officers who took part in the 1997 military coup. In our school, there is a student called *Yusuf Sandy*. This student is nicknamed *Kanja* because he has the same family name with *Kanja Sandy*.

Students who were also caught stealing other students’ books, pens, pencils, lunch money and other school properties, were called *tifi tifi* (*Jane*). Only one incident of theft occurred during my observations, in SASS. A student was involved in some serious theft outside of the school with a gang of street children and was brought to the school to be disciplined. Since it was a very sensitive case, which involved people outside of the school, I avoided getting any further details.

I also observed that their colleagues teased some students from certain ethnic groups who could not pronounce certain letters or words in English correctly because of influences from their indigenous languages and other factors. In the classes I observed, I realized that some of the students from the *Themne* tribe pronounced the letter ‘J’ as ‘Y’. Similarly some students from the *Mende* tribe pronounced the letter ‘R’ as ‘L’. Students
from the Limba tribe pronounced ‘F’ as ‘H’. Below is an example of a typical case of
ame-calling due to poor pronunciation of a certain letter:

On May 22, I observed Patricia teaching English Language. She asked a
student to read a passage from one of their English textbooks. While this
student was reading, he came across the name John and pronounced it as
\( Y\v n \) (yawn). Everybody burst out laughing and immediately the students
started calling him \( Y\, n \). I resisted laughing. The teacher told them to stop
and reminded them that all the tribes had certain words or letters they
could not pronounce properly. Her advice met deaf years. During the
break and lunch periods, I could still hear some students calling this
student. \( Y\, n! Y\, n! \) (Field Notes. May 22, 1999, 11:00 a.m.).

Having very dark skin colour was also teased. Christina agreed, “in our school, if
you have a very dark skin colour, the students will call you either Black Satan or Black
Bubu.” There were very few students who were faced with this problem, observed
Marie. I also observed that students were nicknamed for their strong and muscular body
structure. Eddie agreed, “students who were tall and huge, especially the big boys who
bullied small boys were nicknamed Babu Bone [the bone of a baboon]. Similarly,
“students who were ugly looking were called \( \text{W}\text{w}\text{liw} \) (Jane). Thomas further
explained:

There is a student in our class who looks very ugly. He has big ears, a big head and
a big nose. He looks very muscular too. When you see him, you’ll really laugh
because he is too ugly. So students call him \( \text{W}\text{w}\text{liw} \). Students just liked to
tease him. But some students over do it.

Students who behaved foolishly or stupidly were also given nicknames. “They’re called
Billy Goat” (Frances). Students who also gave foolish answers during classes were called
the same name (Charles). “In our school, students who could not answer teachers’
questions were also called Billy Goat” (Thomas).
The study also revealed that a nickname that was predominantly used by students at SASS, was Mustian. According to Frances, “Mustian refers to a student whose parents are partly Muslims and partly Christian.” During one afternoon break, I observed two students quarrelling over the use of this nickname and a teacher intervening to prevent a further escalation of the conflict:

**Big boy:** “Whom were you calling Mustian?” “Will you call your dad this name?”

**Small Boy:** “It was not me who called you Mustian, it was the other boy.”

**Big Boy:** “That’s not true, come let’s go to the prefect.” “Is it my fault to have a Muslim mother and a Christian father?” [He began to drag the poor little boy on the ground].

**Small Boy:** [Screaming]. “It was not me. I swear to God.”

**Teacher:** One of the teachers saw the drama. He shouted, “you bully leave that little boy alone.”

**Big Boy:** He called me Mustian.

**Teacher:** “I don’t care,” shouted the teacher. If he did something wrong to you, you should report him instead of dragging him like that, the teacher insisted.

The small boy escaped the jungle justice! But I could hear the big boy threatening that next time, he’d teach the small boy a lesson. Certainly the conflict was only suppressed and who knows when the Mustian drama will unfold again? I pondered (Field Notes, May 7, 1999).

It is important to note that provocation, either in the form of nicknaming or teasing, was prohibited in all the three schools. The majority of students saw provocation as very destructive. Jane was particularly concerned with the negative effects of this type of student behaviour. She recalled seeing some cases where students reacted violently to any form of provocation. She agreed with the saying that “provocation leads to madness.”
Prefects did everything possible to curb this type of behaviour. Nonetheless, students violated the rule prohibiting provocation more than any other school rule. For some students it was done purely for fun. Eddie agreed:

Some students come to school without eating anything. They sleep in class. Their colleagues provoke them. They knock them on their heads just to tease them.

But he noted, “these jokes made some students become angry and sometimes forced them to use obscene language against those who provoked them.”

Some other students provoked their colleagues in order to settle old scores or revenge. On the other hand, for some students, provocation was a way of dealing with stress or tension (John, Thomas, Jane, Marie, Mark and Christina). Charles also mentioned that in his class some students were unsympathetic to students who were physically impaired, because they made fun of their physical disabilities. “As a Muslim, I find this very disturbing and ungodly,” he concluded. Provocation or teasing generally occurred when students were playing games during the break or lunch periods and when they did not have a teacher in class (Charles, Eddie and Thomas). “The lateness or absence of some teachers during classes provided moments for students to cause noise, gossip, and tease one another” (Field Notes, May 6, 1999).

**Disagreement Over the Repayment of Financial Loans and Return of Borrowed Items from Other Students**

All the students indicated that there were many cases when students would take financial loans from their colleagues and would not repay those loans. Some also borrowed items such as books, rulers, pens, pencils, erasers and other essential school materials and failed to return them. The students maintained that disagreements regarding
the non-payment of financial loans and failure to return borrowed school items was another major type of conflict amongst students. The study revealed that several students took loans from their colleagues and either were incapable of repaying the loans or just refused to do so. Eddie cited the following typical example from NASS:

Most times we have students taking loans from their friends and they don't repay the loans. These cases happen very often. One day, a boy came to school without money to buy lunch. He asked his friend to loan him some money and he promised to pay the next day. But the next day he came to school without the money. And when his friend asked him for the money, he said he had no money. His friend seized his school bag. The matter was reported to me. This took place last week. I told the student who was reported that if he did not return the bag immediately, I'd report him to the Disciplinary Committee. He returned the bag the next day. Of course he was punished for that later on.

Frances also explained that one of her friends borrowed her Chemistry notebook in order to copy some notes she missed when she was absent from school. She said her friend promised to return it the next day but did not keep her promise. "I needed the book urgently because we had upcoming tests," she remarked angrily. "This was how our friendship broke up," she concluded. According to John, Thomas and Marie, some students were also in the habit of borrowing books from their libraries without returning them at the stipulated times. "This has led to many quarrels and fights among some students" (Thomas).

**Misunderstanding Due to Stealing of Properties**

Misunderstanding due to stealing was rated as one of the most common types of conflicts amongst the students in all the three schools. All the students I interviewed stated that a good number of students went to school without money to buy food during the lunch break. This influenced some students to steal things they did not have (Frances
and Charles). Eddie cited the following example in order to show the seriousness of this type of conflict in his school:

You see some boys come to school without lunch money, notebooks, textbooks, pens, pencils and erasers. And most times they have to steal basic necessities. They steal the lunch items or money from their fellow students. This creates enmity amongst students and leads to quarrels and fights. Every day, one or two cases of theft are reported to the Disciplinary Committee.

John, Mark and Charles pointed out that they spent quite a lot of their break and lunch times dealing with conflicts that had to do with stealing. Thomas, Marie, Christina also noted that nearly eighty percent of the misunderstandings they reported to either the senior teachers or the Disciplinary Committees were about stealing.

**Misunderstanding Over the High Cost of Education**

All the students interviewed noted that students generally expected that the schools and the Ministry of Education would ensure that all the students had access to affordable and readily available textbooks and other essential school materials. Many students cannot afford to buy their textbooks, school uniforms, and other school materials, pay tuition and meet the transportation costs as well (Thomas, Jane, Eddie, Mark and Christina). “Education in our country is getting so expensive that only the rich parents’ children have full access to education” (Jane). Many students are therefore, generally angry at the government and school authorities because they feel education was too elitist (Eddie and Thomas).

John agreed, “in our Economics class of over one hundred students, less than twenty students could afford to buy all the required textbooks for the subject.” Similarly, in a French class I observed in SASS, out of four students studying the subject, only one
of them had a French textbook. The other three students kept bordering him right through the class to allow them to use his book. To worsen the situation, the teacher (Patricia) who was teaching the class had only one French book from which she was copying the notes for the students.

One would have thought that the school libraries would be have been equipped enough to salvage this situation. But Thomas argued that “books are so expensive that the school could not afford to buy books for the library.” It is therefore very difficult for students to do any research work (Frances Christina and Mark). But the problem was not just with the lack of books. John also mentioned that some students could hardly even afford buying basic things such as pens, pencils, mathematical sets and so on. He stated “that some of these students expected to borrow these items from their colleagues and when they were denied, they blamed their friends and sometimes quarreled with them for not being helpful.” These quarrels led to fights sometimes, he added. The misunderstanding lies in the fact that the students do not understand why a rich country such as Sierra Leone could not afford to provide accessible and affordable education for all Sierra Leoneans (Mark, Marie and Charles). “On the other hand government feels it is doing enough but honestly, it is not” (Mark).

**Misunderstanding Over Differences in Ideas or Opinions**

The majority of the students agreed that misunderstandings over differences of opinions occurred among students principally regarding how to deal with the rebels. There were diverse views regarding how the government and the people of Sierra Leone should deal with the rebels who had caused so much destruction of lives and properties (Thomas, Jane, Marie and Charles). Marie cited this example:
For now the rebel war is a major source of disagreement. There’re different views about the war. There’re lots of disagreements about what we all thought about the war. Like today, we’re having a discussion about “peace at what cost?” A student asked the question, “What should we do with the peace process?” I said we should invite the SLA [Sierra Leone Army] to come over. We should not allow them to stay in the bush. There are about five thousand of them and they are well trained. They’ll fight. And they know the Peninsula. Some body got up and said, “Oh! Those guys are thieves.” “I don’t want to hear about them.” He started getting very upset about it. We started arguing and arguing and nearly went into blows. So I went away.

She indicated that these types of arguments about what to do with the rebels and ex-soldiers were common amongst students both in class and on the playground, especially during breaks or lunchtime.

Most students also agreed that their colleagues supported different political parties, mostly along tribal orientations. Thomas agreed that “most times, students from the Northern Province supported the political parties from their province, while those from the Eastern and Southern Provinces supported parties from those provinces.” This caused differences in views that led to bitterness and violent confrontations, and hence serious conflicts, he concluded. John, Marie, Mark and Christina also observed that topics related to the rebel war and national politics were very sensitive topics that were to a very large extent responsible for the aggressive and rude behaviours of some students towards some of their colleagues who held different opinions. John mentioned that in their Economics classes differences in views over certain topics sometimes became very intense and led to bitter quarrels and animosity among students who felt too good to be challenged by their colleagues.

Streaming of students according to grades was another case in point. According to Eddie, “students are placed in streams such as Junior Secondary One E, G, F, unto Q.”
Sometimes “students in the ‘E Stream’ feel they’re superior to those in the other streams” (Eddie). Jane also argued that streaming of students according to grades made some students feel better than the others. “This has led to some quarrels and fights amongst some students,” she emphasized. John agreed:

This morning, during the first break I went to greet a friend in Form One E. I found him quarreling with another student in Form One F. My friend thought his stream had more intelligent students than the Form One F. The argument was at the point of exploding when I entered the class. I told them to stop arguing. They did. I explained to them that no stream was better than the other one. But I did not think I was able to convince my friend. Nevertheless, they stopped the argument.

Marie, Eddie, Frances and Christina observed that this also happened in their schools.

Disagreement Over use of Classroom Space

All the students agreed that disagreement over the use of the limited classroom space was a very serious type of student-student conflict. “In our school, the classrooms are very small and we are too many in class and so if you do not move your chair and desk in front, you can hardly hear what the teacher is saying” (Jane). I observed that getting a strategic place in the classroom so as to be able to hear the teacher and copy notes was a common practice among the students in all the three schools. I also noticed that this led to tensions, pushing and yelling at each other among the students. Christina agreed and gave an example to make her point:

Each time we had classes in the Biology lab, you have to go as early as possible to make sure you got to the front seats. But sometimes some students would come late to class and fight their way in front, pushing whoever was there before them. The bigger boys usually behaved like that. This fighting for a space in class has been in this school for quite a long time. The more students are enrolled, the worse the problem becomes. I’m glad I’ll go to the university next year. I’m fed up with fighting for space all the time.
Thomas and John also stated that at WASS, some of the students who could not get the front seats many times resorted to playing mischievous games such as throwing papers at their colleagues. “Others sometimes dodged some of the classes” (Christina).

**Differences in How Each Tribe Perceived the Other Tribes**

Sierra Leone has thirteen main ethnic groups or tribes - *Themne, Limba, Mende, Creole, Fullah, Yalunka, Mandingo, Susu, Kuranko, Kissi, Loko, Sherbro* and *Kono*. The two major tribes are the *Mendes* (mostly from the Southern and Eastern Provinces) and the *Themnes* (predominantly in the Northern Province and Western Area). Students from the minor ethnic groups observed that some of the students from these two tribes felt they were superior to them. Charles articulated this quite vividly with reference to the *Mendes*:

I observed that certain students from the major tribes are very domineering. For instance in our Literary and Debating Society (LandDS), most of the top executive members are *Mendes* and the other tribes hold the junior positions. The *Mendes* consider their tribe as superior to others. They consider the other tribes as inferior. The other tribes keep to themselves. The *Mendes* keep to themselves. Most of the time, the *Mendes* consider themselves as the cores of the class because they occupy all the executive positions in the LandDS. And most times they talk in their ‘Mende language’. Most of us are disgusted with this.

In addition to Charles’s observation the following stereotypes were also held against the *Mendes*.

1. They’re too power thirsty.
2. They are cannibals.
3. They eat frogs a lot.
4. They are selfish people.
5. They are responsible for the rebel war.
6. In every department in the country there’s a Mende.

Thomas, on the other hand said this about the Themnes:

They brought violence into this country during the All People’s Congress rule. You see, like the Mendes, they always want to rule this country. They hate the Mendes. In the Northern Province, they dominate all the other tribes. They’re very proud people.

Eddie also observed that the Themnes felt too good about their tribe and liked to fight for any minor problem. Other major tribal stereotypes held against the Themnes were:

1. They are war-like (often nicknamed as ‘Germans’).
2. They are proud people.
3. They don’t like the Mendes.
4. They are uncivilized because they like to wear plastic sandals and big gowns.
5. They have spoiled this country.
6. They feel they are too good.

All the students indicated that both in the school and the society at large there were certain stereotypes that were also held about each tribe. For example, they pointed out that the most common stereotypes about the Limbas are: they are only good for tapping palm wine, they are backward, stupid and uneducated, they lack political leadership skills, and they liked to look like Creoles. On the other hand, stereotypes against Fullahs included: they are thieves, miserly, uneducated, hate to go to school, and are only good for transporting goods for other people with their mpanke (wooden Cart).
As for the Lokos, the general stereotypes held about them included: they are dancers, warriors, backward and liked to behave like the Mendes. Also, Susus were considered as beggars, praise singers and uneducated. Similarly, Kurankos and Yalunkas were misconceived as very backward, unprogressive, uneducated and only good for the national army, while Mandigos were generally misconceived as being very proud and rich people. As for the Sherbros, they are stereotyped as behaving the same like the Mendes and Creoles. On the other hand, the Creoles, are stereotyped as: being very proud, behaving like white people, believing that their true home was London, considering people from the provinces as their enemies, living in houses made out of boards and wood and believing they were more civilized than other tribes. The Konos are stereotyped as diamond ‘diggers’, primitive, not interested in sending their children to school and unable to grow rice. Last but not the least, the Kissi people are stereotyped as treating the Northerners as enemies, being the same as the Mendes, being cannibals and behaving like wise people.

According to John, Frances and Margaret, the students did not take these wrong perceptions lightly. They felt their tribes were being wrongly misrepresented by these stigmas, they observed. Tensions, arguments, misunderstandings often times developed as a result of this. Violent confrontations did erupt sometimes, remarked Margaret. “Because of these misconceptions, there seemed to be a lot of tribal tension, jealousy, mistrust and animosity especially during students’ political activities, as well as during national elections,” Jane commented.
Disagreement Over Mode of Dressing and Physical Appearance

In all the three schools, like all schools in the country, students were required to wear school uniforms approved by the school. Students were also required to be neat and tidy at all times and avoid dressing in any manner they wished. John, Jane, Marie, Eddie and Charles pointed out that some students liked to come to school with very expensive and fanciful shoes and refused to obey the school prefects when they instructed them to remove them. Some boys liked to come to school with stylish haircuts, while some girls preferred not to plait their hair, as required by the school (Christina, Frances and Mark). “Some of the students liked to argue with the school prefects when they were confronted for not following the rules” (Thomas). The prefects reported these particular students to either the senior teachers or to the Disciplinary Committee (Jane and Charles). I observed that this type of conflict occurred mostly between the prefects and some other students.

Misunderstanding Over Inappropriate Sexual and Gender Relationships

There were only very few female students in each school. All the female students observed that female students faced a lot more student-student conflicts than the boys. In addition to having to deal with the general daily types of conflicts, the female students also had to deal with inappropriate sexual advances from the boys (Christina). According to Jane, “the girls suffer a lot of victimization from the boys, especially from the male prefects, each time they refused to condone their inappropriate sexual behaviours.” John a senior school prefect, strongly agreed:

Yesterday a Lower 6 [Grade 13] female student reported to me that her form prefect threatened to punish her because she refused to fall in love with him. I was upset with the boy because he should not misuse his power to victimize the girl. He is there as a student police to make sure things go well in the school.
According to Marie, “conflict erupted in her sixth form class primarily over boys’ rivalries over girl friends or girls’ rivalries over boy friends.” She gave the following example:

A boy in our class was already going on with a girl and then another boy wanted to interfere in that relationship. This created a lot of confusion. They quarreled about that. They now hate each other and are not talking to each other. There are several similar cases in the school.

In NASS, Eddie, a prefect, gave a similar account:

I was in my form last week when two boys from Form Three came up to me and told me that there’s fighting going on in their class. When I arrived at the scene, I came to realize that the boys were fighting over matters concerning girl friends. One of the boys was dating a girl at another secondary school in town. Later, he realized that one of his friends was intending to have an affair with the same girl. The boy got this information from another friend. So this boy decided to come to class and tension his friend. He queried the guy for trying to make love with his girlfriend. I tried to resolve the matter, but the guy was so aggressive that he told his friend that after school, he’d fight him. Fortunately, they did not fight in school.

Disagreement Over Use of Limited Playground Space

The study revealed that NASS and SASS had soccer fields while WASS did not have any. There was generally limited recreational space to meet the needs of all the students in each of the schools. In NASS for example, students were fond of playing hand tennis. They used the assembly area for this game. I witnessed this incident during break:

At about 10:30 a.m. students rushed out. It was break time. The break was just for five minutes. Six small boys from Form One rushed to the assembly area first and quickly divided the area into three ‘hand tennis courts’ and began to play in twos. Before they could finish the first game, four big boys, probably from Senior Secondary One rushed to the courts and asked the boys to allow them to play. The six small boys pleaded with them to wait until they finished at least one game. The four big boys shouted at them, “you selfish boys, you’re always like that.” Within the
twinkle of an eye, one of the big boys snatched the tennis ball from one of
the small boys and the rest started to push the small boys out of the courts.
The games were disrupted. Quarreling erupted. Thank God the bell rang
for the end of the break. A teacher emerged from the staff room and
shouted, “everybody back to your classes.” That saved a possible violent
encounter! (Field Notes, May 3, 1999).

Similarly, Marie also observed, “when the big boys wanted to play hand tennis, they
would always take the tennis ball from the small boys.” In WASS, the story was the
same:

As you see our field is not too big to accommodate everybody. At times
when we play, the field will be divided. If the younger students wanted to
play we the senior students too would like to play. In that case, the junior
students must leave the playground. But most times, they would not leave
voluntarily. They would leave just because they were afraid not to be
beaten by us (Thomas).

Jane also highlighted the issue of incompatible students' interests in the playground at
WASS. She gave this example to illustrate her point:

One day last week, I was standing outside the Principal’s office opposite
the playground when I saw some students rushing to the playground.
Some of them wanted to play soccer. The others wanted to just run
around. Those who wanted to play soccer began to kick the ball against
those who wanted to run. When the ball got to those who wanted to run
round the field, one of the students seized it and threw it away. But those
who wanted to play soccer were in the majority, so they overpowered
those who just wanted to run around the field. The others left the field
bitterly. Students would always fight and quarrel over the use of the
playground space, because it’s limited.

The way the students conducted their games was another case in point. What Mark
observed in his school was common of the other schools:

In our games, we do not have referees. Everybody is a referee. One player
can just come and hit you on the head with the ball or kick you willfully.
Some players cheat a lot. There is no referee to complain to, so we fight
sometimes. The losers will throw stones at the winners. No one takes
defeat peacefully.
Major Types of Student-student Conflicts Identified by the Teachers

Misunderstanding Over the Use of the School’s Furniture

All the teachers agreed that misunderstandings over who should use this chair or that desk has been one of the main types of student-student conflicts. For example, Margaret revealed, “students bring complaints to me about someone taking their chair or desk.” Patricia agreed that “disagreements among students were many a time about ownership of seats in their classes.” According to Jack:

Disagreements between the old and new students in the lower forms were most times about chairs and desks. The old students feel they’re superior to the new ones and so they grab the seats from them. Therefore, the new students most times went without seats.

Joan agreed, “some of the misunderstandings and quarrels among some of the students were about chairs.” She observed that this type of conflict among students was a chronic one:

Since I started teaching in this school about five years ago, students have always been fighting over chairs and desks. In the morning, as soon as the general assembly was over, you’d see the students running here and there in search of seats. If they did not rush to the classrooms immediately to secure furniture, there’d have no place to sit for the rest of the lesson.

The misunderstandings over who had a right to a particular seat could be very dangerous, because some students would fight to the point that they wounded each other (Peter, Andrew, Dolly and Joe). Philip agreed, “just before this interview, two students in one of the Form One streams fought over the use of a chair and one of them wounded the other on his face.”

In addition to the misunderstandings over furniture, the teachers also complained that some of the classrooms were too small and could not adequately accommodate all
the students enrolled for those particular classes. This meant that students had to struggle for space. Disagreements over the use of the limited classroom space were therefore, quite common (Joe, Dolly and Margaret). Jack's experience explained the serious nature of this type of conflict:

In my English language class, we go to the former chemistry lab. There are over fifty students in that class. The lab is too small. The seats are not enough. Students have to use the windows to write their notes. Others sit on the floor. Ventilation is poor. To make things worse some rude boys foul the air. Those who sit at the back of the class ended up reading other stuff or distract their colleagues. To be honest, I am fed up with this situation. Other teachers feel the same like me.

Disagreement Over Name-calling or Provocation

All the teachers in the three schools agreed that this type of conflict was one of the most common and disturbing among the students. Several teachers felt they wasted a lot of their precious teaching time and break periods to settle cases of provocation amongst students. "That’s why I flogged any student I caught provoking others," remarked Jack. Patricia pointed out that some of the serious disagreements among the students in her classes stemmed out of name-calling. She cited the following example:

There’re three very close female students in one of the forms I teach. These girls liked each other very much. They’re always together. They did not tolerate nonsense from the boys. They’re very assertive and hardworking. The boys nicknamed them Jombo Bta. This is a Mende phrase meaning ‘three witches,’ like the three witches in Shakespeare’s Macbeth. They called them this nickname just to frustrate them and make their lives uncomfortable. These girls have a right to be protected. It is therefore my duty as a teacher to protect them. So I usually reported the matter to the Principal and the culprits were always punished severely. In my classes, name-calling has been drastically reduced.

Joan, Dolly, Andrew and Margaret also observed that students who were unfamiliar with modern technology, modern mode of dressing or ways of life, were
referred to as munku boy/girl (Backward or Primitive Boy/Girl). Andrew described a situation in his class when some students were called munku boy/girl:

There’re some students in one of my form one streams who used to attend primary school in the provinces and who could not speak Krio and English properly. The way they dressed was different from the way students who had lived in the city dressed. Also, when the students who grew up in the city talked about movies and night clubs, the students who grew up in the provinces and were not exposed to Western movies and night clubs had very little to contribute to the discussions. Because of these reasons, the students who grew up in the city called their colleagues from the provinces munku boy/girl.

In fact, Peter and Philip stated that students provoked their colleagues for all sorts of reasons. For example, “students who did not dress with the latest fashion in the city were nicknamed bush boy/girl” (Philip). Joan gave other instances when students in her classes teased their colleagues:

In one of my classes, there’s a very quiet and non-violent boy. He’s physically disabled. One of his feet was deformed. He struggled a lot walking around the school compound. His colleagues nicknamed him Flex. I’ve no clue why they gave him this nickname. He fought back by cursing and verbally abusing any student he caught calling him Flex.

All the teachers indicated that some of the students were nicknamed with the names of the RUF rebels and former members of the 1997 military regime, if they had the same first or last names as they did. The study revealed that the most common names of RUF rebels used included Foday Sankoh, Sam Bockarie, Mike Lamin, and Gibril Massaquoi, while the most common names of the former military regime, included Johnny Paul Koroma and Augustine Sandy. All the teachers argued that name-calling or teasing has been responsible for some of the very violent misunderstandings and fights among students in the schools. “If name-calling is not eradicated from the schools, it would lead
to very serious consequences, especially when one considers the fact that during this rebel war students have been living under fear and tension” (Dolly).

**Misunderstanding Over Stolen Properties, Non-repayment of Loans and Failure to Return Borrowed Items**

The study revealed that this type of conflict was prevalent in all the three schools. For instance, Joan, Philip, Dolly, Peter and Jack mentioned that there were many students who would attend school without the essential school items and money for lunch. They observed that some of these students sometimes stole food, money and other essential items, thus creating deep disagreements and mistrusts. According to Joan, “students whose properties were stolen sometimes accused the wrong students and this led to arguments, fights and verbal abuses.” Philip explained how stealing was typically done in his class and its consequences:

Stealing was quite common in one of my Form One classes. Yesterday, a student reported to me that he was sitting in his class copying notes. He said that at some point, he decided to stand up and stretch himself. Just at that time, the student went on, a colleague told him someone wanted to see him outside of the class. He said he went to see this person and when he returned, his Social Studies textbook was gone. He accused the student who sat next to him that he had stolen his book. The boy denied. They were at the point of going into blows when I entered the class. I investigated the matter. I found out that the student who sat next to him stole the book and then passed it on to the next student. The next student then passed it on to another until they took the book out of the class. So if I had decided to search the classroom, I would not have found the book. I only got to know this details because I told them that the entire class would pay for the book.

Joe, Dolly, Peter, Patricia and Jack narrated similar experiences in their classes. Margaret also argued that, “very serious misunderstandings occurred when some students loaned books, pens, rulers and other school items they lacked and sometimes failed to
return them either because they have lost them, misplaced them, or just did not want to keep to the deadline." Patricia agreed:

There're certain students in my class who would always come to school without their textbooks and other school materials. Most times, they'd borrow these items from their friends and colleagues. For one reason or the other, they hardly returned them on time. Their friends would get upset with them and sometimes this developed into a quarrel, fight, malice or grudge.

Andrew, Peter and Jack agreed that it was a common practice for some students to borrow money and other school items and not return or repay back. They pointed out that each one of them dealt with this type of conflict at least once a day.

Misunderstanding Over Different Ideas

All the teachers in the three schools mentioned that disagreement over different ideas was also one of the types of conflicts students experienced in their daily interactions with their colleagues. They noted that certain controversial topics mostly associated with the on-going rebel war were sources of students' differences in views. Peter cited the following common example:

In my class, students always argued about whether the national government should negotiate with the rebels or continue to fight them until all the rebels were eliminated. Some students believed that the rebels should be defeated militarily while others felt that the government did not have the military power and financial resources and equipment to do so. Sometimes, the arguments become so heated that they resulted to quarrels and fights.

Philip also mentioned that sometimes when teachers were absent in their classes or went to teach late, the students engaged in debates about the tribal identity and birthplace of the rebel leader, Foday Sankoh. Some argued that Foday Sankoh was a
Northerner and a Themne by tribe, while others believed he was a Mende by tribe, and an Easterner, Philip concluded. According to my observations, debates about the rebel war generally took place during the breaks and lunch periods, especially among students in the fifth and sixth forms who were not engaged in recreational activities during the above-mentioned periods. For example, during one of my visits to NASS, I heard this argument between two fifth form students, regarding whether it was the RUF or the AFRC who invaded Freetown on January 6, 1999.

Student A: A tink se na di RUF bin kɔs dis Jenuware wahala. Bikɔs di rebel dɛm we bin go na wi os na RUF rebel dɛm (I think that the January troubles were caused by the RUF. This is because the rebels who went to our house were RUF rebels).

Student B: Na lay, nɔto RUF rebel dɛm. Na AFRC soja dɛm bin kam pweel Fritɔŋ. A sabi sɔm pan di wan dɛm we go bɔn wi os. Na bin AFRC soja dɛm. A swe to Gɔd (It’s a lie, it was not the RUF rebels but the AFRC soldiers who destroyed Freetown. I knew some of those who burnt our house. They were AFRC soldiers. I swear to God) (Field Notes, June 10, 1999).

This argument went on and on. Each student held on to his views. I observed that tempers were already getting quite high. Thank God the bell rang for classes to resume. “Things would have gone out of control,” I concluded. According to Philip, “disagreeing with other people’s views, especially those of older people, is not considered culturally appropriate.” He argued that “some of the students bring this type of mentality to the school.” This trend was common in all the three schools. Dolly, Andrew, Patricia and Margaret commented that the students hardly discussed controversial topics that were related to the subjects they were studying in school. “The rebel war seemed the most burning issue that students debated about daily” (Margaret). I also observed that it was
more or less the same for all the teachers in the three schools. Most of their debates were about the rebel war.

**Differences in How Each Tribe Perceived the Other**

All the teachers observed that there were vast differences in the socio-economic backgrounds among the thirteen major tribes in the countries. “Some of the tribes were generally much richer than other tribes and so had better status in society” (Andrew). Students from rich and socially high-placed tribes believed that they were superior to those from poorer tribes remarked Jack, Dolly and Joan. In fact Philip argued, “there are vast differences regarding how students from one tribe perceived those from another tribe.”

Joe and Jack noted that some of the students from the two major tribes believed they were superior to those from the other minor tribes. Joe gave the following example:

In my class, I noticed that some of the students from the Themne and Mende tribes believed that their tribes were more educated than the other tribes. Sometimes I heard them telling the other students from the other tribes such as the Fullah, Limba and Loko that they were backward. I also observed that some students from the Creole tribe hardly mixed with the students from the other tribes. They felt their ways of life were more civilized than others. Sometimes, I would hear them say “Dën ṭplayn student dën m nɔ sabi dër s fayn, dën tu munku” (The students from upcountry do not know how to dress properly, they are too backward).

Sometimes students from the other tribes perceived the students from the Themne tribe as warriors (Joe, Joan and Dolly). Similarly, Jack gave other examples of misconceptions about the Fullah and Limba tribes:

This morning, I heard two students from the Fullah and Limba tribes arguing over which tribe was more civilized than the other. The student from the Limba tribe told his colleague that Fullahs were uncivilized and
only good for driving transport vehicles. On the other hand, the student from the Fullah tribe replied that Limbas were the most uncivilized because they sharpen their teeth and drink palm wine all the time.

Andrew, Patricia and Philip also noted that some of the students also held certain stereotypes about the Mende tribe. "The most common stereotype is that the Mende like to feel that they should rule the country always" (Philip). Patricia also noted that "other tribes accused the Mende of being 'tribalistic' [that is they believed in the supremacy of their tribe over others and the right to use their political power to discriminate against other tribes]." Andrew advised that if I wanted to know more about the stereotypes that each tribe held about the other, I should interview the students, since they used them against each other quite often. I followed his advice, and as shown in the previous section, the students shared quite a lot of stereotypes held against each of the country’s thirteen tribes.

Disagreement Over Mode of Dressing and Physical Appearance

All the teachers indicated that there were many times when some of the students had disagreements with some of the prefects over their modes of dress and physical appearances during school sessions. All the teachers noted that the main conflict in this case has been while the students simply did not want to obey the schools’ dress codes, the prefects had the mandate to enforce the dress codes. According to Peter, "enforcing dress code has been a bone of contention between the students and prefects." Joe gave some examples of how some the students at WASS sometimes expressed their defiance over their school’s code of dress:

You see in our school, we do not allow the boys to wear their pairs of trousers below the knee length. It has been the practice of some of the
boys sometimes to come to school with shorts with big bottoms and
lengths beyond their knees, because that’s the new fashion. Some would
come to school wearing shorts with very big waste bands. The boys also
preferred the ‘Mike Tyson hair cut’ styles or other hair cut styles from
some Western movie stars. As for the girls, some of them sometimes wore
all kinds of chains and plaited their hair in very gorgeous ways. Some of
the girls also liked to paint and flush their finger nails and put on bangles.
They argued that “they were dealing with modern times.” But the school
does not allow them to put on all these very attractive attachments. That
has been a problem and sometimes, this causes misunderstandings
between them and some prefects and teachers.

Dolly, Peter and Margaret made the same observations about the students at NASS and
SASS. Joe, Dolly and Margaret also agreed that some of the students from rich homes
sometimes wore very fanciful attire just to show off their wealthy backgrounds. I
observed that all the three schools ensured that students strictly obeyed the dress code.

Misunderstanding Over Inappropriate Sexual and Gender Relationships

The study found out that all the schools had relatively very few female students.
In fact, there were less than twenty female students in each of the school. Joan observed
that there was a scramble for female students among some of the male students interested
in making sexual or intimate love relationships with the female students. She cited the
following example to justify her claim:

As soon as the female sixth-form students were admitted at the beginning
of the year, the sixth form-boys rushed on them with proposals for
intimate love relationships. Sometimes the responses they got from some
of the girls were negative. The boys who were rejected often resulted in
provoking the girls and abusing them verbally. Conflicts developed as a
result of this.

Patricia, Dolly, Margaret and Jack reported similar incidents in their schools. According
to Dolly, “sometimes the female students behavied nicely to the male students and this
gentleness would be misunderstood by some of the male students and this sometimes
developed into very unhealthy disagreements.” Jack also argued that “our society
socializes boys to believe that they were better than the girls and so when they come to
school they refuse to treat the female students as equals.” He went on to say that when
some of these male students would find out later that some of the female students were
better academically, they harass the female students as a defense mechanism.

**Disagreement Over the Use of the Limited Playground Space**

The study revealed that most of the disagreements over the limited playground
space was as a result of the relatively very limited land that the schools possessed. Philip
agreed, “many student-student conflicts occurred in the playground.” To support Philip’s
argument, Joe gave the following example that he witnessed almost daily during
lunchtime:

> During breaks or lunchtime, some set of students might want to play
> football, while others might want to just run around. So you see, those
> who wanted to play football always tried to prevent those who were just
> interested in running around. And the problem has been, there’s only one
> small playground.

Joan mentioned that in her school the disagreement over the use of the limited
playground intensified when students in the morning shift stayed after their normal
school period to play hand tennis. “This is because the students in the afternoon shift
would not allow those in the morning shift to use the playground, because their school
time was over,” she added. Dolly, Andrew and Joe described similar situations in their
schools. “Because we operate a two-shift school system to accommodate the internally
displaced students, the students always argued, and sometimes fought and abused
themselves when one group of students tried to take control of the playground” (Dolly). According to Andrew “if no teacher intervened in such playground disagreements or fights, and the students were left on their own, the outcome has been, might was right.”

**Major Causes of Student-Student Conflicts Identified by the Students**

**Poor School Infrastructure and Inadequate School Furniture**

All the students stated that poor school infrastructure and inadequate school furniture were among the most prevalent causes of student-student conflicts. They pointed out that some of the furniture were destroyed or looted during the May 1997 military coup and the rebel invasion of the city in January 1999. Another major cause the students identified was that all the three schools did not have enough money to buy adequate school furniture. Some of the old school furniture, which had been damaged, could not be repaired due to lack of finances. Grants from the YES Ministry were inadequate and not paid regularly, most students remarked.

Jane, John and Thomas were quite upset with the deteriorating condition of their school’s infrastructure. Thomas shared his personal frustration about his school’s poor infrastructure and how it contributed to the conflicts students encountered:

Our playground is very dusty. It has been like this for ages. Each time we played on it students got dirty when they fell down. Some of us could only afford one set of school uniforms. When it’s dirty you could not come to school the next day because the prefects and teachers would not allow you in the compound with dirty uniforms. This sometimes created some misunderstandings between the prefects and the other students.
Poverty.

I observed that the fundamental problem all the students faced was that most of them came from very poor backgrounds, especially those, whose parents were internally displaced (Field Notes, June 10, 1999). Mark agreed, “most students lacked the basic necessities in life.” He also stressed that “most students did not also have money for other essential school needs.” For instance, Jane stated that in her class “a good number of students could not afford to buy pamphlets and text books because they were very expensive.” Most times, those who could not afford these school materials asked their colleagues to loan them or share with them some of these items. Eddie noted that as a result of this, some students resorted to stealing pens, books, pencils and mathematical sets. “Tensions, disagreements and arguments usually resulted from such encounters” (Marie).

Charles also showed another layer of poverty that caused student-student conflicts:

In our school, some students are so poor that they could not afford to buy more than one pair of school uniforms and shoes. Some of them are forced to buy used clothing for their uniforms. In Sierra Leone, used clothing is called junks or congo. Some of the students who wear these junks/congo are looked low upon by their colleagues. Sometimes they nicknamed them congo boy. Many quarrels and fights result from such provocation.

Frances, Christina, Charles and John also mentioned that many students would go to school without eating anything in the morning because their parents could not afford it. “Some of them beg their friends to give them some of their lunch food or money” (Christina). She observed that “sometimes, their colleagues would make fun of them and call them bega bega [beggar] and this caused serious misunderstandings.”
Disrespectful Behaviours of Certain Students Towards Others

All the students agreed that the disrespectful behaviours of some students caused a lot of student-student conflicts. “Nobody would like to be disrespected in public,” remarked Jane. According to Thomas, “sometimes, misunderstandings occurred between two or more students because a group of students would feel they’re more intelligent than others and so the others deserved no respect because they’re perceived as fools.” Some students who sometimes dressed better than others, were sometimes disrespectful to their colleagues (Jane).

On the other hand, Marie observed that “some students from the socio-economically and politically powerful ethnic groups sometimes regarded the students from the minor and less powerful ethnic groups as inferior people.” She stressed that conflicts developed when the students from the powerful ethnic groups impose their will on the others in a rather disrespectful manner. Frances and Christina believed that some students were naturally rude and disrespectful. “I noticed in my class that these types of students most of the time got into conflicts with their colleagues because of their disrespectful ways” (Christina).

Major Causes of Student-Student Conflicts Identified by the Teachers

Mismanagement of the School’s Material Resources

Nearly all the teachers argued that the poor management of available material resources was a contributing factor to the misunderstandings among students. During one of my interviews at WASS, Philip shared his candid opinion on this matter:
You know in this country, there's no maintenance culture. Public property is seen as government property and most times those in charge are very careless. Look at our school, we used to have many chairs, desks, tables for everybody. There were also flush toilets, running water and electricity. Because of lack of regular maintenance, most of these facilities are mere monuments. If they were properly maintained, some of the conflicts among students could be prevented.

Just at that point, I noticed with dismay that the guidance and counseling room where Philip and I were having our interview, was also a store for dozens of broken chairs, desks and tables. As if he read what was in my mind, he showed his dismay too:

Look at these broken chairs, desks and tables in this room. They have been here for the last two years or so. If these were repaired, we could ease the problem of students fighting for chairs and desks.

Joe also observed that "the toilets in our school [WASS] got to this deplorable state purely out of mismanagement and negligence by the school administration, teachers and students." Jane also pointed out that "even the library badly needs repairs and some of its chairs, shelves and desks needed to be replaced as well." I also observed that the situation at NASS was quite similar. There were lots of broken windows, desks, chairs and shelves in the science labs that urgently needed repairs or replacements. Andrew agreed:

You see we're in the Chemistry lab. When I was a student in this school many years back the chemicals in this lab were replenished. The chemicals used to be enough. Bottles were replaced as soon as they were broken. Look, these tables need to be replaced. But for some time now, there's no replacement. So the labs are ghosts of their former selves. I know the general problem has been the lack of money. But to tell you the truth, the problem is also lack of proper maintenance. This is a common disease in most schools and government institutions.

Dolly and Peter argued that the mismanagement of material school resources created a very un-conducive teaching and learning climate, which led to student-student
disagreements and tensions. This problem was less serious in SASS. The school was kept very clean and there were very few school furniture and buildings that needed very urgent repairs.

**Poor Recreational Facilities**

The teachers in the three schools stated that their schools did not have adequate playground space. Joe, Andrew and Jack also observed that their schools lacked adequate appropriate recreational items and equipment. For example, volley balls, footballs and hand tennis balls were very limited in supply and very costly as well (Jack, Peter and Philip). I observed that in-door games were virtually non-existent in all the three schools. During the rainy season (May – November), students have very limited recreational facilities (Joe). I observed in SASS that sometimes when it rained, some of the male students grabbed every opportunity to play hand tennis along the limited space along the corridor when teachers were out of sight. Struggles among the students about who should play on the corridor were quite common.

**Poor Moral and Gender Education**

Philip and Jack argued that there was a lack of proper moral and gender education in the schools that has contributed to some of the improper female-male student relationships in the schools, as well as some of the male students’ lack of respect for the dignity and privacy of the female students. Re-echoing this point, Joan said, “the lack of moral and religious education with good models in most schools was the major contributing factor to the inappropriate sexual behaviours among some of the male students.” Margaret also stressed that “the society was biased against women and
particularly the education of girls, and this has influenced the boys to believe they were endowed with more power and privileges than the girls.” All the teachers also shared this view. For instance, Margaret stated that:

Some of the students that came from homes that nurtured very strict moral and religious ways of raising children were more respectful to one another. Boys from such backgrounds respected the girls and hardly sexually harassed them in school.

On the other hand, Philip and Andrew believed that the influence of the polygamous and patriarchal culture in the Sierra Leonean society made boys to feel they were superior beings to the girls. In fact according to Andrew, “our patriarchal culture makes boys develop gender bias against the girls.” Therefore, Joan, Joe, Peter, Margaret and Jack concluded that moral and sexual education should be part of the school curriculum.

**Dishonesty, Greed and Selfishness**

The teachers felt that dishonesty was one of the major causes of student-student conflicts. According to Philip, “some students did not repay their loans, returned borrowed items and stole other people’s properties simply out of mere selfishness and greed.” Margaret agreed:

In some of my classes, I have realized over the years that some students stole school materials from their colleagues not necessarily because they were poor, but because they were envious of other students who came from richer family backgrounds. My reason for saying is that most times I found out that some of these students did have the very things they stole from their colleagues. I believe it’s just bad habits and selfishness.

Joan, Philip and Joe supported the argument that some students were selfish. They observed that during the recreation periods in their school, some students would
deliberately throw dust on some of their colleagues just to dirty their uniforms and get them into trouble. "But if you asked them why they did that, they would give the excuse that they were just trying to have fun with their colleagues" (Joe). Andrew and Peter also noted that what sometimes caused student-student conflicts in their school was the fact that some students would borrow books from the library and would not return them on time just to deprive their colleagues from using them. "Some times their colleagues would later find out that they were just trying to be selfish" (Peter). He further noted that this sometimes led to verbal insults and fights.

**Poverty**

The majority of teachers agreed that poverty was one of the main causes of student-student conflicts. They also revealed that the general cost of living was very high for the majority of Sierra Leoneans, especially those living in the urban areas. Margaret, Jack and Joan agreed that most of the students came from very poor homes. Against this background all the teachers argued that the majority of their students could not afford to buy the prescribed textbooks and other essential school materials such as pens, erasers, pencils, mathematical sets, calculators and notebooks. This influences some of them to steal or borrow some of these items from their classmates (Patricia, Jack and Peter). "What else could some of them do?" Patricia asked. The main cause of this poverty is that "the country’s economy is in shambles" (Joan). "Most Sierra Leoneans live below the poverty line" (Philip). The majority of students came from homes that could hardly provide a decent meal and other basic amenities for their families (Joan, Dolly and Peter). Patricia agreed:
Most of the students usually came to school without eating anything. Some have to walk a few miles to come to school because their parents could not afford to pay an average of Le1000 [$1 Canadian] per day for public transport. During lunchtime, most of the these students did not have money to buy food. Sometimes, some of them took loans from their friends with a verbal agreement to repay the loans at an agreed date, and witnessed by another student. When the time came to repay the loans, they just did not have the money. Some of the students stole from their colleagues. Misunderstandings often developed. Sometimes these misunderstandings turned violent, especially when teachers or prefects were not around in the scenes.

What Patricia narrated was affirmed by my observations and those of all the teachers in the three schools that participated in this study.

**Lack of Respect for the Other Students**

The study also revealed that some of the student-student conflicts were caused by disrespectful behaviours from certain students. All the teachers stated that some of the students had very little or no respect for the other students. According to Joan, Joe, Dolly and Jack, some of the students did not like taking orders or instructions from the prefects, especially if they were in the same form. Philip also argued that “some students just did not like to be controlled by anybody.” Patricia, Philip and Peter believed that most of the student-student conflicts were caused by some of the students’ lack of respect for school rules and regulations. Therefore, Patricia noted, “prefects who tried to enforce these rules and regulations most times found themselves in conflict situations with the other students.”

In all the three schools, my observations confirmed that some of the students were disrespectful not just to the prefects but to the other students as well. During lunchtime or breaks and sometimes even in class (when teachers were not around) I overheard students
using abusive words and phrases against their fellow students (Field Notes, May 25, 1999). Some of these words and phrases included:

- You idiot, why did you push me?
- *Us basta pikin tek mi buk?* [Who's the bastard that took my book?]
- *Yu dɔnɔ bɔɔ, yu de koba di blakɔɔ dɛn A nɔ de si fayn* [You dirty boy, you're covering the blackboard and I can't see clearly] (Field Notes, May 5, 1999).

Joan, Peter, Patricia, Margaret and Jack agreed that they also heard some of these derogatory remarks made some of the students against their some of their classmates. Margaret and Peter stated that some of the serious student-student misunderstandings were caused by some of these disrespectful remarks.

**Over-enrolment**

The teachers in WASS and NASS observed that in their schools, over-enrolment was a major cause of student-student conflicts. This over-enrolment came about as a result of the two-shift systems that WASS and SASS operated in order to make room for the internally displaced students from the provinces and schools from the east end of Freetown that were destroyed during the rebel invasion. As a result of this, the Ministry of Education had to increase the student-teacher ratio from 45:1 to 60:1 and this has caused the over-enrolment problem (Philip and Andrew).

Joan, Joe and Peter also observed that sometimes their schools enrolled more students than they could accommodate simply to make money. "But more students means more pressure and struggles over the use of the limited resources available in the school"
(Peter). For instance, Joe argued, "there is no way the limited playground we have could accommodate all the three thousand students enrolled in the school." Andrew further explained:

Sometimes, between twenty to thirty students rushed to the small general assembly area to play hand tennis. Most times, no one could tell who was there first. Arguments would erupt and sometimes fights too if no teacher or prefect was around. The problem has been that there's not enough room for everyone.

Joan, Joe, Dolly and Peter observed that this problem would remain a problem until the end of the war when hopefully, most of the internally displaced students would have returned to their former schools. "But no one could tell when the war would be over and so this dilemma would be with us for an indefinite period," Dolly concluded.

**Poor School Infrastructure**

All the teachers agreed that the deplorable school infrastructure was to a large extent contributing to the conflicts students experienced among themselves. Philip described the situation in his school:

Some of these buildings were built over fifty years ago. Some of the roofs are leaking. Some of the window glasses are broken. The flush toilets have not been working for a long time. Everything is slowly disintegrating. How can students learn effectively in such a situation? I'm not surprised that students are always fighting over chairs and desks. The physical needs of the school are inadequate.

This situation was more or less the same in the other two schools. According to Margaret, Patricia, Joan and Dolly, the main cause of conflicts among students was inadequate school furniture. "In some classes, two or three students squeeze to a chair" (Joe). More students were enrolled each year but little has been done to increase the number of school
buildings and even to improve the old ones (Philip, Joe, Dolly and Peter). Philip further showed his frustration:

Students fight over space in the science lab and library all the time. The library lacks adequate furniture. It has very few out-dated books. The science lab is the same. It does not have enough chairs and desks. There’re also no equipment and chemicals. Whenever students go to the library or science lab, they have to fight for this and that. If the school infrastructure and essential facilities were not improved, there’d always be misunderstandings and fights among the students. It has become a survival of the fittest affair. The weaker students lose all the time while the stronger ones always triumph.

Andrew, Patricia and Jack made similar comments about their schools.

**Negative Influence of the Rebel War and Gangster Groups**

All the teachers acknowledged that the rebel war has had negative influence on the behaviour of certain students, which has led to deep misunderstandings among the students. They also unanimously agreed that the destruction of school furniture by the rebels and the military junta has caused their schools to fall short of the furniture they required to accommodate everybody. “Worst of all, the war has increased the culture of youth violence,” remarked Philip. He explained how:

Since 1991, the rebels of the RUF have exposed the youths of this country to violence and all sorts of crimes such as rape, looting and killing of innocent civilians. There’re some students in our school who have started to look up to these young rebels as their heroes. They think the only way to settle disputes with their fellow students is to fight. There are few cases of students who now come to school with small instruments that they could use to inflict wounds on students they’re in conflict with.

Most of the teachers also indicated that in their schools, some of the students have formed gangster groups. These groups usually identified themselves with some of the fierce-fighting movie stars. These gangsters were also engaged in drug abuse, truancy, stealing
and gamble (Joe and Peter). Philip also argued that most of the gangsters were irresponsible in their behaviours. Joan observed that sometimes these students did not maintain their chairs and desks well. “When the classrooms are overcrowded, they would stand on them,” she concluded. “It is important to note that the majority of students are opposed to these groups” (Andrew). These differences in values and beliefs most times developed into conflicts between the gangster groups and the students who loathed these groups (Joe, Peter and Andrew).

**Poor Parental Guidance and Support**

The study also found out that many teachers believed that poor parental guidance and support was in one way or the other also contributing to some of the conflicts students experienced in school. According to Joe, “the lack of respect for other students had to do with the lack of discipline from some of the students’ homes.” Margaret agreed. “some students came from unruly homes where family members disrespected each other and so these students did not care to respect anyone else both in and outside of their homes.”

Joan believed another cause would be poor home training. She observed that in her many years of teaching she had realized that some students came to school with bad habits that they had either picked at home or elsewhere. “For example, if you have students whose parents were in the habit of not repaying loans or returning materials borrowed from other people, the likelihood that some of these students would behave likewise in similar situations in the future, would be quite great,” Margaret concluded.

Philip, Peter and Patricia argued that some students lacked adequate parental care and support. “Some students come form homes where they were not taught by their
parents or relatives, how to listen to others, be patient, tolerant and respectful to others” (Peter). Therefore, Patricia argued, “sometimes, these students resorted to joining gangster or peer groups that could have negative influence on their behaviours in school.”

**Lack of Co-operation and Commitment from the Ministry of Education**

In all the three schools, the teachers argued that the YES Ministry was partly to blame for some of the conflicts the students were faced with in their schools. According to Philip the Ministry of Education should be blamed because:

It does not provide the schools with the necessary financial and logistical support to enable them build new classrooms in order to ease the problem of overcrowding of the classrooms. I know they always argued that it’s because of this war. But this is not quite true. Government funding for the advancement of education has not been a national priority for decades.

All the teachers in WASS and NASS argued that the introduction of the two-shift system in their schools by the YES Ministry was problematic. They recognized though that it was done in order to accommodate the internally displaced students. They felt it was not a bad idea if the said Ministry had backed such a decision with the necessary material and financial support. Without such support, it was very difficult for the schools to provide adequate school furniture, spacious classrooms, well-equipped libraries and science labs, adequate recreational facilities and other basic school amenities that could ensure a more co-operative and peaceful environment for both the students and teachers (Joe, Peter and Andrew). “A poorly financed school is a recipe for all kinds of conflicts.” Joe concluded.

According to Margaret, Peter, and Joan, the lack of commitment from the YES Ministry to control the high cost of school materials also contributed to students'
frustrations, distrust of the educational system and conflicting behaviours in school. In fact Philip accused the YES Ministry of conniving with the publishers to produce expensive materials and frequently change textbooks. Associated with this problem were the scarcity of educational materials and lack of viable local bookstores, observed most of the teachers. Jack agreed but stressed that "the politicians were also to be blamed because they cared less about the education of the ordinary Sierra Leonean since most of them send their children overseas to get a very good education." Some of the teachers also accused the above-mentioned Ministry of corruption and mismanagement and believed that this contributed to the Ministry's inability to promptly pay teachers' salaries and also meet its other financial obligations to the schools. Therefore, in one way or the other, this contributed to some of the causes of conflicts in the schools, concluded Jack, Margaret, Andrew and Dolly.

**Tribal Stereotypes**

The study revealed that most of the teachers agreed that the misconceptions or stereotypes students from one tribe held about other tribes contributed a great deal to student-student conflicts. According to Philip, Dolly, Andrew, Margaret and Joe, there was hardly any day when students would not fight because some students said something unpleasant about their tribe. Joan agreed:

In my classes students from the different tribes would complain about how this student or that student told them that their tribe was uneducated, stupid and barbaric. Sometimes students from one tribe would call those from other tribes rebels or rebel collaborators. Most times the students whose tribe was stereotyped as being rebels reacted violent. They would either fight or use abusive words against the students who accused their tribe. No student would like his tribe to be associated with the rebels and the defunct military regime. They would do anything to protect their tribal image.
Similarly, Dolly, pointed out that just before I interviewed her, one of the prefects reported to her two students who had fought in class because one of them said that the other student’s tribe was always begging from other tribes. These experiences were also shared by some of her colleagues. Patricia highlighted the negative effects of tribal stereotypes on the interpersonal relationships among students:

Some of the students from a particular tribe believed that the stereotypes they held about other tribes were true. They used these misconceptions to provoke others. Those who were elected to power discriminated against students from other tribes they considered inferior or backward. They also disrespected them and made them feel unwanted in the school.

In fact students who could not tolerate these stereotypes sometimes gave up schooling (Margaret, Jack and Patricia).

**Major Types and Causes of Student-teacher Conflicts Identified by the Students**

The aim of this section has been to highlight the main types and causes of student-teacher conflicts that were identified by the students and validated by my personal observations. Only the major and most common conflicts in all the three schools that were mentioned by the majority of the students are described in this section. No comparison of the conflicts among the three schools was also made. In this section, therefore, I am only interested in presenting the bigger picture of the types and causes of student-teacher conflicts in the three schools as perceived by the students.

All the students agreed that undesirable behaviours from some of the students were responsible for the serious student-teacher conflicts that were prevalent in all the
three schools. As shown later, some of the teachers confirmed the students' arguments. Throughout my observations of teachers' classes, general school assemblies and behaviours of teachers and students during breaks and lunchtimes, I realized that the students' observations were true. The main causes identified by the students are summarized below.

**Disagreement over Teachers' Misuse of their Power**

All the students agreed that most of the conflicts between teachers and students emanated from the fact that most teachers misused their power in one form or the other. The students cited several examples to substantiate this claim. For example, Thomas stated that "some teachers dictate who should be school prefects, instead of leaving the students to make their own choices." Mark also cited the following incidence to illustrate how some of the teachers at NASS misused their powers:

Last term during our Literary and Debating Society elections, some teachers were going around canvassing for students they could manipulate. They would like to influence every decision students made about how to run their own affairs.

All the students pointed out that the majority of the teachers misused their power by punishing certain students unfairly. Charles gave an example to illustrate this point:

Yesterday, in our Economics class, a student pronounced the word entrepreneur wrongly. We all burst out laughing. The teacher, who was busy writing the notes on the blackboard, turned around and asked, "What's funny?" Nobody answered. The teacher asked all of us to remain standing till the end of the class. Most of us felt that it was not fair. We're not quite happy with this particular teacher because he has made this a habit to punish everybody for a single student's crime.
Thomas, Jane, Marie and Eddie shared similar experiences in their schools. My observations confirmed the students' remarks:

I was walking along the corridor of the main NASS building one morning, when I noticed that one of the classrooms was too noisy because they had no teacher. The noise was so loud that the teacher next door came out of his class and asked all the students to remain standing and put their hands up until further notice. The teacher returned to his class and continued teaching. There was complete silence for a while and noise broke out again when the students started pointing fingers at each other for putting them in their current mess. “But why did he not find out who were causing noise?” One of the students asked. “Misuse of teacher’s power,” I said to myself (Field Notes, April 12, 1999).

Another indicator of teachers’ misuse of their power over the students was on the issue of corporal punishment. All the students noted that the bulk of the deep misunderstandings between them and teachers were caused by the excessive use of the cane by nearly all the teachers. Charles showed his frustration with one of the teachers who use corporal punishment excessively:

There is one particular teacher I really dislike in this school. He spends more time flogging students instead of teaching. Any time he comes to our class he’s too moody. He used the cane to settle any little misunderstanding that students brought to him. His excuse was that “the only language we African children understood was the cane.”

John, Thomas, Mark and Eddie stated what Charles’ experience was quite common among students in their schools. Mark observed that in his school, flogging has become the teachers’ most common method of handling conflicts among students and between students and teachers. “The school violates the Ministry of Education’s guidelines on the use of the cane” (Eddie). I confirmed the students’ observations:

In all the three schools, the use of the cane was quite rampant. Students were flogged for virtually every little wrongdoing, lateness, causing noise, failure to do assignments, truancy and not wearing the proper school
uniform, you name it. “Why is no one abiding by the rules stipulated by the YES Ministry regarding how many strokes should be given and who should administer the punishment?” I asked myself (Field Notes, June 12, 1999).

According to my observations flogging students was becoming too problematic. Jane explained the seriousness of this matter:

I know quite of number of colleagues who have dropped out of school because some of them were fed up with corporal punishment. Recently, some of the students who could not take it any more from some of these teachers have begun to fight back some of the teachers. There’s growing bitterness and anger among some of the students against some of the teachers. I overheard some students threatening to harm some of the teachers if they did stop this excessive use of the bat. You know in our school, teachers use the bat instead of the cane.

Thomas shared an experience he had with a particular teacher that he felt was a mere abuse of the teacher’s power:

As I told you earlier, before the rebel invasion I had all the basic things I needed for my schooling. I had some very expensive pairs of shoes, which some teachers could not afford to buy because of their numerous financial problems. One day, I wore this expensive pair of shoes and came to school. One teacher saw me and looked at me with unpleasant looks. He made these remarks, “some people don’t come to school to learn but to bluff with luxuries.” I knew he was referring to me. So I stopped wearing them because I did not want him to have me in mind [that is bear a grudge against me]. But I felt this teacher was suppressing my freedom. Right now I make sure I have very little to do with him.

Marie, Christina and Eddie shared similar experiences. In fact Marie and Christina told me that they used to have very nice watches which they have stopped wearing because of the unpleasant comments some of the teachers made against them. “I feel there’s too much suppression by some teachers and this is building some tensions and disagreements between some teachers and students” (Jane). Frances also cited another example of abuse of power by some teachers:
There’s a particular teacher in our class who was jealous of a student who had Division One when he took the General Certificate of Education, Ordinary Level Exams. The student got a distinction in the subject that this particular teacher was teaching. Any time this student asked this particular teacher certain questions or disagreed with him, he’d frustrate the student by telling him that his Division One was fraud. He never liked this student and he would do anything to humiliate him even though the student was very nice and intelligent. I think the teacher was trying to show the student that he was more powerful than he was.

Last but not the least, the affluence of rich students alsobordered some teachers and led to misunderstandings between some teachers and students (Frances and Marie).

**Rivalry Over Girl Friends and Sexual Harassment of the Female Students**

All the students pointed out that rivalry over girl friends between a few students and teachers and sexual harassment of female students did exist in their schools. There were cases when some students and certain teachers did have very serious clashes or misunderstandings over girl friends (Jane, Marie, Frances, Christina and Charles). “Girl friend in this context means a much deeper sexual relationship than ordinary friendship” (Christina). All the three schools experienced this type of conflict between some students and teachers. Mark gave the following common example in his school:

In our school, if a teacher was excited over a particular sixth-form girl, and he realized that a sixth form boy was in love with that girl, he’d develop grievances against the boy. There was a time when my friend and I went to a dance. A teacher in our class wanted to go into blows with my friend in Form Six because the teacher met my friend dancing with a particular girl both of them were making love with. He wanted to remove the girl forcefully from my friend. Of course it was the girl who asked my friend to dance with her. They had a bitter argument. I told my friend to get out of the dance and leave the teacher with the girl. We left them there. Up to now the teacher and my friend have deep grievances against each other.
Thomas also revealed that a particular teacher was fond of making negative and threatening remarks against him because he suspected him to be in love with his girlfriend in the school. He stated that each time the teacher saw him, he would make this type of remark, "Some people did not come to school to learn but to study how to make love with women." He stressed that "these types of encounters led to poor student-teacher interactions."

As earlier mentioned all the students also observed that some of the male teachers sexually harassed the female students. For example, Frances explained how she was horrified and shocked when one day one of her teachers told her that he wanted to make love with her. She admitted that she paid a dear price because she denied him. She explained that from that moment, she suffered humiliation and rebuke for whatever little thing she did that was unacceptable to the teacher. In the end, she was forced to confront the teacher with threats that she would report the matter to her parents and the principal. It was only then that the teacher let her off the hook. Christina, Marie and Jane agreed that some of the male teachers were very fond of proposing love relationships to some of the female students. This sometimes creates deep disagreements and sometimes malice between these male teachers and the female students (Margaret, Frances, Marie and Jane).

Misunderstanding over Teachers' Negligence of their Duties

Many students felt conflicts often arose between teachers and students as a result of some teachers' negligence of their duties. The students cited several examples to support their argument. For example, Jane stated that:
When some teachers come to our classroom to teach, they do not teach effectively. So the students decide to make fun of them. The teachers become angry and decide to leave the classroom. The students hate these types of teachers and develop a deep grudge against them for wasting their time and tuition fees. So they look for chances to misbehave to show their anger.

This was a view that was also shared by some of the students interviewed. Christina also noted that “some teachers are always late to class and by the time they start to teach, just few minutes, the bell rings for a change of class.” She concluded that in their class, some students have developed very rebellious attitudes against some of the teachers who do not teach for any just reason. John also observed that “some teachers spend very little time to prepare their notes and so they resort to copying notes directly from textbooks without having time to explain them.” Marie, Eddie, Frances and Charles agreed that similar situations were common in their schools. They noted that such deep misunderstandings between some of the teachers and students were as a result of these types of teachers’ behaviours.

**Misunderstanding due to Poverty**

All the students argued that poverty was a one of causes of the deep misunderstandings between the students and teachers. They noted that most students were poor and could not afford to buy essential school materials. Some of the students who were faced with this kind of problem resorted to stealing and this angered the teachers, remarked John. “Some teachers are working hard to advise the students who stole from others to realize that such behaviours would adversely affect their image in the long run” (Eddie). The students also noted that most students could not afford to pay for the
teachers' private lessons. Charles explained how this caused a conflict between him and one of his teachers:

You see a particular teacher in our form runs private lessons in his house for those of us offering his subjects. He charges five thousand Leones [$5.00 Canadian] per subject. The school also organizes extra classes every Saturday and we are charged five hundred Leones [$0.50 Canadian]. Other teachers charge two thousand Leones [$2.00 Canadian] per month. I cannot afford to pay for these extra lessons. This particular teacher I'm talking about feels I dislike him. Each time he comes to our class, he finds every excuse to punish me. If I put my hand up to answer his questions, he'd ignore me most of the time. Sometimes he would accuse me of causing noise and will drive me out. I know it is because I do not attend his home classes. Right now I am thinking of dropping his subject, because our misunderstanding is growing deeper.

Misunderstanding due to Poor Communication

The study found out that misunderstandings between some of the teachers and students occurred as a result of poor communication. Thomas cited the following example:

Misunderstandings between students and teachers sometimes happened because some teachers don’t pass on the message correctly. I mean they don’t know how to teach. Some students make fun of these teachers. In classes where the teacher does not communicate well, some of students would read other books such as novels instead of paying attention.

Jane, John, Eddie, Marie and Christina agreed that John’s example was common in all the three schools. According to Charles, “a good number of teachers don’t want to listen attentively and seriously when students confront them with problems.” But this problem was also common among some students. Frances agreed, “most times, we students don’t listen to instructions properly or even pay attention when the teacher is explaining in class.” A major communication problem I observed in all the classes I observed was that most teachers asked the students for feedback about how the lessons were going on but
did not want to receive objective feedback from the students (Field Notes, October 25, 1999). A class I observed in NASS supports my comments:

It was the first period at NASS. I walked into Form Three’s class. The class had a Mathematics lesson. The subject teacher briefly introduced me to the students as a guest from Canada. I said hello to the students. One of the students asked me what was the purpose of my visit. I thanked him for his question and explained briefly about my research. You’re welcome Sir, they all responded in unison. I sat quietly at the back of the class. There were over fifty enthusiastic students in the class. The teacher introduced the topic of the period. It was about ‘addition of mixed fractions’. The teacher solved two examples and then asked the students if they understood. The student sitting by me raised his hand and said the examples were not clear. The teacher became furious and angry. “What’s not clear, you trouble maker?” He roared. There was complete silence. “Now solve the following problems.” the teacher yelled. Then he went on to write four problems on the blackboard. Before the students could solve one problem, the bell was rung for the next period. No room for receiving feedback! (Field Notes, October 12, 1999).

In most of the lessons I observed there was more or less a one-way communication process. The teachers did most of the talking, while the students listened passively and copied notes (Field Notes, April 12, 1999). Mark agreed and shared his frustration. “a particular teacher used to dictate all his notes from a textbook without explaining and whenever he was asked to explain, he would punish the whole class.” Mark also mentioned that some of the students in his form had no respect for this teacher.

Most students observed that some teachers and students sometimes misunderstood differences in views between them. Some teachers did not want to hear different views from their students and often got upset when students challenged their views in class discussions. Frances cited an example:

There’s a teacher who teaches us ‘logic’. We just don’t understand some of the things he says. He’s supposed to teach us how to argue and reason objectively. During one of his lessons, he said something and a student put up his hand and disagreed. The teacher was very angry. He told us he’s a
University Lecturer and that he had no time to waste. He told us that if we did not listen to what he tells us, then he’d leave us to teach ourselves. Then the boys in the class said, “E bo! E bo!” [Oh dear! Oh dear!] The teacher became mad at us and he left the class angrily. The Principal begged him later to resume teaching us and warned us not to do that again. The teacher returned and since then we tried not to disagree with him.

Eddie recalled that when he tried to disagree with one of his teachers in class, the teacher asked him, “Do you want to take my place?” I noticed that in all the classes I observed there was very little feedback between the students and teachers (Field Notes, April 12, 1999). I also observed that some of the teachers virtually did very little to paraphrase students’ narratives and ask them probing questions during classes (Field Notes, April 12, 1999).

**The Mammy Coker Syndrome and The Usay den Tay Kaw na de I de It Gras (The Cow Grazes Where You Tie It) Mentality**

All the students stated that most teachers were engaged in some unprofessional activities that affected their work and hence their relationships with the students. “In all the schools, it’s called *Mammy Coker*” (Frances). According to Thomas, “*Mammy Coker* refers to the illegal economic ventures taken by some teachers during official working hours.” Mark, a senior prefect in NASS, shared his experience regarding a conflict he had with a teacher whose *Mammy Coker* activity was photography:

I had a problem with a teacher recently. I asked a photographer outside of school to come and take photos of the students for our Literary and Debating Society (L and DS) identity cards. The teacher you’ve interviewed he himself is a photographer. He called me and told me that he was not happy with what I did. And I tried to know what went wrong. He said, “if in the compound there’s a woman selling cola nut, you don’t need to leave that woman to go buy cola nut elsewhere, because she’d personally grow annoyed.” I got the message. He wanted me to know that
he was a photographer and that I should not leave him and call another photographer. So I realized he was not happy with me.

In summary, the student gave the contract to the teacher. It turned out that the teacher did a very poor job because his camera was faulty. The teacher had to call another photographer, who happened to be his friend. He too did a poor job. "The problem has not been resolved yet," Mark concluded.

The students interviewed in all the three schools shared similar examples. Margaret's description of the Mammy Coker problem in her school was a true representation of what I observed in the three schools:

In our school, some teachers conduct private lessons in their homes to make extra money to feed their families even though the school also offers extra classes in the school compound. In school, we pay five hundred Leones [$0.50 Canadian] per subject once every Saturday or two thousand Leones [$2.00 Canadian] per month per subject. In addition to this, some teachers also charged five thousand Leones [$5.00 Canadian] per subject per month. If you don't attend these private classes you'll have problems with some of these teachers.

Mark, John, Marie, Charles and Christina observed that some of the teachers justify this Mammy Coker activities by arguing that usay dɛn tay kaw na de l de it gras. This is a Krio idiom meaning "sweets of office" (Field Notes, May 24, 1999). This is a societal problem because many government workers and politicians who misuse public property or engage in unprofessional behaviours for personal gains justify their behaviours with this type of argument (John, Mark and Marie). Many students feel that this approach is not setting good models for them but are afraid to express their opposition (Marie). They also feel that some of the student-teacher conflicts and many of the ills of their society emanate from these kinds of attitudes (John).
Misunderstanding over Poor School Infrastructure

All the students observed that the deplorable physical conditions of their schools were also sources of student-teacher conflicts. Charles showed how the poor infrastructure of her school was a source of some serious misunderstandings between some students and teachers:

One major problem in our school is the lack of adequate seats for students. After assembly, most guys rush to class for spaces. The strong ones get seats, the weaker ones go without. The senior teachers most times handled these problems. To solve such a problem, some senior teachers would take the seats from both parties and give them to some neutral students who needed them. Some of the students caught up in such conflicts sometimes make flippant remarks against some of the teachers because they disagree with their decisions. Students caught making such flippant remarks are heavily punished and some of them will remain in the teachers’ bad books for quite some time.

All the other students agreed that Charles’s comments also reflected the realities of the situations in their schools. The issue of poor toilet facilities was another case in point. John stated that since in his school there were no toilet facilities, students had to beg their neighbours to allow them to use their toilets. He observed that “some neighbours would allow the use of their toilets, while others refused once on a while.” In fact Thomas revealed that most times, “arguments and quarrels arose when two or more students wanted to use a particular neighbourhood toilet at the same time.”

On the other hand, Mark argued that poor library facilities caused conflicts between the teachers and students. He gave this example to support his argument:

In our school, the poor library facilities make the students to be more dependent on the teachers’ notes. The teachers could not refer the students to the library to do research projects, because the relevant materials were not there. Therefore, most students expected to be spoon-fed by the teachers. Some of the teachers who could not meet such expectations encounter deep misunderstanding with some of the students.
Eddie, Mark, Christina and Charles made similar observations about their schools. All the students also observed that the poor science lab facilities made it very difficult for the teachers to prepare the students adequately for their external examinations. This leads to frustrations among the students and teachers (Jane, Thomas, Marie, Frances and Christina). I observed that some of these frustrations caused misunderstandings between the teachers and students:

There's a general feeling among the students that teachers were not influencing the school authorities to improve the conditions of the science laboratory and the libraries. Some students also felt that certain teachers would like to maintain the status quo because it gave them the opportunity to promote their private lessons. It also made it possible for them to publish their pamphlets and earn extra money to augment their meager salaries. Teachers on the other hand, felt the situation was beyond their control. I observed that these deep differences in views were certainly sources of student-teacher conflicts (Field Notes October 12, 1999).

Eddie and Jane argued that the rebel invasion of the city had worsened the problem of inadequate school furniture because the rebels destroyed quite a lot of the schools’ properties, especially furniture. “Sometimes our teachers spend a lot of time trying to settle students’ quarrels about chairs or desks” (Thomas). In the process, the students and teachers developed deep disagreements (Marie, Christina and Frances).

**Misunderstanding due to Students’ Unruly Behaviour s**

The students in all the three schools agreed that the unruly behaviours of some of the students also contributed to some of the student-teacher conflicts. Charles gave a specific example to support the students' observations:

There was a time when a teacher was teaching next to the Lower Sixth-Form, where two girls were causing noise. The teacher came out to warn them to stop causing noise. The two female students made flippant remarks against the teacher. The teacher reported the matter to the
Principal, but because the Principal never took a serious step towards that, the teacher decided to leave the school. It was a very big blow to some of us, because he was regarded as the best Economics teacher in the school. Now he is in another school.

Jane, Marie, Thomas and Christina agreed that there were certain students who were sometimes disrespectful to some of the teachers for no good reason. Thomas gave the following example to support this argument:

Yesterday, our Economics teacher was busy teaching us when a female student just pushed the door without knocking. She began to drag her feet noisily while going to her seat without any remorse for her lateness. As she was going to her seat, she began to talk to her companions here and there, ignoring the fact that we were all busy taking notes. The teacher asked her to leave the class. But instead of leaving the class, she became very argumentative. The teacher threatened that if she did not get out of the class, he would leave. We became angry with the student and started scolding her. But she grew all the more stubborn. The teacher left the class. I reported the matter to the disciplinary committee. The case is under investigation.

Another example of unruly behaviour was the lack of respect and value for school property (John, Marie and Frances). For example, “some students are fond of throwing chairs around” (Frances). When teachers punish these students, some of them become very rebellious and disrespectful to the teachers. Misunderstandings between students and teachers also happened when students sometimes failed to sweep their classrooms and clean the school compound (Jane, Marie and Frances). “In fact, some students do not want to respect and abide by the school rules and regulations and that’s how they clash with some of the teachers who would like to maintain good discipline” (Mark).
Misunderstanding over the Negative Influence by Gangster Groups

Nearly all the students believed that behaviours by some students, which caused serious misunderstandings between and some of the teachers were as a result of negative influence by gangster groups. Thomas elaborated:

Our Form is believed to have the most un-behaved students in the school. This is because most of them are ‘gangsters’. You live in the Western world so you know what I am talking about. I mean ‘film stars’ like Tupak, Rambo and Bruce Lee. There are some students who copy these gangsters’ lives. Some students don’t even come to class regularly. When they come to class, they talk more about these ‘film stars’ rather than pay attention to what the teachers were teaching. At times the teachers would get very angry and would leave the class. We the innocent ones fell victims just because of them. Some of the students learn bad things such as smoking, gambling and ‘rudeness’ from these wild films.

Thomas’s comments were supported by observations I made when I visited certain sections at the east-end of the city. I noticed that there were ‘video booths’ all over the city. Most of the films shown were violent movies mostly from India, the United States of America and other parts of Western Europe. I also observed that even the government-owned Sierra Leone Broadcasting Services showed similar violent movies. Some of the students regarded the movie stars as their role models (John and Charles). They organize gangster groups and call themselves, Rambo Warriors, The Bruce Lees and so on (John, Mark and Charles). These gangster groups sometimes tried to influence other students to follow them and when their demands were rejected, they reacted rudely (Eddie).

Major Types and Causes of Student-teacher Conflicts Identified by the Teachers

This section focuses on the major types and causes of student-teacher conflicts from the teachers’ points of views. The teachers identified many types and causes of
student-teacher conflicts, both minor and major. As argued by all the teachers, some of them were minor, quite isolated and less significant, while others were considered major and prevalent in the three schools that participated in this study. The teachers also considered these types of conflicts and their causes as obstacles to the maintenance of peace in the schools. A summary of these major types of student-teacher conflicts and their causes is provided in this section.

**Misunderstanding over Teachers’ Go Slow Attitudes**

The appalling conditions of service for teachers have always been a bone of contention between the teachers and the YES Ministry, observed all the teachers. According to Joan, Joe, Dolly, Peter and Margaret, a major problem faced by teachers has been the late payment of their salaries. During this study, teachers had not been paid for at two months or so (Field Notes, May 24, 1999). Philip explained how he dealt with this unpleasant condition:

> You might have heard that we have not been paid for the last two months. So what does the Ministry of Education expect me to do? Does it expect me to eat stones? Does it expect me to come to school regularly and teach effectively? A teacher is not a slave. If I don’t get paid, I’ll come to school but I’ll go slow and not teach seriously. There is a ‘go slow’ all over the country where schools are still running. What that simply means is that teachers go to school but don’t teach effectively. Students who fail to understand our plight are upset with us, but it’s not our fault. It’s a very serious problem because there’re deep misunderstandings between the teachers and students over how to deal with this issue. We’ve demonstrated against successive governments, but no success, so we’ve decided to ‘go slow’.

All the other teachers in WASS, NASS and SASS agreed with Philip’s observations. They were also of the opinion that the government was not serious about improving the teachers’ conditions of service and that the ‘go slow’ approach was their own non-violent
way of protesting against the government. “Of course, we are aware that the students suffer more than the government, but we cannot help it” (Dolly). Philip, Joe, Peter, Margaret and Patricia observed that many teachers came to school worried about the uncertainty of when salaries would be paid. In the classroom, staff room and anywhere teachers clustered together, the main topic of discussion was about their poor conditions of service (Field Notes May 24, 1999). Some of them had very little time to listen to students’ complaints, remarked Jack and Andrew. According to Joan, Dolly, Peter and Patricia this ‘go slow’ attitude of the teachers leads to very poor inter-personal relationships between the students and teachers. “Some students tend to support the teachers’ position while others were opposed to it” (Jack). Misunderstandings between students and teachers over this issue become more tense during the periods close to examinations (Joe, Dolly and Patricia).

**The Mammy Coker Syndrome and The Usay dên Tay Kaw na de I de It Gras (The Cow Grazes Where You Tie It) Mentality**

All the teachers argued that due to the difficult financial situations most of the teachers were faced with, some teachers tried to do whatever they could to make both ends meet. They also agreed that many teachers were engaged in various income-generating ventures, popularly known as *Mammy Coker*. Joan defined *Mammy Coker* “as a practice by teachers and other government workers to engage in all kinds of odd jobs and sometimes, illegal economic activities/jobs in order to survive.” These activities affected teachers’ performances and commitment to schoolwork (Joan, Joe, Dolly and Margaret). Nevertheless, teachers engage in these activities because *usay dên tay kaw na de I de it gras*, argued Dolly, Joe and Joan. Most government workers and civil servants
in this country believe in this philosophy and feel that it is one of the ways they use to supplement their meager salaries and meet their financial commitments (Dolly and Joan). Many teachers also believe in and practice this *usay dën tay kaw na de I de it gras* philosophy (Field Notes, June, 10, 1999). “But I would like to tell you that there are many other teachers who are opposed to this way of doing things” (Joan).

Some of the teachers shared several examples to illustrate the *Mammy Coker* syndrome. According to Dolly, “some teachers relied on private lessons where they charged students more, because their monthly salaries were delayed by the government.” Therefore, students paid more attention to these private lessons than the normal school classes because the teachers taught more effectively during the *Mammy Coker* lessons (Patricia). Jack noted that at SASS, the *Mammy Coker* lessons helped teachers to solve their financial problems. Students who could not afford to pay for the private lessons were the actual losers (Jack). According to Joan, Dolly, Andrew and Margaret, this would lead to the children of the rich having better access to higher educational opportunities than those of the poor in the long run. In addition to charging exorbitantly for private lessons, some teachers also published pamphlets in their respective subjects and sold them to the students at very expensive prices (Philip and Peter). Joe also noted that, “due to the irregular payment of teachers’ salaries, some teachers engaged in petty trading as part of their *Mammy Coker* activity.” I observed that there were tensions and deep misunderstandings between the students and teachers over this issue (Field Notes, June 10, 1999). As illustrated below, some of the student-teachers conflict had their roots from the *Mammy Coker* syndrome:

In NASS and SASS, I saw three female teachers selling food items such as, locally made yogurt, ‘cool aid’ and roast peanuts. During the break and
lunch periods these female teachers will sit at strategic places outside of the classrooms calling on students “Kam bay mi makit” (come buy my goods). Although the teachers did not force the students to buy their goods, it was evident that failure to patronize them would be regarded as lack of sympathy for the plight of the teachers. It was hard for me to tell whether statements like “Enti una dən student dəm nə de bay mi makit! Una wet!” (It looks like you students don’t want to buy my goods! You wait and see!), were mere jokes or real threats from the teachers. But the reluctant faces of some of the students buying the teachers’ food items, made me suspect that they were merely trying to avoid having conflicts with their teachers (Field Notes, April 23, 1999).

**Misunderstanding over Teachers’ Misuse of Power**

I observed that in all the three schools, the use of the cane was the norm rather than the exception. In fact throughout my data collection process, I observed that the adage, “spare the rod and spoil the child” was the guiding principle that governed how teachers dealt with the conflicts they experienced with the students. All the teachers agreed with my observations. They affirmed that the use of the cane was a major source of student-teacher misunderstandings and confrontations. Eddie was particularly disgusted with a colleague who was very fond of pushing students out of his class and caning them for every minor offence. Peter from NASS, who was bordered by this excessive use of the cane, said that some of his colleagues strongly believed that “the only language the African child understood was the cane.” He gave the following example to drive home his point:

We used to have a teacher here. He’s now pursuing further studies. But he’s currently here doing his teaching practice. He flogs a lot in class. He spends most of the time flogging. He flogged the students at every moment they did something he disliked. And it borders us as administrators. Because if a teacher spends half of the time administering the cane, one would wonder how much time he/she spent teaching. Probably, we should have counseled this teacher.
Andrew agreed that in NASS they also used the cane. He claimed that there were some teachers who tended to over use the cane. "Because of that, the students hate them," he concluded. I observed that the policy from the YES Ministry, stipulating who should flog students and how many lashes should be given, was hardly adhered to. Peter agreed:

There's a memo from the Ministry of Education to the Principals indicating that flogging should be done in front of the Principal and should be monitored as well. But the schools normally did not go strictly by that. We're allowed to use the cane but we're advised to use it moderately. Sometimes, because of the gravity of the offence committed by a particular student, some of us tend to inflict up to six lashes and in the process inflict injuries on the students once on a while.

The excessive use of the cane was certainly the greatest nightmare of my data collection process. There were two moments I could hardly stand. The first was an incident in NASS:

I arrived at the school at lunchtime. Some students were playing hand tennis. Others were busy buying junk food from the market women. While moving towards the Principal's office I heard a small boy screaming, "teacher you'll kill me." His head was engulfed in the thighs of a heavily built male teacher. The poor little boy's buttocks' were left at the mercy of this teacher. He gave the boy at least six lashes. While still squeezing the boy's head between his thighs, other teachers who passed by gave the poor kid a few lashes, laughing at the same time as the boy continued to scream. By my rough calculations the boy received over ten lashes for an offence I honestly never was able to understand throughout the period I visited the school. All I gathered later was that the boy was very troublesome and rude to teachers. Whether that was true or not, it was hard to tell. Throughout that week, I kept wondering what the hell that boy has done to those teachers to warrant such public humiliation and physical torture. Having to remain silent about what I saw was a nightmare! (Field Notes, May 25, 1999).

I witnessed a similar incident in SASS the following week. This time a student was accused of stealing from someone outside of the school. He was forced to remove his school uniform and forced to lie flat on the ground and was given at least ten lashes by a
senior teacher. The flogging was followed by verbal insults and humiliation in front of many other students and teachers. I noticed that some of the teachers who witnessed this episode felt the type of punishment that was given this student was a little bit inhuman.

Philip made similar observations regarding the excessive use of corporal punishment in WASS:

In some cases also you have teachers who're not fair in meting out punishment. Some are not very skillful enough. Some are hot-tempered. For example, here, we don’t use the cane. We use a bat. If for any reason some students misbehaved very badly to some of the teachers, the reaction of some hot-tempered teachers would be to beat such students with vengeance. Sometimes they seriously wounded the students. This caused very deep divisions between some of the students and teachers involved.

There were some teachers who disliked flogging students. In all the three schools. I observed that most of the female teachers, especially those in charge of the Guidance and Counseling Departments in WASS and SASS avoided the use of the cane in handling student-teacher conflicts. On the contrary, I observed that many male teachers used the cane on many occasions to handle student-student and student-teacher conflicts. But some male teachers disliked using the cane. For example, Peter. a senior teacher in NASS loathes the use of the cane because according to him, “it’s brutal and it leads to more aggressive behaviour from the victims.”

**Misunderstanding due to Overenrolled Classrooms**

As earlier mentioned the rebel war forced the YES Ministry to mandate most schools to run a two-shift system in order to accommodate the thousands of internally displaced students flooding the city. “The official student-teacher ratio was 50:1, but due to the influx of the internally displaced students from rebel-held areas, the Ministry of
Education mandated the schools to increase this ratio from between 60:1 to 100:1” (Andrew). Pressure to increase school enrolment also came from the schools’ proprietors, old students’ associations and politicians (Peter and Andrew). This has resulted in overcrowded classes (Peter). Philip argued, “because of the overenrolled classrooms the teachers found it very difficult to control the students and teach effectively.” Peter agreed:

There’re just too many students per class. Sometimes the students at the back of the class can’t see the notes on the blackboard clearly. Students argued and caused noise as they struggled to see the notes and copy them. Worst still, in the dry season, after 12:00 p.m. temperatures are very high. The classrooms become very hot and there’s poor ventilation. When it’s too hot the mental capacities of the students and teachers are adversely affected. Under such overcrowded conditions, misunderstandings developed between the students and teachers, as the teachers tried to maintain order.

Overenrolled classrooms made it practically impossible for teachers to give assignments. Jane asked, “How can you mark 60-70 exercise books?” Peter, who taught in the same school (NASS) expressed similar concerns:

Over-enrollment of the school has again obliged us to transform the lab into an ordinary classroom. These students who are in this science lab [pointing towards the students] did not come to do science. It’s now a normal classroom. So we’re doing this at the expense of science teaching. This is simply because we want to enroll more students.

Philip believed the students were the losers for this overcrowding. He noted that due to this problem, students were not able to take notes and write their exams conveniently. He argued that over-enrollment in the classrooms has made supervision by the teachers quite difficult. He concluded that “because of the congestion, it’s also very
difficult to identify culprits in class and in some cases, teachers abandon their classrooms, and thus causing students to suffer.”

In WASS, I observed a Form One English class. Two students were without chairs. They stood near me at the back of the class throughout the period. They could not write their notes. They engaged in pocket discussions that angered the teacher. The teacher did not bother to tell them to be quiet, until when one of the students sitting in front of them began to complain. At this point the teacher told them to stop distracting the other students and threatened them that he would throw them out of class if they continued doing so (Field Notes, June 10, 1999).

Misunderstanding over the High Cost of and Unavailability of School Textbooks and Stationery

Nearly all the teachers and students indicated that the high cost and lack of books and other school materials was one of the most serious problems affecting student-teacher interactions. Almost all the teachers in the three schools observed that the textbooks and other school materials prescribed by the school administration in collaboration with the YES Ministry were quite expensive for the average student. Joe therefore, argued that most of the students in his school could not afford to buy textbooks. Therefore, “they had to depend entirely on the teachers’ notes” (Joe). Similarly, Andrew shared his frustration about this matter:

Sometimes, students come to class without the appropriate textbooks. That makes it difficult for teachers to teach. Sometimes students bring novels or comics to class. While you’re teaching say Math, they’ll be reading these novels and comics. The major problem is financial constraints from the parents. Parents are required to buy so many textbooks and other school materials, and they’re so expensive. Some times they would buy just a few basic items for their children. Because of this problem, some teachers avoided giving assignments. Others would just copy notes from
their own textbooks. Students sometimes accused some of the teachers as being lazy and inefficient and this brings about misunderstands.

Peter also noted that in his class most students only had one exercise book instead of the four required books. He lamented that he had to deal with this problem throughout the school year. Dolly observed that “generally speaking, throughout the city, you’ll hardly find more than five students in any class with textbooks.” She considered this as a source of student-teacher conflict: “It’s the most difficult problem to deal with, because you give assignments, they’ll not do the assignments because they have no textbooks” (Dolly). She went further to observe that this influenced some students to steal their companions’ textbooks and kept them in their homes. “In the final analysis, the teachers have to get involved in dealing with this type of conflict and it’s sometimes frustrating,” she concluded.

**Misunderstanding due to Poor School Infrastructure**

All the teachers agreed that although their schools were among the best built schools in the city, the existing structures needed lots of repairs. I observed that the three schools did not have functional flush toilets. While NASS and SASS had pit latrines as remedies, WASS had none. Both the teachers and students at WASS had to use the toilet facilities of their neighbours. According to Joe, this problem has been there for quite some time. “Both the teachers and students had to go to neighbouring houses to ask for toilet services and this created problems for them” (Joe). Philip observed that sometimes students went to class late with the excuse that they went to a neighbourhood toilet and some teachers just don’t accept their excuses. It was evident that the school would need quite a lot of money to repair these flush toilets and even if they did, the unreliable water
supply and electricity systems in the city would render such efforts more or less fruitless (Field Notes, June 10, 1999). The other schools did not experience this problem because they managed to dig pit latrines (Field Notes, June 10, 1999). The school with the toilet problem did not have adequate space for such an alternative (Field Notes, June 10, 1999).

All the teachers also maintained that the lack of adequate furniture was one of the most serious sources of conflict between the students and teachers. During one of the interviews, Patricia, shared her frustrations regarding this problem:

As the teacher in charge of the Guidance and Counseling Department, many students come to me to complain that student so and so took their chair. I am supposed to take them to my office to help them resolve the problem and counsel them. But I only have one chair and one table in my office. I have to borrow chairs myself. In fact I borrowed this very chair you're sitting on from the staff room. My office is supposed to provide a very comfortable environment that would enable me counsel the students when they bring their problems to me. I've complained to the Principal, but the answer is always, 'no money'. Sometimes the students think I do not want to help them with their problems because I'm reluctant to take them to my 'empty' office. You know most schools don't like our departments because we preach against corporal punishment and some of my colleagues do not feel comfortable about it.

The teachers also observed that the libraries in all their schools were poorly equipped. They lacked adequate furniture and relevant books to meet with the needs of both students and teachers (Joan, Jack and Peter). I also observed that most of the textbooks were out-dated (mostly 1950 – 1970 editions). Andrew agreed:

In our school and in all the other schools in the country, library facilities are inadequate. If you go to our library for example, the books that are there, are almost twenty to twenty-five years old. They're very, very old editions. Quite out-dated. Periodically the books should be changed to make room for current developments.
Because of the poor library conditions both the teachers and students could not engage in serious research (Joe, Philip, Dolly, Peter, Patricia and Margaret). There was evidence that many teachers would like to encourage their students to do extra readings in the library to supplement the notes they gave during classes. Some in fact who could afford it went all out to buy essential textbooks and photocopy them for their students at either free cost or for a small fee (Peter). Journals, newspapers and periodicals were virtually non-existent in the libraries (Philip). Even local newspapers were luxuries because the schools are faced with serious financial constraints (Joe). No serious confrontations between teachers and students as a result of this situation were observed in all the three schools. What was evident though was the growing dissatisfaction and frustrations amongst most of the teachers about the appalling library conditions. Due to the lack of relevant and resourceful materials in the libraries, some teachers spoon-fed their students and had to go the extra mile to look out for books elsewhere for the students (Dolly).

With a well-equipped library "teachers can engage the students to do some research on their own" (Andrew).

Similarly, all the teachers I interviewed expressed their disgust about the deplorable states of the science labs. Andrew observed that in NASS, students who wanted to pursue science education at post-secondary levels had to transfer to other schools with better science labs. "Even in this school, chemicals and relevant science equipment are in very short supplies" (Peter).

In NASS, I observed that the science labs were turned into general stores and classrooms. The labs were generally not well maintained because there was very little to
maintain (Field Notes, May 25, 1999). My experience interviewing the students and teachers in the science labs at NASS was scary:

One morning, I went to one of the schools to conduct my interviews. The Vice-Principal made previous arrangements that I use the science labs for all my interviews. The sight of the labs was disgusting. I saw about fifty rusty containers containing some unused chemicals. The floors were dusty, some of the tables and chairs were broken. The stench of the decomposing chemicals and biological specimens made me feel sick. “As you can see this used to be our science lab but it’s now out of use and we use it for our classes, but it was not made for that,” Andrew remarked (Field Notes, May 25, 1999).

Using the science labs as classes created classroom management problems for the teachers (Andrew and Peter). Some students resorted to causing noise and doing other things when the teachers were teaching (Andrew). “Teachers who could not stand it loose their tempers and inflict unnecessary punishment, such as kneeling and standing in class or outside of the class” (Philip).

Misunderstanding over the Breaking of the School Rules and Regulations

The study revealed that each school had certain rules and regulations that all registered students must abide by. These rules many times conflicted with students’ desires, capacities and needs (Joan, Dolly, Peter, Margaret and Patricia). Based on my observations, interviews (especially of the teachers serving the various Disciplinary Committees) and analysis of some documents from the schools and the YES Ministry, the following major and minor offences were identified.

**Major offences.**

1. Stealing;

2. Fighting;
3. Use of illegal drugs and smoking;
4. Sexual harassment;
5. Use of obscene language;
6. Disrespect to school prefects, teachers and school authorities;
7. Damaging/destroying school properties;
8. Wounding/stabbing;
9. Dishonesty, especially cheating during examinations;
10. Prolonged absenting from school without permission;

**Minor offences.**
1. Truancy;
2. Lateness;
3. Wearing improper school uniform;
4. Not having proper hair cuts [for boys];
5. Not plaiting hair [for girls];
6. Not wearing school crest;
7. Painting nails;
8. Wearing bangles and chains;
9. Eating in class;
10. Irregular school attendance;
11. Provoking/nicknaming others;
12. Causing noise during class time;
13. Not having the prescribed school textbooks;
14. Distracting the teachers/students during classes;
15. Shabby appearance (e.g. boys not combing the hair, long finger nails);
16. Not doing class assignments/homework.

The study revealed that when the teachers tried to enforce rules and regulations to minimize or prevent the occurrence of both these major and minor offences, confrontations between the students and prefects and between the students and teachers developed. In fact Jane stated that school prefects who tried to help the school administration enforce these rules and regulations were often times disrespected by some of the other students. Of course, disobeying the prefects meant disobeying the teachers and the school administration that appointed them (Patricia and Jack). Margaret illustrated this point further:

In our school, there's a particular student who liked to wear a ring and come to school. When the prefect told him to remove the ring, he told him to leave him alone and that he was a Form Six student, he can do anything he liked. The prefect insisted that the boy should take off his ring. The boy refused and scolded the prefect by the neck when he tried to remove the ring. The prefect pushed him. Just at that point, another prefect got into the scene. He took the boy to the disciplinary committee, which I serve as a member. We recommended to the principal that the boy should be suspended. You see some of these boys don't respect the prefects because of the work they do. But they have to do it.

Teachers who tried to maintain good school discipline also faced students' resistance, which led to misunderstandings (Margaret). Joan cited examples regarding improper hairstyles and improper mode of dressing with particular reference to some girls in her school:

For the girls, the most important thing is that they liked to make their hair very gorgeous. They are required to plait their hair in a very simple
manner. We do not allow very attractive ‘attachments’. We do not allow them to put on chains; to paint and flush their nails. We do not allow them to put on bangles. We’ve problems with them, because many of them do not like to plait their hair. And when they do, they’d like to do it in a very gorgeous way. That has been our problem with them.

The issue of improper hairstyles and improper school attire was also common among the boys. Philip agreed:

For the boys, they must have a proper haircut. Lately, they’re fond of coming to school with all types of different styles on their heads. We tell them, as students we won’t allow them. They should make simple haircuts. We also don’t allow them to put on all types of shoes. We allow them either black shoes or brown crepes or sandals. Because we believe that every student should look alike. But sometimes some students disobeyed these rules and we punished them. The rationale for having school uniforms and disallowing gorgeous forms of dressings was mainly to ensure that the students from rich backgrounds did not look low upon students from poor backgrounds. The conflict between them and us is that our values and theirs are quite different, and so there’s a clash.

**Misunderstanding over Sexual Harassment**

In all the three schools some of the teachers indicated that there was a prevalence of sexual harassment of female students by their male teachers. This included male teachers making for example, sexual advances to some female students, verbal remarks and various gestures that were sexually inappropriate (Andrew, Philip, Margaret, Patricia and Joan). According to the YES Ministry’s codes of conduct for teachers, it could lead to a termination of service and legal action by the student’s parents (Philip). As a matter of policy, the Ministry considered sexual harassment as highly unprofessional and in principle, did not tolerate such behaviours in the schools (Philip). In practice, the Ministry has not done enough because; some teachers have been sexually harassing female students without any serious consequences (Joan). All the female teachers and
some of the male teachers commented that female students were the victims of the unprofessionalism and immorality of some of the male teachers. Patricia recalled an incident a female student reported to her:

At the beginning of this school year, a female student who had just been admitted into this school came to report that a male teacher who has been making love advances to her since the first week of school. The student told me that she denied the teacher outright. She went on to say that since that time, the teacher has been using all kinds of threatening remarks against her. She told me that she could not put up with it more and would report the matter to her parents. I advised her not to do so and I promised to talk to the teacher. I did talk to the teacher and he promised to leave her alone. Nearly all the female students experienced this problem.

Although the study did not focus on teacher-teacher conflicts, two of the female teachers that I interviewed confirmed that they were also sexually harassed a couple of times by their male counterparts. Joe agreed that this type of conflict occurred in his school but argued that it was not common. According to him, “there’re some odd cases when naturally a teacher would like to have a love affair with a female student and when the pupil did not show interest, some teachers would try to find ways of penalizing the female student.” Many teachers agreed that there were cases when female students who refused to fall in love with male teachers were subjected to verbal and non-verbal insults, reduced grades and other forms of degrading punishments. Many times most of the female students affected were afraid to report to anybody for fear of further victimization (Joan, Jack, and Jane). The school administration was totally against teachers behaving in this manner and the Principals always threatened to take very serious disciplinary actions against such teachers (Joe and Andrew).
Misunderstanding over the Negative Influence of Gangster Groups

All the teachers observed that some students who watched Western movies/films (mostly American movies) imitated some of the ‘film stars’ in these ‘wild movies’. Some of these film stars include Tupak, Rambo and Bruce Lee (Philip, Andrew and Patricia). According to Andrew, “some students copied their ways of dressing, speaking, walking and their other mannerisms.” Overall, I realized that this was becoming a very serious problem in all the three schools (Field Notes, June 10, 1999). Philip agreed:

In our school, some of the male students form gangster groups bearing the names of some war-like movie stars. These students are the most rebellious in the school. They sometimes dressed in a manner not compatible with the school rules. What I find dangerous is the fact that these gangster groups are trying to influence the well-behaved students to join them. Lately, these groups have begun to use illegal drugs. After using these illegal drugs such as marijuana and cocaine, they become very unruly. The teachers and school administration have been trying very hard to ensure that these types of groups are eradicated from the school. But there’s still a long way to go.

All the other teachers shared Philip’s worries and concerns. They also affirmed that gangsters groups were growing rapidly in their schools. Peter believed that the rebel war was partly to blame. He argued that “the youth violence which has been perpetuated by the rebel war is having a negative impact on the students’ behaviours, beliefs and values.”

Misunderstanding over Teachers’ Negligence of their Duties

Student-teacher conflicts also arose as a result of the negligence of teachers (Dolly, Joan, Margaret, Philip, Jack and Peter). Jack disclosed, “quite often, some students complain that some teachers did not teach their classes regularly and on time.” Also, he admitted that some teachers didn’t teach well and so found it difficult to relate
with the students. In fact, Peter also noted that “for some teachers it was even a habit to skip teaching their classes and when they appeared in class they didn’t teach seriously.” Others did not teach according to the prescribed syllabus and sometimes students confronted these teachers (Joan). Of course some teachers did not take confrontations from students lightly (Jack). Lots of tensions often times developed from this (Dolly). Some students reacted by loosing interest in the subject, while others ended up doing all sorts of mischievous things (Dolly, Joan and Mark).

Also, “some times students were not pleased with some teachers because they made mistakes in calculating their grades” (Patricia). This type of conflict was common in all the three schools (Field Notes, April 19, 1999). According to Joe, there was hardly any term when students would not come to him to complain teachers who had entered the wrong grades in their report cards. He concluded that most times the students were right. Often times, the affected students and teachers developed bitter disagreements and misunderstandings before the truth of the matter was found out (Joe). Andrew also accused some Form Teachers of negligence of duty because sometimes, they forgot to record grades for certain students. In fact he further observed that some teachers were so careless and negligent that sometimes they lost the whole list of students’ grades and even forgot to make copies. Finally, he commented that:

Some teachers put marks without making sure they’re correct marks. Some teachers, due to so much work or negligence, or whatever the case may be, they even put wrong marks. They take one student’s marks and put them for another. Honestly, I can sympathize with the students who get furious with such teachers. These are some of the conflicts students would take to their parents.
Students’ and Teachers’ Methods of Responding to Student-Student Conflicts

In this section, the methods the students and teachers used to respond to student-student and student-teacher conflicts are described. The students and teachers were asked to identify the methods they have been using or have observed their colleagues using to respond to the different types of conflicts they had earlier described during the interviews. I also observed students and teachers during classes, breaks, and lunchtime in order to triangulate the data derived from the students’ and teachers’ responses. The most common methods that were identified are summarized below. Since these responses were common to all the schools, no attempt has been made to discuss them separately per school. As earlier mentioned any responses that stood out for particular schools are highlighted accordingly. This section is divided into two subsections. The first subsection deals with the methods the students used to deal with student-student conflicts, while the second subsection focuses on the methods the teachers used to handle student-student conflicts.
Students' Responses about the Methods They Used to Deal With Student-student Conflicts

Fighting and Use of other Forms of Physical Abuse

In all the three schools, the students observed that many students physically fought with their colleagues when they were confronted with conflicts either in the classroom or playground. Most fights were as a result of misunderstandings over the use of school furniture (Field Notes, May 25, 1999). Jane agreed that in her school, "most students normally fought for chairs just immediately after the general assembly." Thomas agreed and shared his own experience:

The previous day I had a fight with one of my classmates over a desk I have been using throughout this term. Because he entered the class few minutes before me, he took my desk. When I tried to take the desk from him, he pushed me and I also pushed him. Since I was stronger than he was, I overpowered him and took the desk from him. Fighting for school furniture is quite common in our school.

I observed in WASS and SASS that some of the students who did not have chairs and desks often went to other classes and grabbed the chairs or desks from the physically weaker students. In fact Marie and Charles noted that the bigger students always bullied the smaller ones when a dispute over school furniture erupted. Bullying was a form of physical abuses which some of the senior students used to deal with the scarcity of school furniture (John, Mark and Christina). Jane, Marie and Charles agreed and noted that in their schools, some of the big boys who did not have seats often times went to the classes of the junior boys and snatched their chairs or desks from them forcefully.

John, Marie and Frances also noted that some of the students who could not withstand provocation or teasing from their colleagues sometimes fought those who
provoked them. Eddie and Charles agreed but also mentioned that in their classes some of the students sometimes fought over the non-repayment of financial loans and non-return of borrowed school items such as books, pens, pencils and erasers. Eddie shared the following personal experience:

Last week, a colleague of mine came to school without his Mathematical set. He asked me if I could lend him mine for that day and promised to return it the following day. I accepted. The following day, he came to school without it. I needed it badly that day. When I confronted him, instead of being apologetic, he told me that I approached him rudely and began to shout at me. I lost my temper and scolded him. He scolded me too. Friends came to stop us. They told him to bring the set. He did the following day. Up to this time, we're still angry with each other.

All the students also argued that rivalry over girl friends also generally resulted in fights among the boys. Thomas, Marie and Charles also noted that there were very few cases when very strong differences in views resulted in fights.

**Use of Obscene or Abusive Language**

All the students stated that the majority of the students also used abusive words to deal with some of their conflicts. John, Jane, Mark and Christina argued that most times the students who used this method of handling conflicts were those who were provoked or teased by their colleagues. I observed that such verbal violence was more common during the break and lunchtime, especially among students in the lower forms. Throughout the data collection process, I did not observe any use of obscene language by the students in the fifth and sixth forms.

The study also revealed that there were times when some of the boys verbally abused or used obscene language against the female students who refused to have
intimate relationships with them or resist any form of sexual harassment from them.

Christina cited the following example:

The first time I came to this school, a boy in my form asked me to be her lover. I told him no. But he did not stop making this request. This went on for several weeks. But I continued to tell him no. He became annoyed with me and he told his friends. They began to say nasty things against me. Each time they saw me when no one else could hear them except me, they'd say, “yu wɔwɔ titt, luk aw yu mɔt wɔwɔ yanda” [You ugly girl. see how ugly your mouth is]. I had to threaten them that I would let my parents know about it before they could stop harassing me.

Marie, Jane and Frances agreed and further noted that girls attending co-educational schools were most times verbally abused by some of the boys if they rejected their sexual advances.

**Reporting or Complaining to Either the Teachers or Prefects**

According to Charles, Mark and Jane, there were many instances when students would report their conflicts either to the teacher or prefects or Disciplinary Committee. Eddie, Thomas and Frances indicated that most times students reported cases of name-calling or provocation to the class prefects. Eddie recalled that just few minutes before interviewing him, a student in Form One came to complain to him another student in his form who was calling him *blaki* because of his dark skin. When I asked him how he responded to this conflict situation, he told me that he took the matter to one of the senior teachers and the offender was flogged. Jane explained why prefects sometimes preferred to report to the teachers. She said, “most times the prefects could not properly handle student-student conflicts that were caused by provocation.” In fact Marie stated that the
previous day, she reported to one of the teachers, a male student who was very fond of calling her *munku titi* (primitive girl) for no reason.

According to John, Eddie and Christina, some of the students reported directly to the prefects, teachers and Principal as soon as they were faced with a misunderstanding over who had more right to use a particular desk or chair. I also observed that sometimes some students would go straight to the Principal and complained about cases related to theft, fighting, and use of obscene language. John, Thomas, Mark Eddie and Christina also indicated that most times some students who failed to repay their loans or return the items they borrowed from their colleagues were reported to either the teachers of the Disciplinary Committee or the Principal. Charles cited another example of a very serious conflict that he reported to the Principal:

Last week, we had soccer match between students in the upper and lower sixth forms. This was meant to bridge the gap that has existed between the two forms for quite some time. The Principal gave us the okay and all the logistical support. During the game, two boys had a very deep misunderstanding about foul playing. They went into blows and one of them was wounded. I deemed it necessary to report the case to the Principal because it was beyond my power as a prefect. The Principal later called the parents and resolved the matter.

**Avoidance**

Avoidance was one of the most common methods students used to respond to the conflict situations they were faced with (Marie, Frances, Thomas and John). For example, Thomas disliked anything that had to do with provocation. Therefore, he avoided dealing with students who were fond of provoking other students. He explained why he took such a position:

I would like to tell you why I would not want to do anything with the students who provoked others. In our class, there’s one student with physical disability. Some wicked students make fun him. They call him
John, Mark and Frances also stated that most physically weak students avoided dealing with some of their colleagues during conflict situations, especially when they realized that the stronger students would put up a fight. Mark, Frances, Charles and Christina also indicated that many weak students avoided confronting stronger students they are in conflict with by simply saying *aw fɔ du!*. "This is a Krio idiomatic expression meaning what can one do?" (Mark). This is a way of leaving things to fate rather than doing something about it (Frances and Charles). Marie, Jane, Frances, Christina and Eddie also observed that some of the female students who are sexually harassed by some of the male students sometimes ignored such conflicts by simply leaving things to fate. "Some of the female students also respond to gender biases from the male students using the *aw fɔ du* approach to problems" (Christina). This approach is common among many oppressed people in society, such as women, children, youths and the disable people (Jane and Marie).

Eddie gave another case in point when some students would avoid dealing with conflicts:

In our school, because of the limited playground space, students scramble for space to play hand tennis. Most times the junior boys would be the first to get to the playground. But the senior boys would come and seize their balls and ask them to leave. Most times, the junior boys would leave quietly and avoid any confrontation.

Marie, Frances and Christina stated that most times they avoided confronting the students who sexually harassed or called them all kinds of nicknames. They said that most times
they pretended that they did not hear the nicknames and ignored their adversaries. When I further asked them why they avoided confronting the boys who harassed them, Marie replied, “if you don’t ignore them, they’ll continue to disturb you and feel that they’re important because you paid attention to their provocation.” On the other hand, Frances remarked that “it was a waste of time to take every type of conflict very seriously.”

Thomas and Charles also mentioned another very common way some of the students in their schools avoided dealing with conflicts over the use of the limited class spaces, teasing and high costs of school materials. They stated that some of the students preferred to stay at home rather than attend school. In fact Charles argued that “some of the students who could not cope or withstand the numerous conflicts that they encountered in school daily, have resorted to absenteeism.” In fact, he frankly told me that he used that method several times when he first came to this school about five years ago.

**Stealing**

According to John, Eddie, Frances and Charles, the bulk of the students in the three schools came from materially and financially poor families. They lacked most of the essential school materials that they needed (Eddie and John). Some of these students sometimes stole from their friends in order to meet their material needs (Christina and Marie). John agreed:

Yesterday, I brought my bag to class and during the break I went outside quickly to look for my friend. I left the bag in class. When I returned, it was gone. I reported the matter to our form teacher. He threatened that he would punish the entire class if the bag were not produced. Later on students who saw one of the students with the bag reported the matter to the teacher. The boy admitted that he stole the bag and sold it to buy some
school materials. The matter is still under investigation. Some of my friends in the other classes had similar problems.

Jane, Eddie and Christina remarked that in their schools, the stealing of pens, pencils and books was a very common way for a good number of the poor students who lacked some of these basic school materials. Some of the students felt that stealing was a way of dealing with their problems, but that is not true because they usually ended up having more conflicts with some of their colleagues and teachers (Charles, Mark and John).

**Judging**

In the absence of certain teachers, the prefects judged students who had very minor misunderstandings (Thomas, Eddie and Charles). Some of these minor conflicts were mostly reports about students not sweeping and cleaning the classes after the normal classes, teasing and causing noise in class when the teacher was absent (Jane, John, Mark, Frances and Christina). John also pointed out that “sometimes, cases involving students who borrowed school items from their colleagues and failed to return them were reported to the prefects to be judged.” He further described the following incident to illustrate his point:

This morning, a student in our class reported another student for borrowing his pen and refusing to return to it. I called the two students and asked them to explain what happened. First I asked the complainant to explain what happened. Later I asked the defendant to tell me his own side of the story. Fortunately, the defendant did not deny and so I did not see the need to call for witnesses. So I told the defendant that he was wrong and that he should tell the complainant that he was sorry. I also told the defendant that he must return the pen the following morning, otherwise, I’d take the matter to the senior school prefect. He accepted and apologized to his colleague and he did bring the pen the following day. That’s how I judged that case and was able to settle the problem.
The problem of students borrowing school items and lunch money and not returning them or paying back was quite common amongst the students (Jane, Marie, Eddie, Charles, Frances and Christina). “As a prefect, I always tried to judge the case first to find out who was at fault and made sure the student who was offended was appeased, and if I could not solve the problem, I referred it to one of the senior teachers” (Charles). I also observed that students who had misunderstandings over the use of playground space reported the matter to the prefects for judgement. Mark agreed:

This morning, during lunchtime, two students came to me to complain that while they were playing hand tennis, other students disrupted their game and asked them to leave the court because they wanted to play too. I went to the playground immediately to find out who was right or wrong. Since time was against us, there was no time to ask all the parties to explain. I simply asked them to call their witnesses. I was interested to know who was at the tennis court first. Both witnesses told me that the complainants went to the playground before the defendants. Once I was able to establish that fact, I told the defendants that they were wrong and that they should leave the court immediately. They did. The complainants continued their game immediately.

Marie, Eddie, Frances and Christina also indicated that they spent quite a lot of their breaks and lunchtime judging students involved in name-calling, distracting their colleagues who were busy studying, and playground misunderstandings.

**Teachers’ Responses about the Methods they Used to Respond to Student-student Conflicts**

**Use of Corporal Punishment**

All the teachers agreed that corporal punishment was the most visible and predominant method used by the teachers to handle student-student conflicts. With the
exception of three female teachers – Joan, Dolly and Patricia, all the other teachers I interviewed stated that most of the time they flogged students involved in conflicts. Margaret explained why she thought flogging was useful in handling some of the student-student conflicts that were reported to her:

Some of the students behave rudely to the prefects. Some of them come to school late all the time and when the prefects tell them to clean the compound, they’d challenge them and tell them off. Some cause noise in class and if their prefects tell them to be quiet, they’d respond rudely. They have to obey their prefects, otherwise I’d cane them.

Joe, Andrew, Peter and Jack agreed with Margaret and also indicated that they sometimes flogged students who were fond of grabbing chairs and desks from other students. Andrew cited an example:

There’re certain students who most times went to their classes late. If they found that all the chairs and desks have been occupied, instead of politely asking their colleagues to accommodate them, they’d find every excuse to grab some one else’s desk or chair and put up a fight if they did not succeed.

**Use of other Non-corporal Forms of Punishment**

Asking the students in conflicts to remain standing with their hands up, throughout the lesson was another method used by some teachers to deal with classroom conflicts (Joan, Joe, Peter and Jack). Examples of such conflicts include students’ misunderstandings over the use and ownership of seats in the classes, quarreling in class, and distracting other students during class time. Sometimes, teachers would ask the guilty students to kneel down for the rest of the lesson (Field Notes, May 25, 1999). There was one incident I observed in WASS where, a student was asked to stand up and hold a chair above his head at the same time (Field Notes, May 25, 1999).
Some of the teachers also indicated that some teachers who had no time to arbitrate students’ conflicts usually ended up sending the students in conflict out of their classes until the conflict was resolved. Peter gave another way he dealt with conflicts related to provocation, and distracting other students who wanted to stay focused during classes:

When students who provoked others were reported to me, sometimes, I would ask those students to write a sentence such as, “I’ll not provoke anyone again,” between five hundred to one thousand times. I do the same thing to some of the students who caused noise most of the time and prevented other students from concentrating in their class sessions.

Philip, Joe, Margaret and Jack observed that many teachers in their schools also dealt with student-student conflicts in the same way Peter described above.

Arbitration

All the teachers accepted that many times, they arbitrated conflicts among the students. Philip, Joe, Dolly, Peter, Patricia and Jack stated that many of the teachers in their schools spent a lot of their precious time arbitrating cases among students that were mostly about misunderstandings over the use of chairs and desks. For example, Philip cited a very fresh experience he had just before I interviewed him:

Just immediately after the General Assembly this morning, I had Form Two during the first period. When I entered the class, I found two boys pushing each other and arguing loudly. Each one claimed to have grabbed the chair first. I took the chair from them and asked them to explain what happened. One of the boys said that he arrived in class first and took the chair. The other denied and insisted that he was the first to take the chair. Since I did not know who was telling the truth, I called for witnesses. After the witnesses had explained, it was easy for me to determine who was wrong or who was right. I warned the guilty student and threatened to punish him next time he told lies.
Giving Advice

Only the teachers in the three schools (that is Philip, Dolly and Patricia) who served as Guidance and Counselors in the three schools reported that they sometimes gave advice or counseled students who were constantly provoked or teased by their colleagues. Patricia also indicated that she also gave regular pieces of advice to the male students who sexually harassed some of the female students to stop doing so and respect the rights and dignities of the female students. She also stated that most times she advised these students to concentrate on their studies rather than indulge in improper sexual behaviours.

All the teachers noted that sometimes they also advised students faced with conflicts over the use of the limited school furniture and classroom space. Dolly explained further, "when students come to me to complain about misunderstandings or disputes they had over the use of classroom space and furniture, I often advised them to try to solve their problems peacefully." She was not too sure though whether they followed such an advice or not. "At least, in my presence, they would stop quarreling and agree to work together," she concluded.

Complaining to the Principal

Most of the teachers commented that when students reported to them conflicts over the use of the limited resources that their schools had, they in turn complained to their Principals for solutions. "We refer such matters to the Principal because they are beyond our control" (Joan). Joe, Dolly, Patricia and Margaret, also indicated that they reported or complained to their Principals, students who were involved in conflicts which emanated from fights over desks and chairs, lack of the prescribed textbooks and fights
which resulted in serious bodily harm. "We all report all conflicts that involved serious wounding to the principal" (Margaret). I found out that this was the procedure in all the schools studied (Field Notes, June 10, 1999).

All the teachers also stated that conflicts involving drug abuse, sexual harassment, disrespectful behaviours to the teachers (such as fighting teachers and using obscene language against teachers), stealing and destruction of school properties were referred to the Principals.

**Avoidance**

Most of the teachers admitted that sometimes they were so fed up with having to deal with student-student conflicts that they avoided both the students and their conflicts. In fact Joe, Peter and Jack stated that sometimes they told the students who referred their conflicts to them to leave them alone because they had more important things to worry about. Peter explained why he avoided most students with conflicts:

> You consider yourself in my position: I came to school this morning without giving money to my wife to prepare food for our family of six. This is the middle of the new month, no salary for the previous month. I have to engage in Mammy Coker (I mean do extra odd jobs) to make ends meet. I’m just too busy and have no time to solve students’ conflicts.

On the other hand, Jack argued, "if you avoid dealing with most minor conflicts among students, no student would border you and you could get a lot more serious things accomplished." Andrew and Joe noted that most of the time they avoided dealing with conflicts that had to do with the use of school furniture and playground, because these were chronic problems in their schools and they could do little about them.
On the other hand, Margaret and Patricia generally ignored conflicts that had to do with provocation. Margaret for example, said that when students complained to her that their colleagues were calling them nicknames, she said she simply told them to ignore the nicknames as well as those who were teasing them. Similarly, Philip, Joe, Andrew and Jack mentioned that they avoided having anything to do with conflicts that emanated from differences of views among students, because it was time-consuming. Joan, Peter and Margaret confirmed that many teachers in their schools were fed up with conflicts of differences among students because such differences were mostly about issues related to the war, which was far beyond what the students and teachers could do anything about.

Philip, Dolly and Peter also noted that most teachers in their schools dodged classes that were over-crowded simply as a way of avoiding to get involved in any conflict that might erupt in such situations. Philip gave the following example to illustrate how some of the teachers avoided dealing with student-student conflicts:

We have some teachers who did not like to teach in classes that were overcrowded, because they complained that they spent most of the time resolving conflicts. Some of them sometimes failed to teach their classes by staying home and pretending to be sick. Some went to the classes and just copied notes on the blackboard and then left the class immediately without explaining the notes or encouraging any questions from the students.

**Students’ and Teachers’ Methods of Responding to Student-teacher Conflicts**

In this section, the methods teachers and students used to handle student-teacher conflicts are described. As in the previous section, no attempt has been made to compare the different methods used by the teachers and students. The purpose of the section is to describe what the students and teachers articulated during the interviews, including my
own observations. Similar to the previous section, this section has been divided into two sub-sections. In the first sub-section, the students’ responses about the methods they used to deal with student-teacher conflicts are summarized. The teachers’ responses about the methods they used to deal with student-teacher conflicts are summarized in the second sub-section. In both sub-sections, I also share my observations to support or validate the students’ and teachers, responses.

**Students’ Responses about the Methods they Used to Deal with Student-teacher Conflicts**

**Fighting and Use of Obscene Language**

Nearly all the students noted that students hardly fought teachers they were in conflict with because such behaviours were not taken lightly by the disciplinary committees and the Principals. But there were times when few fights occurred between some students and teachers (Charles, Mark and Jane). For example, while I was waiting to have a meeting with the WASS Vice-Principal, an angry-looking teacher walked into the principal’s office, greeted the Vice-Principal and teachers who were present and then made the following report:

I was busy teaching when that student over there (pointing to the student who stood by the Principal’s window) entered the class abruptly. I simply told him to leave the class because he was late and worst of all did not have the courtesy to knock at the door before entering. Instead of saying he was sorry, he walked rudely into his seat. I told him I wouldn’t teach the class until he left the room. He ignored my threats, murmured something to himself and looked at me in a very disrespectful manner. I lost my patience and confronted him. I insisted he should leave the class and he told me I had no right to ask him out. He categorically told me that he was not leaving the class. I held him by his hand and tried to walk him out of the class. He scolded me and pushed me. Just at that point, a
colleague of mine intervened and advised that the matter be brought to the Vice-Principal's office. Of course the student's immediate reaction was that nothing would come out of it because his father had a strong backing in the school. And I think because his father has so much influence in this school that's why he doesn't respect the teachers. "This is not the first time he's misbehaving to a teacher," someone remarked in the Vice-Principal's office (Field Notes, April 15, 1999).

In the same school, Thomas reported the following similar incident:

Last week, while our Economics teacher was teaching us, a female student walked in late and started walking sluggishly. She made a lot of noise with her feet. The teacher became annoyed and asked her out of the class. For no reason, this student turned around and slapped the teacher on his face. The entire class was outrageous and we thought that was a despicable act that should not go unpunished. So the entire class rallied around the teacher and reported the matter to the Vice-Principal. The student was suspended indefinitely.

John and Jane confirmed the above observations. In all the three schools I observed few cases where students would physically resist teachers who tried to flog them. Charles, Frances, Jane and Marie also reported that there were a few instances when one or two teachers would fight one or two students over a girl friend issue. All the students also noted that there were times when students would make flippant or very rude remarks against certain teachers they were in conflict with.

**Reporting to the Principal/Vice-Principal and Disciplinary Committee**

All the students mentioned that when students felt they were being punished by certain teachers because they either refused to patronize or could not afford meeting the cost of private classes organized by some teachers, they often reported the teachers concerned to either the Principal or the Vice-Principal. "Many times, we also reported to the Principal or Disciplinary Committee, students who misbehaved to teachers for no just
cause" (Thomas). For example, Charles mentioned that he reported a student who was caught making flippant remarks against one of the teachers.

On the other hand, all the students also noted that the form prefects also reported teachers who neglected their duties. "Some teachers come to class late and don’t teach seriously, and so we report them to the Principal/Vice-Principal" (Eddie). John also stated that his class reported a particular teacher who was very fond of copying notes from textbooks without any explanations. Christina also described moments when teachers were reported to the Principal/Vice-Principal:

There were times when some teachers punished students unjustly. And sometimes they flogged certain students to the point that they inflicted wounds on their skins. There were times when certain teachers hated particular students for reasons best known to them. As prefects, it’s our responsibility to make sure these students are protected so we take such matters to either the Disciplinary Committee or the Principal/Vice-Principal.

Avoidance

I observed that most students avoided dealing with the conflicts they experienced with some of their teachers. For example, Jane, Marie, Frances and Charles mentioned that many times, instead of confronting the teachers about the high cost of their private classes and pamphlets, they ignored talking to the teachers concerned to avoid any misunderstandings.

Some of the students who could not withstand some of the teachers’ excessive use of corporal punishment also avoided dealing with this issue by withdrawing from school (Jane, John, Eddie, and Frances). For example, John noted that a friend of his said that he would never attend school again because a particular teacher was fond of flogging him for any minor mistake he made in his class. Marie, Mark, Christina and Frances also cited
similar examples in their schools. They also explained that some students avoided asking or answering questions in class because some teachers did not tolerate challenges from bright students.

In all the three schools, I also observed that each time some students realized that the teacher was resisting their challenges of his/her debatable opinions, they remained silent (Field Notes, April 15, 1999). Some of the students would avoid the conflict of ideas by reading novels or comic books, engaging in pocket discussions and reading notes of other subjects (Mark). Thomas agreed, “each time I realized a particular teacher was not ready to accept different views from the students. I just ignored the teacher and read something else.” Christina, Frances and Mark also acknowledged that some students who do not want to confront teachers during conflict situations simply resort to the aw j du mentality, which leaves things to fate. On the other hand, some students would develop chronic absenteeism as a way of avoiding having any conflicts with some of the teachers (Jane, Thomas, Eddie, Christina and Charles).

**Teachers’ Responses about the Methods They Used to Deal with Student-teacher Conflicts**

**Use of Corporal Punishment**

All the female teachers and two of the male teachers (Jack and Joe) agreed that the most common way teachers responded to the conflicts they encountered with students was the use of corporal punishment. Most of the teachers also agreed that some teachers used the cane to respond to student-student conflicts. According to Joan, Dolly, Andrew, Patricia, Margaret and Jack many teachers used more corporal punishment to respond to
student-teacher conflicts than any other method. They also argued that many teachers still believed in the old adage, “spear the rod and spoil the child.” Joan cited an instance when she used corporal punishment:

Sometimes, while I was teaching, some of the students who were not interested in the lesson would sit at a corner of the class and instead of trying to be quiet, they would cause noise while I was teaching. When I turned around to tell them “keep quiet, don’t disturb the peace of others,” some of the rude boys would put up naughty behaviours to such an extent that I had to use the bat. I mean flog them.

Philip also pointed out, “students were not allowed to come to school late and we flogged them if they did.” When further asked how many strokes he would give a student he was late for classes, he responded:

We give them between two to six strokes. The maximum the Ministry of Education allowed was four lashes. But we usually did not follow strictly what this Ministry dictates. There’re certain crimes for which we needed to give the students more than six strokes. According to the Ministry of Education, only the Principal was allowed to give more than four strokes. But the Principal has mandated us to give up to six strokes depending on the crime.

Peter and Jack also noted that there were teachers who used the cane virtually to handle any type of conflict they encountered with the students. “Some teachers flogged students to the extent that they inflicted serious wounds on their bodies” (Peter).

**Sending the Students Out of the Class**

All the teachers pointed out that many times, they would send students out of their classes as a way of dealing with some of the misunderstandings they experienced with them. Joan described an instance when she would send students out of class:

There were times when boys who were taller and stronger than me would create problems in my class. Since I knew if I used the cane they would
fight back, I usually drove them out of my class if they persistently did not do their assignments or distrusted my class while I was teaching.

Margaret and Dolly shared similar experiences. They noted that as female teachers they did not feel strong enough to flog some of the big boys, who misbehaved in their classes, so they sent them out instead. Patricia noted that since she disliked using the cane, she sent out most of the students who came late to her class as well as those who dressed shabbily.

Joe shared another instance when he would normally send a student out of his class:

There’re certain students in my class who did not want to accept punishment from any teacher because their parents were well to do. Sometimes if they distracted other students while you’re teaching and you ask them to remain standing or kneel down in class they’d refuse. What I usually did with such students was to send them out of the class.

**Avoiding to Teach Certain Classes**

Philip, Andrew, Margaret and Jack indicated that sometimes some teachers who have had some very serious misunderstandings with certain students in a particular class avoided teaching that particular class until the students concerned were seriously punished. For example, Andrew said, “any time I found a classroom not well swept and organized, I simply avoided teaching that class for that particular period.” Patricia, Dolly and Joe made similar comments. On the other hand, Joan remarked, “I personally cannot teach a class that’s too noisy and so if the students caused too much noise; I’d just stop teaching and leave the class.”

I also observed that certain teachers could not tolerate students who were fond of provoking their colleagues and some teachers as well. Joe agreed:
In some of my classes, there’re certain students who liked teasing their colleagues while I was teaching. In fact sometimes they had the guts to provoke some of my colleagues who used certain mannerisms when they’re teaching. First, I'd warn the students to stop, if they persisted, I’d leave the class.

Philip, Peter and Margaret mentioned that sometimes when something was stolen from another student and nobody would want to name the person who did it, even though they would know, they left the class to influence the students to name the culprit. Peter shared his experience:

Last week, I went to teach in one of the Form One streams. I found the class very noisy and unruly. I yelled at everybody and there was some silence. I asked the prefect what was the matter. He told me that a student reported to him that someone had stolen his pen. Since this was not the first time that has happened in this particular class, I told them that I was sick and tired of such behaviour. I told the class that I would leave the class until they found the culprit. I’d not return to their class. I went to the staff room. Few minutes later, the prefect came to the staff room and told me that they had caught the student who stole the pen. I went back to class and referred the matter to the Disciplinary Committee. I'd leave the class each time I realized that the students did not want to co-operate with me in finding out students involved in mischievous activities in class.

**Complaining to the Principal or Disciplinary Committee**

All the teachers agreed that sometimes they referred certain conflicts they had with some of the students to either the Principal or Disciplinary Committee. “Students get into conflicts with teachers when they disobeyed the school rules because it’s our responsibility as teachers to monitor the students and make sure that they behaved properly” (Philip). When some of the students were caught gambling, using illegal drugs and wounding others, we report them to the disciplinary committee, which in turn would refer them to the Principal if the committee felt that the matter was quite serious (Joan, Joe, Dolly, Peter, Patricia and Margaret). According to Peter:
Deep misunderstandings often times developed between the students and teachers because of this. Some students would have a grudge against the teachers who reported them and would make flippant remarks or rude comments against them any time they could seize the opportunity. Teachers usually reported such cases to the Principal.

**Use of Other Forms of Physical Punishment**

Through out the data collection process I observed that all the teachers used other types of punishment other than the flogging in order to deal with some of the conflicts they encountered with the students (Field Notes, June 10, 1999). Peter agreed, “when students disturbed my class, I asked them to remain standing for the rest of the lesson.” Asking students to remain standing was a very common method teachers in our school used to deal with students who chronically caused noise when teachers were busy teaching (Joan, Andrew and Patricia).

Jack also mentioned that sometimes he punished the students who failed to do their assignments by asking them to remain kneeling down sometimes for part or the entire lesson. In both WASS and NASS, there were a couple of times when I saw some teachers asking the students who challenged their authority or disobeyed the school rules to kneel down on the playground sometimes when it was terribly hot (Field Notes, May 25, 1999). According to Jack, “certain students were extremely rude to teachers and sometimes part of their punishment included kneeling down either in or outside of the class.” Andrew also noted he was usually in conflict with certain students because they teased other students and made fun of other teachers while he was teaching. “What I sometimes did with such students was to ask them to remain standing in class with one leg and both hands up, or sometimes I asked them to kneel down and put their hands up as well,” he added.
In addition to the above-mentioned types of physical punishment, I also observed in WASS and NASS that some teachers asked students they had problems with to run round the soccer field two to three times (Field Notes, May 25, 1999). Joe, Philip and Peter agreed that some teachers used this method particularly with students who slept in class or did not pay attention while they were teaching. But Philip argued that this method sometimes worsened the student-teacher relationship. In the light of this, he observed that some students developed deep hatred for some of the teachers who used this type of punishment.

**Use of Verbal Insults and Threats**

All the female teachers observed that some of the male teachers whose sexual advances were rejected by the female students sometimes used verbal insults against the students. Patricia gave the following example to support this observation:

> Few days ago, a female student came to report to me a male teacher who was using derogatory remarks against her simply because she rejected his request for some intimate love relationship. This behaviour was common among certain teachers. I had a similar experience when I first came to this school.

Some of the male teachers were also very fond of threatening some of the female students who rejected their sexual demands (Joan, Dolly, Patricia and Margaret). “Some of these threats were sometimes executed by some of these male teachers” (Dolly). Joan and Margaret agreed that sometimes certain teachers would give poor grades to female students who refused to make love relationships with them.

> “Most times, very young and unmarried male teachers manifested this type of behaviour” (Patricia). Peter agreed and also observed that some male teachers threatened some of the male students who had love relationships with the female students they were
also trying to make love with. "Last week a male student complained to me that a teacher was threatening him that he'd teach him a lesson if he did not stop panting after his student girlfriend" (Peter).

**Summary**

I have presented the findings of the study based on the views of the students and teachers, the data collected from the documentary analysis I made and my personal observations. The Chapter has revealed the complex nature of conflict. Both the students and teachers have shown that conflict means many things to different people depending on the socio-economic, political and cultural contexts in which individuals find themselves. All the student except one perceive conflict to have negative impact on their relationships with other students and teachers. On the other hand, all the teachers except three feel conflict had negative consequences on their inter-personal relationships with their students.

All the teachers and students agreed on the major types of student-student conflicts. These included, use of school furniture, provocation, misunderstand over loan repayment, tribal stereotypes, differences in ideas, misunderstandings over dress code, use of limited playground, inappropriate sexual behaviours and high cost of education. The students also identified stealing and higher cost of education as some of the causes of student-student conflicts. With regards the causes of these conflicts, the students identified just three: poverty, disrespectful behaviours and poor school infrastructure. The teachers agreed with the two latter causes and in addition, identified ten other causes. These included mismanagement of school materials, poor recreational facilities, poor
gender moral and education, lack of respect for other students, over-enrolment, negative influence of gangster groups and rebels war, tribal stereotypes and lack of co-operation and commitment from the YES Ministry.

Both the teachers and students confirmed they used avoidance, violence, arbitration/judging and complaining to the Principals to respond to student-student conflicts. The students also indicated that stealing was another method used by some students to respond to student-student conflicts. On the other, the teachers noted that they gave advice to students in conflicts.

The Chapter also showed that the students and teachers experienced similar as well as different types of conflicts, which were largely caused by societal factors and to a lesser extent by the incompatibility of individual needs and goals. Poor communication, teachers’ misuse of power, teachers’ negligence of duties and negative gangster influence were some of the causes identified by the teachers and students. A more in-depth analysis of these findings is presented in the next Chapter.
Chapter 5: Analysis and Discussion of the Research Findings


The purpose of this study has been to describe how selected teachers and students in secondary schools in urban Sierra Leone perceive and manage interpersonal conflicts in complex emergencies, with a view to identifying the challenges for building a culture of peace and for further research. This Chapter provides a detailed description of the main themes that emerged from the analysis of the participants' understandings of the meaning of conflict, the types of student-student and student-teacher conflicts experienced, their causes and the major methods used to manage such conflicts. The findings of the study are discussed and analyzed under four main themes:

- The meaning and effects of conflict
- The types of conflict
- The causes of conflict
- Conflict management methods

These major themes are further divided into sub-themes in order to provide a more in-depth description of the sense I made out of the findings. This Chapter attempts to compare and contrast the responses of the students and teachers in each of the main themes discussed.

Several conceptual frameworks of previous researchers in the field, for example, Bickmore (in press, 1999a, and 1998), Moore (1996), Mosha (1994), Albert, Awe, Hérault and Omitoogun (1995), Zartman, (2000); Schrumpf, Crawford and Bodine
The Meaning of Conflict

The study revealed that all the students and teachers had different understandings of the meaning of conflict. They were all of the opinion that "the term conflict has no clear single meaning" (Rahim, 1986:2). The study also revealed that majority of them understood the meaning of conflict from a negative point of view. They perceived conflict as being destructive. Few students and teachers had positive perspectives of the meaning of conflict. The findings revealed that teachers with positive views of conflict were mostly those who were heads of the Guidance and Counselling Departments. These teachers had introductory courses in conflict resolution and moral education during their undergraduate studies. It is worth noting that the study brought perhaps a new dimension or focus in conceptualizing the meaning of conflict. That is, the need to recognize the socio-economic, cultural and political contexts, which inform individuals' perceptions of the meaning of conflict. For example, the students' and teachers' understandings of the meanings of conflict are informed by the day-to-day issues related to their interpersonal interactions and struggles to meet their basic school needs – adequate school furniture, playground, classrooms, libraries and prescribed textbooks and stationery, to name but a few examples.

The study also attempted to find out from the participants whether conflict in itself was good, bad or neutral (Brown, 1983). The responses were varied. Only one female student indicated that conflict had some positive effects on the disputants. She argued that conflict enabled the disputants to strengthen their bonds of friendship in a

The bulk of the students emphasized the negative aspects of conflict based on their informed experiences. They saw conflict as the main source of fights, bad feelings and disincentives for teachers to teach certain classes. The devastating effects of the war and the general deplorable living conditions of the majority of Sierra Leoneans somehow influenced these negative views. Students were faced with a multitude of complex realities for which they had no readily available solutions. And as Costantino and Merchant (1996) argue, too much of conflict causes damage to people and property. These negative perspectives of the effect of conflicts on the students’ inter-personal relationships support the argument that conflict can be destructive (Reuck, 1984; Tillet, 1993; and Costantino and Merchant, 1996).

With regards to how the teachers viewed the effects of conflicts, only four teachers (three of them were females) identified some positive aspects of conflict. Three of them (including two females) were heads of the Guidance and Counseling Departments. These teachers saw conflict as an opportunity to learn new ways of dealing with people in future misunderstandings. This supports Schrumpf, Crawford and Usadel (1991:7) argument that “conflict can be a positive force for personal and social change.” De Reuck (1984:99) strongly agrees:

Conflict is always about change. Conflict is about change in social structure and institutions, in the distribution of resources, in human relations at many levels... Those who promote one form of change enter conflict with those whose interest is to promote another... There are, therefore, always likely to be two sets of issues in any conflict: what changes shall occur and at whose expense.
Similarly, Brown (1983:7) "...see[s] conflict as energizing, creative, and evidence of social dynamism." Supporting this argument, Tillet (1993:1) notes that "[conflict] can...promote, new ideas, encourage better understanding, strengthen personal relationships, and facilitate more effective solutions to problems..."

On the other hand, conflict has its negative aspects. In fact the majority of the teachers saw “conflict situations [as frequent] sources of intense frustrations, discomfort and...risks” (Bisno, 1988:12). It was evident in my observations of general school assemblies and classes that conflict situations such as the lack of adequate school furniture, the limited playground space, the overcrowded classrooms, to name but a few examples, entailed significant risks (Bisno, 1988). The study showed that these led to serious fights and other forms of violent behaviours such as insults, name-calling and bullying. I observed that in the school context, social integration and stability are central to the establishment of harmony among students and between students and teachers, and the school administration. Against this background therefore, “conflict is seen as destructive, dangerous, and indicative of social pathologies” (Brown, 1983:6). By and large, students were not encouraged to engage in discussions that would create major disagreements in views/opinions for fear that they would lead to tensions and unproductive relations among students and between students and teachers (Brown, 1983). The current rebel war certainly informed this type of negativism about the nature of conflict.
Major Types of Conflicts

The study showed that there was general agreement among the participants that "conflict manifests itself in a variety of shapes, sizes, and even disguises" Bisno (1988:13). The types of conflicts identified in all the three schools were the same with very few exceptions. The study focused on interpersonal conflicts (that is, conflicts between two or more individuals). In this section, the major types of conflicts and their causes, which were revealed by the study, are analyzed and discussed. The works of Schrumpf, Crawford and Bodine (1997); Schrumpf, Crawford and Usadel (1991); Moore (1996); Druckman (1993) and Albert et al. (1995), to name but a few examples informs the analysis and discussion. The following major types of conflicts emerged out of the study.

Conflict of Limited Resources

Conflict of limited resources was by far the most prevalent type of conflict among the students, between the students and teachers and within the local community (Schrumpf; Crawford and Usadel, 1991).

In the three schools, the limited resources that were identified were mostly "time, space, money, equipment [and] property" (Schrumpf; Crawford and Usadel, 1991:18). The argument by Schrumpf; Crawford and Usadel (1991) that "conflicts involving limited resources...are typically the easiest to resolve" (p. 18) may be true for North American schools due to their relatively well-developed economies. But the situation in Sierra Leone was quite different. In that country, conflicts involving limited resources were the most difficult to resolve because basic school infrastructure and material needs were just not there. Toilets, books and furniture could be easily provided in a situation
where the state is functioning and economically viable. But in the case of Sierra Leone, conflict of limited resources is beyond the capacity of schools to easily manage.

The study challenges the argument by Schrumpf, Crawford and Bodine (1997:19) that:

Limited resource conflicts may not be resolved because the resource itself may not define the problem. When solutions are crafted that deal only with the limited resource that seems to be the source of the conflict, the real problem is not resolved, and the conflict will return.

In a North American/Western context, this may be true because most of the students’ hierarchies of needs are at the level that might have to do with the need for high self-esteem, a deep sense of belonging and power (Schrumpf, Crawford and Bodine, 1997; and Schrumpf, Crawford and Usadel, 1991). In Sierra Leone, the study revealed that most students and teachers were faced with a multitude of socio-economic problems. Therefore, I argue that the issues of self-esteem, recognition, power and a sense of belonging are secondary. Most students could not afford to buy adequate books, pens, pencils, desks, chairs, clothing and shoes. All the three schools lacked adequate material and financial resources. Therefore, I argue that these basic and fundamental human needs must be met first before any serious attempt at introducing a meaningful peace education programme in the schools. Galtung (1990:286) strongly agrees:

The [basic] human needs constitute a rock-bottom basis. They are the kinds of things that if they are not satisfied human beings disintegrate, falling asunder, falling apart. People not only become much less than what they could be; they are reduced to a low animal level and may be ultimately pass away.

Against this background, the YES Ministry needs to continue to explore local and international funding sources to enable it meet its obligations regarding the provision of
adequate school grants to purchase furniture, library books, science materials and equipment and other essential school supplies. According to the study, the Ministry had not met much of its financial obligations to the schools. It could not even pay teachers’ salaries on time. In each of the three schools, teachers were owed at least one month’s salary. While it may be true that the rebel war was partly to blame, some teachers argued that the corruption and mismanagement of the available limited resources by some officials of this Ministry, was one of the causes of the late or non-payment of teachers’ salaries. In fact, at the time of the study, the Permanent Secretary of the Ministry was under investigation for allegedly squandering teachers’ salaries (mostly those in rebel-held areas) in the tune of about one million Canadian dollars.

It was not surprising therefore, to see teachers involved in Mammy Coker activities, such as running ‘expensive’ private lessons, publishing ‘expensive’ pamphlets, and engaging in petty-trading, photography just to irk a living. I empathize with the teachers to a very large extent. Let me describe the current realities in which teachers lived just to explain why I empathize with them. Most teachers have an average of 5 – 10 family members. They would require at least one bag (50 kg) of rice a month to feed their families. In January 2000, a bag of rice cost about $43.00 - 46.00 Canadian dollars (depending on which part of the country one lived). Secondary teachers were paid between $120.00- 200.00 Canadian dollars per month. Rents in Freetown for a 3 – 4 bedroom house ranged from $500.00 – 3,000.00 Canadian dollars per year, depending on which part of the city one rented. If other essential costs such as health, education, transportation and clothing were added to the above costs, the average teacher needed to be a ‘magician’ to survive. Indeed, teachers, like the majority of Sierra Leoneans, barely
survived instead of living. As shown in the next sections, these hard times for teachers have contributed to some of the conflicts they encountered with the students. As indicated by some teachers, they went to school with lots of worries about how to cope with their financial difficulties. As shown in the section under responses to conflicts, this certainly influenced their responses to student-student and student-teacher conflicts quite negatively and violently.

**Structural Conflicts**

Structural conflicts among students and between students and teachers emerged in all the three schools due to unequal power, authority, control, ownership or distribution of resources and time constraints (Moore, 1996). The issue of "unequal control, ownership or distribution of resources" (Moore, 1996:60) was seen by many students and teachers as a common type of conflict in the three schools. As earlier mentioned most of the students from poor homes went to school without lunch money, essential school materials and equipment. They saw their counterparts from the rich homes wearing gorgeous school uniforms, and adequate school supplies and lunch money. The study has shown that some of the students from very rich backgrounds looked low upon the less fortunate students. This led to some tensions among the students.

It was also evident that some of the students from rich and influential homes and major ethnic groups had more access to power and authority. Some of them were elected as class/senior prefects and executives of the schools’ clubs/societies. I argue that it is important that the marginalized students’ needs for power are met as well. "[If their needs for] achieving, accomplishing, and being recognized and respected" (Schrumpf, Crawford and Usadel, 1991:7) are not met, they would lead to conflicts. The reduction of
the class time from forty-five minutes per period to twenty minutes created lots of constraints for both the students and teachers. Teachers were expected to complete the prescribed syllabi and ensure that the students met the requirements of the internal and external examinations. Being human, they could only do what was practical and realistic. The losers were of course the students. Other examples of structural conflicts included misunderstandings over the high cost of teachers' private classes and pamphlets, poor library facilities, high student-teacher ratio, poor recreational facilities and infrastructure.

**Conflict of Interests**

Another type of conflict that emerged out of the study was conflict of interests. The conflict of interests among students was largely due to the competition for tangible resources or rewards (Druckman, 1993). The study agreed with Moore (1996) that conflicts of interests were mostly actual competition over substantial interests. For example, in each of the schools, there were limited playground spaces, inadequate sports and games items and equipment and limited library facilities. In the field of sports, most students got into conflict situations because they played games without setting the rules clearly and without a referee to ensure that procedures of sports and games were followed in order to prevent unproductive conflicts. The limited resources for sports and games also denied the bulk of the students, especially the small boys and the girls, access to recreational opportunities. These findings support Moore’s (1996) views that conflicts of interests are caused by procedural and psychological interests. The study also indicated that student-teacher conflicts of interests mostly occurred when both teachers and students were interested in establishing intimate love relationships with some of the female students.
Conflict of Values

The study revealed that conflict of values occurred more between the student prefects and the rest of the student body and between the students and teachers over school rules and regulations. Conflict of values erupted when the schools’ values in terms of what students should or should not wear while in school were in direct contrasts to what the students would like to wear. The study also showed that many of the male students would like to wear shorts below the knee because it was the most popular style for youths. It made youths look ‘tough’ and abreast with the ‘youth times’. Some students who have been influenced by Western movies also liked to dress like some of the Movie Stars. Others adored and imitated the *rastafarian* ways of dressing. The schools were opposed to these kinds of behaviours. They accepted shorts for the male students that were not below the knee. On the other hand, they disapproved of any form of dress that was contrary to what they had prescribed.

Similarly, the female students liked to wear chains, earrings, necklaces and the like. They also preferred not plaiting their hair, but rather, make different fanciful hairstyles that were the most popular and latest hairstyles on the ‘market’. Some of the female students from rich family backgrounds also preferred wearing the latest and most expensive shoes. On the contrary, the schools did not accept these ways of dressing. These findings are in agreement with Moore’s (1996) argument that conflict of values emanate from “different ways of life [and] ideology…” (p. 60).

The study also supports the argument by Schrumpf, Crawford and Bodine (1997:19) that “when values are in conflict, the disputants often perceive the dispute as a personal attack…” The majority of students were very hostile to the student prefects and
teachers who tried to enforce the school rules and obligations. Of course as maintained by Schrumpf, Crawford and Bodine (1997) most times both parties thought what they were doing was right and good and what the other was doing was wrong and bad. Both the student prefects and teachers argued, “conflicts involving values tend to be difficult to resolve…” (Schrumpf, Crawford and Usadel, 1991:8). As earlier mentioned, this was because they considered these differences in values as personal attacks, instead of focusing on the real issues (Schrumpf, Crawford and Bodine, 1997; Schrumpf, Crawford and Usadel, 1991). I observed that the student prefects and teachers (especially those in the disciplinary committees) spent a good deal of their time trying to ensure that students observed and obeyed the school rules and regulations.

Conflict of Ideas

The study has also shown that students faced several conflicts of ideas among themselves and between them and the teachers. Among the students, there were major ideological differences regarding how to deal with the rebels and former members of the Sierra Leonean army who have caused so much mayhem on the people of Sierra Leone. While some held the views that the rebels should be totally eliminated through military force, others felt that dialogue was the more appropriate and sustaining option. It was obvious that the rebel factor polarized the students’ ideological orientation more than anything else did (Druckman, 1993). The unthinkable atrocities committed by the rebels influenced some students to loathe anything that has to do with the rebels and ex-soldiers. And as observed by Druckman (1993), the more polarized the ideological orientation, the more difficult it is to resolve the differences. Conflict of ideas between the students and teachers were very limited since most of the teachers did not engage the students in
informed dialogue that led to serious ideological differences. According to the data, some of the teachers and students did not take differences in ideas very lightly. The study has shown that in the Sierra Leonean context, disagreeing with other people is not culturally appropriate. I argue that any peacebuilding initiative in the schools in Sierra Leone should revisit this issue. It is important for both the teachers and students to realize that having differences in ideas is a fact of life.

**Conflict of Basic Psychological Needs**

The study also showed that some of the student-student and student-teacher conflicts erupted due to the neglect of students’ psychological needs for belonging, power, freedom and fun (Schrumpf; Crawford and Usadel, 1991). For example in the literary and debating societies (L and D S) in all the three schools, most students saw power to be in the hands of a few senior students from one major ethnic group. Also, new students were marginalized most times by the students who had been attending the schools for much longer periods. Some of the students and teachers also observed that the selection of prefects was largely controlled and influenced by the teachers and the school administration. Students’ participation in major issues affecting them was very limited.

The study also revealed that teachers had enormous power to determine the fate of students engaged in conflicts that were referred to them. They also set some of the school rules governing students’ behaviours without the informed participation of the students. In the classrooms, teachers were also seen to be the centre of knowledge production and dissemination. There was very little students’ participation in determining both the content and process of their daily classroom experiences. The poor quality of school infrastructure, libraries, science labs and recreational facilities created an unconducive
teaching-learning environment. It was evident that the teachers, and students' need for belonging and having fun in school was largely unmet.

**Conflict of Relationships**

The study identified conflict of relationships as one of the very serious types of conflicts among the students and between the students and teachers. Major examples of conflict of relationships among the students and between the students and teachers were the issues of rivalry over girl friends or boy friends and sexual harassment. In this context, sexual harassment is defined as:

...an expression of sexism, which reflects and reinforces the unequal power that exists between men and women in our patriarchal society. It's part of a pattern of male-female interaction in which men routinely express their dominance over women...It is part of the continuum of violence that restricts the lives of girls and women (Larkin, 1994:21-24).

Most of the teachers and students observed that some of the male students had very strong 'love' emotions towards the female students (Moore 1996). There was competition among the male students over who should develop love relationships with the relatively very few female students in each of the schools. In addition to this, some of the male teachers also extended intimate relationships to some of these few female students. Some of teachers indicated that in principle, the YES Ministry did not tolerate this type of professional misconduct. Some teachers noted though that in practice, the said Ministry had not done much to punish those guilty of such offences. The study also showed that conflicts of relationships occurred among students because of tribal stereotypes/misconceptions. These findings agree with Moore’s (1996) argument that misconceptions or stereotypes lead to relationship conflicts.
**Major Causes of Conflicts**

This section describes the major causes of student-student and student-teacher conflicts that emerged from the study. Only the most common causes that affected both the student-student and student-teacher relationships are discussed. Also, the causes discussed in this section are those that were found to be common to all the three schools.

**Poverty**

The study showed that conflict of limited resources in all the schools was partly caused by poverty. By poverty I mean, "lack of access of some members in a society to the basic essentials in life" (Albert, Awe, Hérault and Omitoogun, 1995:1). Most students came from homes that lived below the poverty line. The bulk of the parents could not adequately meet the school needs of their children. This limited resource base was one of the underlying causes of most of the student-student conflicts. Supporting this view, Schrumpf, Crawford and Usadel (1991:18) argue. "limited resources and different values may appear to be the cause of conflicts, but unmet needs are truly at their root." I argue that the poverty in Sierra Leone is rather complex and compounded by several factors. Albert, Awe, Hérault and Omitoogun (1995:1-2) sums it up very vividly:

Poverty in urban Africa has been compounded by rapid population growth, agricultural stagnation, environmental degradation, protracted civil wars and mismanagement of human and material resources by self-imposed and kleptocratic rulers. The introduction of the structural adjustment programs (SAP) in the 1980s, rather solving the problems of poverty, has been so unsuccessful that it has worsened the economic situation.
Based on my general observations, these comments represent a true picture of the current situation in Sierra Leone. The study also highlighted the fact that most teachers were also experiencing hard times. Some of the teachers indicated that they were barely surviving. As a result of this, some of them argued that they could not afford to waste time trying to resolve some of the student-student and student-teachers conflicts. In the light of this, Bickmore (1998:54) argues, “teachers in stressed urban public school systems have plenty of reasons for dissent and disagreement, because they face complex problems for which there are no easy answers.”

The study also showed that poverty has influenced some of the students to engage in stealing, refusal to repay loans, cheating and truancy. Similarly, the study also revealed that financial constraints have contributed to some of the teachers engaging in various extra-school occupations such as trading, photography, running of private lessons to name but a few examples. It has been shown that these types of activities have adversely affected the inter-personal relationships among the students and between the students and teachers, and have also led to some of the student-teacher conflicts. Fisher et al. (2000:8) agree, “deep-rooted conflict is caused by unmet or frustrated basic human needs.”

**Misuse of Power**

It has been revealed in this study that most of the students and teachers agreed that some of the prefects and teachers misused their power while performing their duties. For instance, some prefects used their positions to punish students who disagreed with them during class discussions, or those students who competed with them for power and love relationships with the female students. The lack of informed participation of the students in the choice of their prefects made some of the prefects uncountable to the
students for their actions. Since some of the prefects realized that they were only accountable to the teachers and school administration they ignored students' concerns about the excessive nature of the way they dealt with students they were in conflict with. When students were denied the freedom to make their own choice of prefects, their need for power will be unmet and would therefore, lead to conflict (Frasher, et al., 2000, Schrumpf, Crawford and Usadel, 1991). The study supports Moore's (1996) argument that unequal power and authority causes structural conflicts.

It was also shown by the study that some of the students from rich homes and major ethnic groups dominated some students from the minority ethnic groups during elections for leadership roles in the schools' clubs. In fact the old students always regarded some of the new students as strangers. Some students indicated that there were several incidences of discrimination against certain students from low-income families by some students from economically rich backgrounds. It is important that the students' need for belonging is met (Schrumpf, Crawford and Usadel, 1991).

Another cause of structural conflicts was that some of the students' behaviour patterns were destructive (Moore, 1996). Some broke some of the school furniture purely out of irresponsible behaviour. Others distracted students' attention during class time unnecessarily. Such unwarranted behaviours hindered cooperation among students and between the students and teachers (Johnson and Johnson, 1994; Moore, 1996).

On the other hand, the study also revealed that many of the teachers abused their power. Some of the teachers flogged students for very trivial conflicts like teasing, joking and name-calling. This overuse of power and authority was a major recipe for some of the structural conflicts experienced by the students. For example, some teachers
concentrated their energies towards private lessons rather than the normal classes, because they could charge fees at will. Students who failed to patronize their economically desperate teachers did not only risk passing their examinations, but also losing the favours and co-operation accorded the student-sympathizers of the teachers' *Mammy Coker* survival strategies.

Finally, it is worth noting that time constraint also caused structural conflicts (Schrumpf, Crawford and Usadel, 1991). The reduction in class time by the YES Ministry in order to accommodate the hundreds of internally displaced students and teachers flooding into the city, constrained both the students and teachers. There was very little time for constructive and meaningful student-student and student-teacher classroom interactions. The overcrowded nature of the classrooms also created a rather unconducive teaching and learning environment. And as Johnson and Johnson (1992, 1991 and 1987) argue a poor physical environment hinders co-operation.

**Limited School Resources**

According to the study, all the three schools had limited resources. This situation caused conflicts of interests and need among the students and between the students. The major factors are summarized below. On the part of the students, conflict of interests were caused by more than one student wanting at the same time:

- A chair;
- Desk;
- A library book;
- The hand tennis court;
- The soccer ball;
- A duster
- A blackboard ruler
Johnson and Johnson (1991:1:7) agree, “when two students both want the same library book at the same time, a conflict of interests exists.”

It is important to note that Sierra Leone inherited a colonial educational system from Great Britain, which laid a lot of emphasis on grades and the passing of both internal and external examinations. Students were streamed according to their grades. Also, most times, students with high grades were given positions of leadership (such as prefects, executives of clubs, etc.) in the schools. As shown by the study, conflict of interests occurred when some of these students felt they were better than others (Johnson and Johnson, 1991). The study also found out that the uneven attention and rewards given by some teachers bred conflicts of interests among the students. Another case in point was that, sometimes two or more students showed intimate relationships to the same female students. This resulted in a big clash of interests.

With regard to conflict of interests between students and teachers, one of the causes was when a student and teacher wanted to develop intimate relationships with the same female student. In all the three schools, there were very few female students. Their limited numbers were sources of conflict of interests for both students and teachers (Johnson and Johnson, 1991). Some of the female students who were victims of this felt quite uncomfortable. They also remarked that they lived in constant fear throughout their time in school.

**Incompatibility of Values**

The main causes of this type of conflict for both the students and teachers were differences in life styles and ideologies (Moore, 1996, Frasher, et al., 2000). With regards the students, the study showed that some of the students had chosen as their heroes, some
of the film stars in some of the popular *Rambo*-type movies from the West, especially American cowboy films. They imitated their ways of dressing, talking, walking and attitudes to life. Many students did not tolerate any student who was seen to join gangsters imitating these movie stars.

Stealing, dishonesty (for example non-payment of loans) and telling lies were other causes of conflict of values among the students. Some students often felt that their prefects were not fair and did not treat students equally. There were differences among the students regarding fairness and equality when it came to sharing of power and enforcing punishments. Schrumpf, Crawford and Usadel (1991:8) agree that “when people in conflict talk about honesty, equal rights, or fairness, the conflict is probably about different values.” For both the students and teachers, conflicts of values between students and teachers were caused by several factors. For example, in all the three schools, there were differences in values among students and between students and teachers regarding whether or not teachers should organize private lessons and charge fees for them. Some students felt the teachers were cheating them and that it was the students’ right to be taught by the teachers because they were being paid by the government to teach them. On the other hand some of the teachers felt since government’s conditions of salaries and services were deplorable, they had a right to find what they considered as genuine means for earning extra money to sustain themselves and their families. There were some students who agreed with the teachers’ argument. These differences in convictions and principles caused some conflicts of values between the students and teachers (Schrumpf, Crawford and Usadel, 1991).
The study also revealed that several students and teachers felt that some of the teachers were not fair with their grading systems. Some teachers favoured some students over the others as manifested by their “different criteria for evaluating ideas or behaviour” (Moore, 1996:60). Similarly, both students and teachers also accused some teachers of flogging some students far beyond what was normally approved by the school administration.

**Incompatibility of Ideas and Intolerance of Differences in Opinions**

According to the findings of the study, conflicts of ideas among students were caused by three main factors. The first factor was the incompatibility of ideas (Johnson and Johnson, 1991). This occurred mostly when students tried to determine how the limited playground space they had should be divided in a manner that would accommodate as many students as possible. The second factor was that students who had more access to relevant textbooks and other sources of learning were better informed than those with limited educative sources of information. This caused differences in their ability to conceptualize in an informed manner. Finally, unfamiliar ideas that challenged already known information also contributed to the conflict of ideas (Johnson and Johnson, 1991).

The study on the other hand revealed that conflict of ideas between the students and teachers existed when the students’ ideas, information and opinions about certain topics were incompatible with those of the teachers (Johnson and Johnson, 1991).
Neglect of Basic Psychological Needs

The study supported the argument by Frasher, et al., (2000); Schrumpf, Crawford and Usadel (1991) that a good number of the conflicts of basic psychological needs occurred when the students' needs for belonging, power, freedom and fun were not met. Unmet psychological basic needs were also caused by the lack of adequate activities for both the students and teachers to share some fun together. Recreation is a basic psychological need that was not largely met in all the three schools. Among the students the need for fun was mostly met through provocation, teasing and name-calling. While those students who provoked their colleagues saw that as fun, some of the students and teachers observed that the majority of the students who were nicknamed or teased felt not being respected, recognized and empowered.

Poor Communication

The study found out that poor communication among the students and between the students and teachers led to some of the student-student and student-teacher conflicts in all the three schools studied. There were several barriers to communication between the students and their prefects and between the students and the teachers. The study indicated that some of the prefects were biased when dealing with students in conflicts. Favouritism blocked the capacity and willingness of the students to listen to the prefects or the other party. Inattentive listening by the parties in conflict also blocked effective communication. There were cases of students using abusive words when confronted with conflict situations. Students' rivalries over girl friends or boy friends caused emotional outbursts that led to some fighting, verbal abuses and malice. The study also noted that some students felt isolated and lonely due to lack of effective communication and support.
from some of their classmates (Kreidler, 1984). Poor communication among students also caused to a large extent misperceptions or stereotypes. All these factors caused a lot of the conflicts. Therefore, Filley (1975:10) argues that "conflict will be greater when barriers to communication exist." Moore's (1996) and Kreidler's (1984) also stated that poor communication or miscommunication causes conflict of relationships.

The study also pointed out that some of the student-teacher conflicts were caused by poor communication. A few teachers listened to the students’ complaints but the majority simply told students not to disturb them with their problems. The study also showed that in class most teachers did not encourage students to raise questions or to disagree with them on some debatable issues. This approach did not create a forum for students to express their emotions, needs and wishes effectively (Kreidler, 1984, Moore, 1986). As revealed by the study, this led to frustrations, tensions and mistrust between the students and teachers. Another factor that hindered effective communication between the students and teachers was the teachers’ use of verbal abuse. The study also showed that there were many times when teachers would shout or yell at students unnecessarily. Students saw the teachers as being quite undemocratic and unwilling to encourage students to make informed participation in knowledge production. Teachers saw themselves as the only ‘fixers’ of students’ problems. This however, does not improve students’ capacity to communicate effectively. Therefore, Bickmore (in press, p. 16) argues that "when students discuss and resolve community problems in a democratic context, they practice listening to and talking with persons who hold different view points." As revealed by the study, this was hardly the case for both the students and teachers. Most times, when both the students and teachers handled conflicts, effective
communication skills such as active listening, paraphrasing and summarizing of the disputants’ narratives, asking probing questions, giving and receiving effective feedback without being judgmental and giving precise instructions, were hardly used.

Conflict Management Methods

Four major conflict management styles emerged from this study: avoidance; confrontation; arbitration; physical, verbal, and structural violence. They are analyzed and discussed below.

Avoidance

The study found out that most of the junior and smaller students who had interpersonal conflicts with either some of the prefects or ‘big students’ (mostly bullies) avoided them by withdrawing, ignoring or pretending the problems did not exist (The Colorado School Mediation Project, 1994. Schrumpf, Crawford and Usadel, 1991). It was also observed that, most of the students who avoided dealing with conflicts were less assertive and co-operative (Malone, 1995). As argued by Schrumpf, Crawford and Usadel (1991:9), this approach did not meet the basic needs of the students in conflict.

Similarly, the study also revealed that most students who found themselves in conflict situations with their teachers avoided the conflict by withdrawing, ignoring the entire conflict, or suppressing their feelings (Schrumpf, Crawford and Usadel, 1991; The Colorado School Mediation Project, 1994). The findings agree with Schrumpf, Crawford and Usadel, 1991:9) that:

Avoiding the conflict may help in the short run – for instance, it may help someone keep from losing his [or her] temper. However, avoidance
usually makes a person doubt himself [or herself] or feel anxious about the future. In addition, because the conflict is never brought up, it can never be resolved. As a result, the person’s basic needs are never met.

This was manifested by cases of students who used physical and verbal violence to vent their frustrations and anger because they could not ‘stomach’ the conflict any longer. There were some students who were aware that “avoidance [was] not useful if it [was] only strategy…” (Malone, 1995:116). The study agreed with Schrumpf, Crawford and Bodine (1997) that most of the students who avoided dealing with conflicts lacked negotiation and mediation skills. Some students and teachers avoided such conflicts because they were less important.

The study did not agree with Schrumpf, Crawford and Bodine (1997:20) that “when people choose to avoid conflict, it is usually because they are not interested in maintaining the relationship…” On the contrary, some of the students usually avoided the conflicts because they wanted to maintain social harmony with their colleagues. Regarding student-teacher conflicts, the study noted that many students avoided letting their teachers know that they were experiencing some conflicts of some sort with them, for fear of being in the ‘bad books’ of the teachers. Students who were bold enough to vent their dislikes of some teachers’ behaviours were often punished severely. It was out of this fear that the majority of students avoided as much as possible conflicting situations with their teachers and the school administration in general. Most teachers still held on to the traditional belief that children or young people should not challenge the wisdom of the elders. Students were therefore taught to recognize the teacher as the centre of knowledge. There were however, a handful of teachers who encouraged critical
dialogue between them and their students, thus creating opportunities for students to participate in managing their conflicts.

The study also showed that most of the teachers avoided dealing with student-student conflicts by referring them either to their prefects or the disciplinary committee. The most common reasons that some of these teachers gave were either they were too busy or that it was none of their business. The fact of the matter is that most of the teachers lacked knowledge and skills in conflict education. Conflict education was just recently introduced in some of the Teacher Training Colleges in the country. In fact the culture of organized formal peace and conflict education is still non-existent in both the primary and secondary schools throughout the country. From my meetings with some of the officials of the YES Ministry I realized that the ministry was aware of this and had already begun to review the school curriculum in order to meet this need. While I agree that avoiding conflicts might be helpful in some circumstances (especially in life-threatening situations), I feel that most of the conflicts identified in the study that were mostly avoided could have been negotiated if both the students and teachers had learnt constructive conflict resolution techniques. Avoiding negotiable conflicts does not solve the problem but only masks it for a while. Frasher, et al., (2000) agrees, “if conflict is suppressed, this leads to future problems.”

**Arbitration**

The study found out that, “the prevalent practice for managing conflicts in schools involves arbitration, with the adult authority serving as arbitrator to settle the dispute for the parties” (Schrumpf, Crawford and Bodine, 1997:24). For some of the student-student conflicts involving lateness during the general assemblies and or classes, causing noise
during the absence of teachers and minor quarrels, the class prefects served as arbitrators. The senior school prefects arbitrated conflicts between the class prefects and students. The conflicts, which they could not resolve, were passed on to the form teachers for arbitration. The disciplinary committees arbitrated major misbehaviours such as fighting, stealing and use of abusive language. According to Schrumpf, Crawford and Bodine (1997), the students usually accepted rulings from this type of arbitration without questioning. The prefects and teachers through arbitration managed student-student conflicts of limited resources, interests and relationships.

On the other hand student-teacher conflicts were handled by some of the senior teachers, the disciplinary committees and the principals. The Principals arbitrated serious cases such as excessive corporal punishments that led to wounding, sexual harassment and chronic absenteeism during classes by some teachers. It must be noted at this point that most of the time, teachers were favoured and protected even when they wronged the students.

**Use of Physical, Verbal and Non-verbal Violence**

The majority of the students felt that not all student-student conflicts could be settled peacefully (Fisher, Kopelman and Schneider, 1994). Quite a good number of them expressed their responses to conflicts with their colleagues through anger, verbal or physical threats, or aggression, and fights (Schrumpf, Crawford and Usadel, 1991; and Schrumpf, Crawford and Bodine, 1997). Others used name-calling, teasing and provocation. The study revealed that many male students used physical violence to deal with conflicts with their male colleagues. They also used verbal and non-verbal violence to respond to conflicts they experienced with some of the female students.
There were very few cases of students using physical, verbal and non-verbal forms of violence to respond to student-teacher conflicts. On the contrary, the study indicated that most teachers used the above-mentioned forms of violence to respond to most of the conflicts they experienced with the students.

**Structural Violence**

According to the study some of the prefects and influential students used structural violence to manage some of the conflicts they encountered with some of their colleagues. For example during lunch breaks most students rushed to the limited playgrounds to carve a court for hand tennis or some other games. Most of the time, the senior or strong students bullied the smaller boys and denied them the right to utilize the limited playground space, sports and games items and equipment. Some of the teachers and students also revealed that a few students, mostly those from the major ethnic groups, rich parental backgrounds and old students of the schools monopolized students’ power and authority.

The study also highlighted that many of the teachers managed student-student and student-teacher conflicts using various forms of structural violence. These included use of coercive force or pressure, improper use of teaching time, charging exorbitant fees for private classes and pamphlets. Students’ participation in the decision-making processes in these critical areas affecting them was visibly very limited. Therefore, Moore’s suggestion that one way of improving structural violence was “[to] establish a fair and mutually acceptable decision-making process” (1996:60) though laudable was not applicable in all the three schools because the decision-making processes were top-down.
The Principals influenced most of the decisions regarding the general school discipline with recommendations from the disciplinary committees.

Summary

This Chapter has analyzed and discussed the research findings. The major themes that emerged from the study have also been presented. Some of the themes that emerged supported the works of previous researchers in the subject while other themes challenged some of the arguments of related research findings. In the conceptualization of the meaning of conflict it was evident that the participants’ overwhelming negative perceptions of conflicts were largely influenced by their deplorable socio-economic, political and educational contexts. Similarly, the types of conflicts and their causes and the methods used to handle such conflicts were informed by the above-mentioned contexts. Therefore, the analysis of the research findings raises the importance of contextualizing the nature and dynamics of the concept of conflict. The analysis also reveals that to attempt to define the meaning of conflict, its nature and manifestations in universal terms would be naïve and undemocratic. What this Chapter has shown is that conflict is a very complex and dynamic term. Therefore, it is important for individuals in societies across cultures to constantly reflect critically on their understandings of the meaning of conflict, its types, causes and constructive ways of dealing with conflicts. It is without doubt that as the quality of life of individuals in any society improves, their perceptions of conflicts would change. Also, as societies become more democratic and people become more enlightened and empowered, they would appreciate the transformative nature of conflict better. On the other hand, I argue that individuals denied
the basic human needs such as food, shelter, clothing, safety and security; health, education, and democratic participation in their own development as well as the development of their communities or societies would likely view conflict negatively and respond to its causes unproductively. The analysis of the research findings clearly supports these observations.
Chapter 6: Challenges for Transformative Peace Education in Post-War Sierra Leone and Further Research

It is difficult to see how such a research can have a serious impact on our society, especially influencing our school curriculum and the trend of education in our country. You see I have been engaged in a little bit of some peace groups. We’ve a group we call International Peace Group [false name for confidentiality]. We went to some workshops and we came up with some resolutions, which included the introduction of peace education in the schools. This was submitted to the appropriate Government Ministry, but nothing has ever been said about it. I’ve a concern that this may just be something you’re doing to earn your degree. And we have seen so much research being done in the country. The Problem has always been the lack of follow-up and implementation. A lot of good ideas remain in books and offices (Jack, An extract from Jack’s interview, 1999).

The purpose of this study has been to describe how selected students and teachers in secondary schools perceive and manage interpersonal conflicts during complex emergencies with the ultimate goal of identifying challenges for building a culture of peace and for further research. The study showed that the majority of the participants generally perceived conflict to be destructive. It also revealed that most of the participants generally responded to conflicts using various forms of violence, a little bit of arbitration and virtually no problem-solving methods such as principled negotiation and mediation (Fisher and Ury, 1991). Various types of student-student and student-teacher conflicts were identified. Some of these conflicts could be managed effectively by the teachers and students if they are trained on conflict management techniques. Examples of such conflicts include conflicts of ideas, conflicts of relationships, provocation/name-calling and conflicts due to poor communication. However, the study revealed other types of conflicts that are beyond the capacity of the schools to handle. These include conflicts of limited resources, misunderstandings due to the schools’ poor
infrastructure and lack of adequate playground, and conflicts caused by the general deplorable socio-economic and political situation of the country. I argue that these essential school needs should be addressed first before any meaningful training of teachers and students on constructive conflict resolution techniques could be realized. Simply put, we need to put the horse before the cart.

How can Sierra Leonean secondary schools empower their students and teachers to build a sustainable culture of peace? In order to address this very important question, I would like to propose the integration of a Transformative Peace Education (TPE) Programme into the secondary schools curriculum. The framework for TPE is described in the following section.

A Framework For Transformative Peace Education for Secondary Schools

The Meaning of Transformative Peace Education (TPE)

I engage the very complex processes of building a culture of peace in the secondary schools in Sierra Leone in particular and the rebuilding and reconstruction of Sierra Leone in general, from a TPE frame of analysis. I will limit this proposal for secondary schools since it was the context I focused on in this study. This agrees with O'Sullivan's (1999:168) argument that "peace and conflict are words that cannot be looked at without a context." Further studies in the primary, secondary, post-secondary and tertiary levels should be carried out and its findings should be used to inform the curriculum for TPE. Similar studies in the non-formal sector should be carried out so as to determine the content of a non-formal TPE programme.
What is TPE? According to Brock-Utne (1987:72) "[TPE] is an education for cooperation [and] for caring and sharing..." Therefore, "[TPE] has the task of setting aside our violent culture, with its war-like ideals and heroes, and of guiding us to build a true culture of peace" (Kekkonen, 1980:56). TPE therefore, provides an opportunity for Sierra Leonean students and teachers to strengthen their capacity to respect their gender, religious, tribal/ethnic, and cultural diversity. TPE is in fact a life long process of reflection-action-reflection (Freire, 1972).

TPE is fundamental to adult education. The following reasons justify why TPE is quite relevant to the young adults in the secondary schools in Sierra Leone:

- The adult is the bearer of wider knowledge and experience and is probably more conscious of his/her feelings about matters of war and peace than a child;

- The adult learner is considered to be a conscious citizen of the country and a conscious member of the community where he/she lives in;

- Although adult education, in many instances, is part of the formal school system, there are many institutions, organizations and groups - either as educational institutions or as voluntary bodies or ad-hoc groups - that can develop their own approaches to adult education for peace without intervention from either parents, school boards or authorities (Dijkstra, 1989:7).

TPE is therefore, an integral part of...education (Kekkonen, 1981. O'Sullivan, 1999). "[Its role is to] awaken public consciousness on the whole spectrum of conflict, violence and injustices issues" (Toh and Burns, 1989:71). But merely developing an awakened public consciousness on these issues is not enough. There should be a critical resistance and reflective education approach (O'Sullivan 1999. Bickmore, in press). I equate this with TPE. O'Sullivan’s (1999:168) vividly describes what TPE is all about:
[TPE]...carries with it a complexity and intricacy, which demand careful thought and consideration...It is an education that deals creatively with the complexities of conflict and violence. It is not a separate direction from the other concerns...such as racism or sexism.

In the context of secondary schools in Sierra Leone, the study identified other concerns such as the sexual harassment of the female students by some male teachers and students, gender bias, teachers' and prefects' misuse of their power, tribal stereotypes, and use of violence to deal with conflicts. TPE should address these concerns. It should empower both the students and teachers to critically examine and analyze the root causes of the issues mentioned above and to collectively organize and change the status quo. Therefore, I consider TPE as "a kind of education for citizenship, in that it develops some of the skills necessary for citizenship activity and imparts values regarding the ways citizens are expected to behave" (Bickmore, in press, p. 3).

TPE is a spiritual journey. It should empower the students and teachers to rediscover, recognize and value the good in themselves and others. It is not the intention of this study to romanticize TPE. It would be naïve to think that the complex conflicts in the secondary schools in Sierra Leone that have been highlighted in this study, would be solved purely through this single approach. Peacebuilding in secondary schools in Sierra Leone needs the informed participation of all stakeholders including teachers, students, parents, school administrators, educationalists, policy makers, Principals, members of the Board of Governors of the schools, members of the Parent-Teacher Associations, the Sierra Leone Teachers Union and proprietors of schools. They need to collectively work for the social transformation of the schools (Hope and Timmel, 1984). I argue that social transformation is the fundamental guiding principle of TPE.
**Learning Themes of TPE**

According to the findings of the study, many of the student-student conflicts were caused by among other things, inappropriate sexual behaviours, tribal stereotypes, non-payment of loans, stealing, improper mode of school dress, poor communication, dishonesty, lack of respect for others and negative influence of gangster groups.

The study has also shown that certain undesirable attitudes and behaviours from some of the teachers, including misuse of power, use of excessive corporal punishment, sexual harassment of some of the female students and negligence of duties were responsible for some of the student-student and student-teacher conflicts. In the light of this I would like to propose the following learning themes for TPE.

**Critical Awareness Building on the Negative Impact of the Aw fǒ du (What can one do?) Syndrome**

The study has shown that some of the students acknowledged that many students resort to the aw fǒ du approach to respond to student-student and student-teacher conflicts. This syndrome is the tendency of the students to attribute everything to fate. According to the study, some of the students responded to some of the conflicts by simply ignoring the conflict and living things to fate. While this may be appropriate in dealing with certain types of less serious conflicts, leaving things to fate has implications. The tendency to attribute everything to fate is problematic, because it limits the individual's capacity, will and commitment to work harder and help determine her/his own destiny and history. As Machila, (1989:78) argues, "[this passivity] denies...[the students] the freedom to determine their destiny, to define peace and development in a manner of their choice, and to have the right to inform and be informed in an objective
and accurate manner about their conception of the relevant concepts of peace and development...” TPE should empower the students and teachers to develop critical consciousness through continuous awareness building of local, national and global issues affecting their school life and the society at large. Both the students and teachers need to critically examine:

- The meaning of *Aw Fɔ Du*
- Develop a time line to show how this syndrome evolved?
- Analyze why it started and where?
- Who is benefiting and losing as a result of it?
- What should be done to change it?

**Critical Awareness Building about the Effects of the Usay ḏen Tay Kaw na de I de it Gras (The Cow Grazes Where You Tie It) Syndrome**

As earlier mentioned, “Usay ḏen tay kaw na de I de it gras is a Krio” saying which literary means ‘the cow grazes where you tie it’. This saying is a defense mechanism used by some of the teachers to justify their misuse of power against the students, such as the charging of high fees for private lessons, the selling of pamphlets at high prices and using official teaching time to engage in Mammy Coker activities.

Fortune (2000: 2) provides a vivid description of this phenomenon:

In urban areas, government workers are not paid regularly. How do they live? Teachers charge their students fees for extra classes to teach children what should be taught in school. These fees help them to survive for the month. Teachers also demand gifts from the students and take items on credit to traders. Books, chalk and other materials supplied by government and agencies end up on the market to keep teaching staff in much-needed cash...
Some students felt disturbed by this because teachers are expected to be moulding the characters of the students (the leaders of tomorrow). I therefore argue that the educational system has a moral responsibility to nurture good and accountable citizenship, promote social justice and train the future leaders of the society. TPE should create awareness about the negative impact of the "Usay den tay kaw na de I de it gras" syndrome. Through role-plays, small group discussion and debates, both the teachers and students should critically analyse the root causes of this syndrome, how it creates conflicts in the school and society and what could be done to transform the situation.

The study revealed that the "Usay den tay kaw na de I de it gras" syndrome is a societal problem. Fortune (2000:2) agrees with the study:

Other government workers make money through their "sweets of office" or they don't go to the office. Provincial and local administrations routinely extort money from chiefdom authorities to survive. Chiefdom authorities also extort money from their subjects to survive. Some government workers are more ingenious – using government property to generate revenue for themselves and their families. Government vehicles are used for transport for hire; other government revenues are fraudulently converted for their own use. The police love off the small money they take from people over cases and perceived traffic violations.

Through TPE the students should be made aware that such ways of life do not build good citizenship and a better nation. Students should be encouraged to emulate the good examples of some the teachers resisting the "Usay den tay kaw na de I de it gras" philosophy. Through TPE workshops in the schools, the effects of this philosophy on national development should be analyzed with a view to identifying the role the schools could play to change the status quo.
**Critical Awareness Building on the Negative Effects of the Might is Right Mentality**

The study revealed that the concept of ‘might is right’ has become part of the school culture. Student leaders were accused of misusing their power to show that ‘might was right’. They were also accused of rigging students’ elections in favour of students from powerful ethnic and rich backgrounds. Incidences of nepotism and tribalism were common among students in all the three schools. On the other hand, some of the teachers were engaged in various unprofessional behaviours such as sexual harassment of the female students, charging exorbitant fees for private lessons and excessive use of corporal punishment. Some of the students and teachers mentioned that some teachers behaved like that because they believed they were superior human beings to the students. The study has shown that some of the student-student and student-teacher conflicts were caused by these ideologies.

TPE should enable both the students and teachers to develop critical analytical skills that would empower them to deeply reflect on the negative consequences of the above-mentioned ideologies. It should also equip them with inquiry skills to enable them investigate other similar destructive ideologies, so as to deconstruct them and expose their negative impact on the quality of their lives and their society.

**Gender Awareness Building**

The study revealed that gender discrimination against the girls was quite prevalent in the three schools. According to study, the boys believed they were more superior to the girls. The school culture condoned the categorization of subjects into boys’ and girls’ subjects. Boys were believed to be more intelligent than girls are. They were therefore, encouraged to study pure science subjects such as Math, Physics, Chemistry and Biology.
On the other hand, girls were encouraged to study applied science subjects such as Home Economics, Nutrition and Needlework, as well as Arts subjects such as French, English, History and Literature in English. According to the study, some of the few female students who opted for some of the "boys' subjects" were faced with all kinds of intimidation from the boys. TPE must teach students to recognize that the concepts of 'girls' and 'boys' were socially constructed and none was superior to the other. Misconceptions about each gender must be challenged.

TPE should enable the teachers and students to develop a critical awareness about the plight of the female students in particular, and women in general (from both local and global perspectives) and take action to support gender equality in the schools, families and society as a whole. Through this type of education, school administrators, teachers and students would recognize the social injustices against the female students in their schools in particular and women in general. Gender awareness building should also enable the students and teachers to recognize the fact that women are still treated as second class human beings in many parts of the world. Through TPE workshops and seminars in the schools, teachers and students should be encouraged to critically examine aspects of the Sierra Leone culture as well as other indigenous cultures that discriminate against women and girls. Students should be made aware that female students deserve respect and humane treatment like anybody else. The teachers, especially the males, should set good examples by making sure that they treat the female students with respect and dignity. More female students should be given positions of trust and responsibilities.

Gender awareness building should also be integrated into the Literary and Debating Societies (LandDS). Topics such as the role of female students in building a
culture of peace in the schools, the effects of male student dominance in leadership roles in the school, to name but a few examples, should be included in the LandDS debates. TPE should help the students and teachers to become more aware of the fact that “women...are the mainstays of the economic survival of the families [especially] in times of conflict” Fortune, (2000:2). TPE should also enable both the teachers and students to examine certain aspects of the African tradition that discriminate and dis-empower women and girls.

**Awareness on the Principles and Practice of Democracy, Human and Civic Rights and Responsibilities**

The study revealed that there were many instances in all the schools when both the prefects and teachers did not involve the majority of students in making informed decisions in matters relating to students’ discipline. Against this background, I argue that TPE should integrate the teaching of the principles and practice of democracy in the classroom. Since participation in decision-making is fundamental to the principles of democracy, teachers should create opportunities for students to be actively involved in school committees, group projects, to name but a few examples.

The study also pointed out that there were cases of human rights abuses. As earlier mentioned, some of the most common examples included sexual harassment of the female students by some of the male students and teachers, economic exploitation of the students by some of the teachers engaged in *Mammy Coker* and the excessive use of corporal punishment by some of the teachers. The use of verbal abuse and threats by many of the teachers and students during conflict situations was identified by the study as another form of human rights abuse. In the light of the above, TPE curriculum content
should include human rights education. Both the teachers and students should be made aware of the various United Nations and the Organization of African Unity Declarations on human rights, such as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the African Charter of Human Rights, Child and Women Rights. TPE should enable the students to be aware that they have a right to:

- participate fully in both national and local political decision-making processes;
- a relevant and high quality education;
- safe drinking water;
- food security;
- freedom of expression and association;
- health education and services.

It has been shown in the study that some of students misuse school properties. Some teachers also noted that there was a culture of mismanagement of school property in the schools. Therefore, I argue that TPE should improve the students’ and teachers’ capacity:

1. To recognize and fulfil their obligations/duties as members of the school community in particular and citizens in general.
2. To inculcate respect for other people's rights
3. To maintain a safe school environment
4. To develop a culture of effective management of school properties.

In the light of this, TPE should include “inclusive critical reflection and problem-solving, which arguably develops participants’ capacities for democratic participation…” (Bickmore, in press, p. 9).
**Critical Analysis of Structural Violence**

The study has shown that both the teachers and students used structural violence to handle student-student and student-teacher conflicts. For instance, some teachers used teaching time improperly, charged students expensively for teaching resource materials and over used their power and authority. Some of the prefects were said to have misused their power and authority as well. Many students were excluded in major decision making processes affecting their school lives. TPE should develop the capacity of students and teachers to critically analyze the root causes of structural violence. Relative peace cannot be achieved in the school environment if the students and teachers were not empowered to critically examine the dynamics of structural violence and analyze its root causes, with the ultimate goal of taking action toward transforming unjust structures within the school and the larger society. This is essential because, as Handa (1992:24) argues, “recognition of the violence which social structures cause is fundamental to any conception of a peaceful world order.”

**Anti-tribalistic Education**

Some of the teachers and students identified tribalism as one of the causes of intra-secondary school conflicts. The term has negative connotations. Based on the issues of tribalism mentioned by some of the students and teachers, the term is defined as:

A system in which [a particular tribe or ethnic group] exercises abusive power over others on the basis of [their tribe/ethnic origin]; a set of implicit or explicit beliefs, erroneous assumptions and actions based upon an ideology of inherent superiority of one [tribal] or ethnic group over another. Tribalism is manifested within organizational and institutional structures and programs as well as within individual thought or behaviour patterns (CUSO, 1996:28).
Against this background, TPE must include anti-tribalistic education. Anti-tribalistic education means "...[a] pedagogical [or andragogical] process of teaching and learning, whether formal or nonformal, as well as the role of those undertaking the process in generating, selecting and organizing the learning experiences...[which are]...consistent with principles of dialogue, participation and awakening of critical consciousness..." (Toh and Burns, 1989:70). Such critical consciousness must analyze the root causes of tribalism and their impact on the 'powerless' tribes, with the ultimate goal of taking collective action for social change. This type of education empowers all the students and teachers of each tribe to value and respect ethnic diversity and critically reflect on the social structures that dis-empower them with a view to taking collective action positive change. It should also develop the capacity of both students and teachers to ensure the equitable distribution of school resources in particular and the national educational, health and development resources among the tribes in the country (especially among the women and children of these tribes) in general.

Since in Sierra Leone, like in most countries in Africa and the South, "education...[has] become an important national industry, [it] can be a part of a policy to amalgamate ethnic differences [in the school and larger society at large]" (Schleicher and Kozma, 1992:6). It is essential that all members of the thirteen tribes be provided with anti-tribalistic education system that creates awareness on the negative effects of tribalism both to the individual and society, and the global community. The school has a role to play in this process.

An anti-tribalistic education should also include popular education strategies because, as Hall (1993:157) argues "popular education validates people's knowledge
generated by people working together to strengthen resistance to oppression and build organizations for collective action. Welton (n.d, p. 7) agrees that, “resistance to and transformation of societal structures emerge from the adult population, and is premised upon men and women’s ability to learn new ways of seeing the world and acting within it.”

In the light of this, the students from the thirteen tribes of Sierra Leone must learn new ways of accommodating each other and make the best use of their tribal diversity. To promote such diversity, the curriculum of anti-tribal education should include in Bullivant’s (1981:9) words, “topics such as dialects and language differences, life styles, dress, food habits and other cultural matters.” Anti-tribal education must develop a critical consciousness for all tribes to recognize that “societal cohesiveness and survival (Bullivant, 1981:11) depends on social justice and freedom. Also, this type of education will help the students in particular, and Sierra Leoneans in general, to realize that “none of us chose race, tribe, our age, our country of origin, nor can we do anything to change them” (Hall, 1993:149). Finally, I argue that through this type of education, the different tribes could rediscover their past, make their voices heard and respected, learn from their mistakes and connect past learning and new learning (Clover, 1995:4-7; Action, 1995:3). The study revealed that tribal stereotypes caused many student-student conflicts. Anti-tribalistic education enables the students to become aware that such stereotypes are mere misconceptions and do not represent the real nature and realities of the tribes. Teachers could help the students to realize this by creating classroom activities that would require the different tribes to undertake group projects. Multi-tribal drama groups could be also be organized to enable the students to value and accept ethnic/tribal diversity
Training on Constructive Conflict Resolution

According to the study the majority of students and teachers did perceive conflict as a negative part of human experience. Teachers’ and students’ background knowledge on the theory and practice of non-violent approaches to conflict management was quite limited. The study identified three training needs on constructive conflict management – knowledge, attitudes, values or beliefs and skills.

Both the students and teachers need to be made aware that conflict also has value (Johnson and Johnson, 1987, 1991 and 1992; Deutsch, 1973 and 1993 and Kreidler, 1984). Kearns, Pickering and Twist (1992:11) agree “conflict is [in fact] a virtual necessity for growth and change, for individuals and groups.” Effective teaching and learning cannot take place in a peaceless environment. Johnson and Johnson (1991:1:1) agree that “teachers cannot teach and students cannot learn unless there is peace and order in the classroom.” Therefore, students need to be taught how to interact productively with their colleagues, teachers and administrators, as well as with other people in their families and local communities. This will enable them to build peaceful relationships both in and out of school. In fact Bickmore (1997:3) argues, “if we infuse conflict into learning opportunities, then students can practice conflict resolution in ways that will help them to become effective non-violent actors in [our] pluralistic societies.” Adams (1994:2) suggests that “teaching...students how to deal with conflict should be a component of an overall program of [transformative] peace education.” I argue that the ultimate challenge of this type of education is for parents, administrators, teachers and students to make a commitment to make school a peaceful place of learning (Bey and Turner, 1996:1).
Deutsch (1993) agrees and further identifies some ingredients of constructive conflict resolution:

1. Awareness of the types of conflict one is involved in, their causes, consequences of violence and the alternatives to violence.

2. Facing conflict rather than avoiding it.

3. Respect for one’s self and interests and respect for others and their interests.

4. Exploring common interests and ground.

5. Defining conflicting interests and recognizing that they require cooperative solutions.

6. Listening actively and communicating clearly.

7. Recognizing the natural tendencies to bias, misperceptions and stereotypes.

8. Remaining a moral person – just and caring and being considerate and sensitive to the rights of others.

Drew (1995) generally agrees with numbers 4, 8, 9 and 13 above and adds another ingredient -“the process of affirming (acknowledging positive qualities in others)” (p. 16). How can these ingredients of constructive conflict resolution be infused into the teachers’ curriculum? Research by Johnson, Johnson and Holubec (1993); Avery, Sullivan and Wood (1997) and Duetsch (1973 and 1993) for example, have shown that this can be done through cooperative learning. Bickmore (1991:5) also notes “…cooperative learning, because of its high rates of student-student interaction, is bound to include a great deal of conflictual behaviour.” For the purpose of this study, cooperative learning refers to “…the instructional use of small groups so that students
work together to maximize their own and each other’s learning” (Johnson, Johnson and Holubec, 1993a 1993b: 6).

Constructive conflict resolution should also teach students the principles and practice of democracy. Students should be engaged in what Bickmore (1999) refers to as positive liberty and which she defines as “the practice of active democratic participation” (236). According to her, students are engaged in positive liberty when:

- They learn about conflict resolution by serving on student government committee.
- They learn about power and problem solving by contributing to a service project.
- They learn about peacemaking by serving as peer facilitators or conflict mediators.
- They learn about analyzing multiple perspectives on public questions by studying problems of war, peace, or controversial issues (1999:236).

**Interest-based Negotiation and Mediation Skills Training**

The data clearly pointed out that poor communication was one of the main causes of intra-school conflicts. The study also revealed that none of the teachers and students hardly used problem-solving techniques when confronted with conflicts. Therefore, in order to enable the teachers and students to acquire problem-solving techniques, which would lead to building a culture of peace in the schools, TPE’s curriculum content should ensure that both the students and teachers:

- improve [their] communication
- learn to listen and to express[their] insights
- diagnose together [their] needs
• analyse the causes of [their] problems, (including exclusion of people because of gender, race, tribe or class)

• plan and act together in teams, organizations and movements (Hope and Timmel, 1984).

I would like to argue that both the teachers and students would be able to learn these skills by teaching them the theory and practice of negotiation and mediation. At this juncture, I would like to describe the conceptual framework of these two terms.

**Negotiation.**

This is a process whereby the disputants talk out their own solutions to their problem (Colorado School Mediation Project, 1994). It is a voluntary process, which provides an opportunity for the parties in conflict to educate each other about their concerns and interests. According to Moore (1986:6):

Negotiation is a bargaining relationship between parties who have a perceived or actual conflict of interest. The participants voluntarily join in a temporary relationship designed to educate each other about their needs and interests, to exchange specific resources, or to resolve one or more intangible issues such as the form their relationship will take in the future or the procedure by which problems are to be solved.

The main purpose of negotiation is to reach a consensus. The process helps participants in a dispute to explore win/win alternatives to their conflict. "...It involves the defense of opposing positions" (Pruitt, 1981:6). It has the potential to resolve conflicts because of its nonviolent nature (Pruitt, 1981). Both the students and teachers should be taught 'principled negotiation' skills (Fisher and Ury, 1991). The focus is to enable the students and teachers in conflicts to look for mutual gains whenever possible and to ensure that wherever their interests conflict, they should ensure that the results of their negotiations
are based on fairness (Fisher and Ury, 1991). To achieve this, both the students and teachers should recognize that "one cannot resolve conflicts and make peace unless the root causes of the conflicts are identified and dealt with" (Assefa, 1993:5-6).

Mediation.

Moore (1996:15) defines mediation as "...the intervention in a negotiation or a conflict of an acceptable, impartial, neutral third party who has limited or no authoritative decision-making power but who assists the involved parties in voluntarily reaching a mutually acceptable settlement of issues in dispute." According to this definition, the power to make decisions lies entirely on the disputants.

The main goal of mediation is to enable the disputants to reach a peaceful settlement that is fair, just and acceptable to the parties through the voluntary intervention of a neutral third party. What is the rationale for mediation? Moore (1986:11-12) argues that mediation is essential when:

- The emotions of the parties are intense and are preventing a settlement...[and] communication between the parties is poor...
- There are perceived or actual incompatible interests that the parties are having difficulty reconciling...[and] have reached an impasse in their bargaining.

Slaiken (1996) also argues that the issue of when to mediate depends on "...[the] openness on the part of each side to look at creative solutions, as well as a willingness to give and take (or compromise) [and] the capability of the parties to [negotiate] with one another..." (15).

What is the significance of teaching the students and teachers about the theory and practice of the mediation process? Mediation processes, like all aspects human
interactions, are grounded on the lived experiences and cultural contexts of each particular society. "The mediation process is a learning exercise, a useful resource for future occasions of other conflicts...[and] nobody wins, nobody loses in mediation" (Sampath, 1991: ix-9). It pursues outcomes that are fair, wise, just, and sustainable and mutually satisfying to all parties to the conflict (Fisher and Ury, 1991, Moore, 1986).

According to the study, many student-student conflicts such as naming calling; misunderstandings over the use of school furniture, library facilities, and the use of playground space were either referred to the teachers or prefects. In fact the study also noted that sometimes some of these conflicts were even referred to the Principal or Vice Principal. Students should be trained as peer mediators to assist their colleagues resolve conflicts through interest-based negotiation and mediation. This will empower students to participate actively in building a peaceful school environment. Through this process, students learn how to analyse problems, give and receive feedback, listen actively, ask open-ended questions and acquire techniques for paraphrasing. The also learn teambuilding techniques. By serving as peer mediators, students also develop leadership skills and inculcate the virtues of service to others.

**Methodology of TPE Programme**

In this section, I would like to propose the following methodology for TPE. The main goal of TPE is to strengthen the capacity of the participants to experience conflicts (Bickmore, 1997 and O’Sullivan, 1999) and constructively manage or resolve them non-violently. TPE is grounded on participatory and emancipatory techniques. Its theoretical foundation is informed by Freire’s (1972) principles of conscientization. Being a resistant form of education, TPE should create a community of learners, where everyone is both a
learner and educator. This means that the teacher is not the centre of knowledge, but rather, a co-partner in the production and utilization of knowledge. TPE methodology is participant/learner-centred. It basically involves action – reflection – action (Praxis Method) (Freire, 19972, Hope and Timmel, 1984). For example, the participants would organize a role-play to illustrate the different ways students and teachers respond to conflict. They would also perform a role-play to demonstrate the types of intra-school conflict and how these are generally resolved. A group reflection and discussion would follow this. Other TPE methods include games, stories, songs and proverbs. Participants are encouraged to learn about conflict through experience (Bickmore, 1997 and 1999).

The use of codes is also appropriate for TPE. According to Hope and Timmel, (1984:75):

A code is a concrete presentation of a familiar problem, about which the group present has strong feelings. It may be a poster, a play, a slide, or a set of slides, a film, a poem, or song, a diagram, a story or newspaper article, a proverb or a case study.

They further argue that “problem-posing education is much easier if one uses ‘codes’ which have been specifically prepared for a group on the basis of the generative themes which emerged during a thorough survey” (1984:75). With reference to the study, codes would be appropriate for analysing for example, the root causes of the Mammy Coker and “Usay dën tay kaw na de I de it gras” syndromes.

To implement TPE, both the teachers and students need to be trained to improve their knowledge and skills in non-violent techniques of handling conflicts. They should learn gender analysis techniques, communication skills, negotiation and mediation skills, facilitation skills and principles of democracy and learning, active listening skills, giving and receiving effective feedback and participative decision-making techniques. I would
like to encourage the NGOs to take this initiative to provide the necessary financial, material and technical expertise needed to support TPE programmes in the schools. I would also like to appeal to them to use their lobbying power and influence to motivate the YES Ministry to integrate TPE in the school curriculum as well as in the curriculum of the Teacher Training Colleagues and universities. Pilot schools should be selected to develop the content and process of TPE with the informed participation and contributions of all the stake holders - Principals, parents, teachers, students, local leaders, policy makers and the wider NGO community. TPE must be grounded on African values, customs, traditions and beliefs that have stood the test of the times and have proven to be relevant to transformation of current local and global problems of 'peacelessness'. TPE is worth trying!

**Challenges to the Implementation of TPE**

In this section, the major implications for TPE are critically examined. Integrating TPE both in the formal and non-formal educational systems has several challenges. Brock-Utne (1987:72) agrees:

If...we are going to work seriously for peace, we are going to have to rethink some of the values and beliefs that are at the core of our society, which help to glorify conquest and mastery. Such rethinking is very difficult and will encounter much resistance, particularly by those who are viewed as leaders within the present framework and would feel a distinct loss of status if the framework were changed and their characteristics no longer glorified.

As shown by the study, many teachers still believe in the saying, “spare the rod and spoil the child.” Also, many teachers and school administrators, as the study revealed, still believe that “the only language the African child understands is the cane.”
Since TPE does not encourage the use of violence to deal with problems, its introduction in the schools could meet stiff resistance from those teachers and school administrators who rely on flogging to maintain school discipline. This would be a big challenge. Although in principle the YES Ministry has already approved the inclusion of peace education in the schools, it lacks the financial and materials resources to support the programme. Any initiative, which demands inputs of any kind from the above Ministry, is wishful thinking.

Another major challenge is that a lot of relevant research on conflict-related issues needs to be carried out. Lessons learnt from this kind of research should be published. At the moment, there are few Sierra Leonean scholars who are working extensively in this field of study. There is currently a need for qualified and experienced external researchers from other African countries and or the West, to work with indigenous Sierra Leoneans and NGOs that are interested and willing to conduct collaborative research necessary for the production of curriculum materials for TPE at all educational levels. There are already existing organizations and institutions in Sierra Leone building the capacity of civil society in peacebuilding approaches. These include among others, UNICEF, UNESCO, the Milton Margai College of Education, Caritas Sierra Leone, the Council of Churches in Sierra Leone, Action Aid (UK), Partners in Adult Education, the Centre for Development and Peace Education, the Network Movement for Justice and Development and the Forum for African Women Educationalists. These organizations as well as others not mentioned here should be encouraged to make informed contributions towards the development of a comprehensive and inclusive TPE for the formal and non-formal
educational sectors. Bringing organizations and institutions with different mandates and development philosophies would be a Herculean task.

In the schools, colleges and university, TPE could also pose a lot of challenges to the teachers, lecturers, policy-makers and community leaders. Boanas (1989:38) explains why:

[TPE] is not necessarily conceived as a separate subject. It should be integrated into the existing curriculum because it is both a process and a product. It is committed to moving from current values of competition and aggression to more caring, sharing, co-operative, powering-sharing modes of behaviour and therefore, teachers [and lecturers] need to model these values in the classroom. There are therefore, implications for [local capacity building] in terms of [students’ involvement in] decision-making...

While I agree that teachers and lecturers need to be models of the above-mentioned values in the classroom, the study has shown that the poor working conditions of the teachers in Sierra Leone make this demand unpractical. Teachers’ salaries and conditions of service need to be improved to meet the cost of living a decent life. I do not think it is fair to expect so much from them when they are living under terrible working conditions and barely making both ends meet. This is a reality that any TPE must have to face objectively without compromising its principles and ideals. Getting the balance can be a real challenge!

The potential for TPE to become a purely academic matter is another case in point. In recent times, the Milton Margai College of Education in Freetown has integrated conflict resolution studies in its certificate and undergraduate programs. The extent to which its undergraduates transfer the knowledge and skills acquired to their workplace needs to be investigated. I argue that TPE must not confine itself to just the teaching of
conflict resolution theory and skills to students teachers without and creating awareness for social action and change.

Floresca-Cawagas and Toh (1989:18) agree:

[TPE] clearly cannot remain at the level of cognitive understanding or emotional involvement. To educate for peace is to try to catalyze learners to undertake action on the basis of their peace-oriented consciousness and self-realized responsibility. Such action includes both personal...[and]...social actions...for peace.

TPE also poses challenges for teachers and lecturers and school and college administrators. When students empower themselves through TFE, they become more aware of their rights and resourcefulness. They also become critical of teachers’ abuse of power and control of the knowledge production process. What this means is that teachers who embrace TPE must be prepared to create the climate for students to become critical learners and informed producers of knowledge. Of course this challenges the traditional monopoly of knowledge, which the teachers have always enjoyed.

I would also like to argue that TPE is a local capacity building process. Local capacity building in this context means a process of empowering people to take control of their lives. It enables people to rediscover their strengths and limitations, and the opportunities open to them to develop their fullest potential. TPE enables students "...to overcome years of uncritical acceptance of top-down and authority-based knowledge and learn to ask for themselves in-depth questions which continually seek out the root causes of problems" (Floresca-Cawagas and Toh, 1989:19). It is without doubt that personal and social action for peace challenges the traditional beliefs that give so much power to the elite minorities in society. This has serious implications for teachers and school administrators. It implies teachers have to let go some of their power and authority as
students develop leadership skills and take responsibilities to influence decision-making in the school. Administrative decisions are generally top-down. Any process that empowers the teachers and students to solicit for a more participatory decision-making process could be potentially threatening for some school administrators.

TPE enables the students to become more aware of their basic human rights and this could empower them to challenge the use of corporal punishment and other human rights abuses by the other students, teachers and school authorities. It could also empower the female students and teachers to challenge the dominance of the male students and teachers in major-decision-making in the school. Marginalized students and teachers would also become more aware of their rights and might eventually resist any attempt by the powerful teachers and students to maintain the status quo. If not integrated into the school curriculum properly, it could be counter-productive by creating disharmony among students and between the students and teachers/school administrators. Certain students might misconstrue the freedom TPE teaches as an opportunity for disrespecting school authority.

**Summary and Conclusion**

The purpose of this study has been to describe how selected secondary school teachers and students in urban Sierra Leone perceive and manage inter-personal conflicts during complex emergencies with the ultimate goal of identifying the challenges for building a culture of peace and for further research. The qualitative approach used to guide this study has helped to describe the participants’ understandings of the meaning of interpersonal conflicts. It has also helped to highlight the effects of these conflicts on
their inter-personal relations, the types of and causes of conflicts they experienced in their schools and the methods they used to respond to them.

This study has succeeded in articulating African perspectives on the meaning and complex nature of conflict with particular reference to Sierra Leone. It has revealed that most of the participants held negative views about conflict. Few participants appreciated the positive nature of conflict. It has also shown that the individuals’ socio-economic, political, cultural realities or contexts influence how they perceive conflict and deal with it. The study revealed two broad areas of conflicts. The first broad area has to do with conflicts related to inappropriate inter-personal relationships among students and between students and teachers. The study has shown that these were mainly caused by poor communication, inappropriate sexual behaviours, misuse of power and authority, unfair treatment, stereotypes, negative attitudes, lack of constructive conflict resolution techniques, and disrespectful behaviours. It has also been shown that most of the participants used to a large extent, physical, emotional, psychological and structural forms of violence to manage their conflicts. I have argued that these conflicts can be managed by the students and teachers if properly trained in conflict management and peacebuilding techniques. To address this issue, I have proposed a TPE approach for the secondary schools in the country. To ensure its success, it must be inclusive both in curriculum content and process. I have also argued that TPE should engage the teachers and students through participatory methods.

The second broad area of conflicts has to do with the general lack of basic physical needs of the interviewees, poverty and the schools’ poor infrastructure. This second area of conflicts occurred largely due to the country’s deplorable socio-economic
and political situation, and the on-going rebel war. These particular conflicts represented the bigger picture of the very difficult times every Sierra Leonean has been going through for decades before the war. These types of conflicts were beyond the capacity of the interviewees and schools' administrative bodies to resolve. Due to the complex nature of the crisis in Sierra Leone, it would be quite unrealistic to expect the YES Ministry to provide the necessary financial, material and technical assistance needed by the schools. Meeting the above-mentioned essential needs would require the cooperation and commitment of the YES Ministry, local and international NGOs, private institutions, parents, schools administrators, members of the Board of Governors of the schools, students, the Sierra Leone Teachers Union, religious institutions and business people, to name but a few examples. I argue that building a culture of peace in the schools in the country must be one of the priorities of the above-mentioned organizations, institutions and groups during the post-war period. Schools must be supported to transform the current culture of youth violence. The youth need to be empowered to make a meaningful contribution to their advancement in particular and the society as a whole.

"Given the enormous obstacles to peace, it is easy to become pessimistic, even cynical about the prospects for change [in Sierra Leone] (Floresca-Cawagas and Toh, 1989:17). However, in spite of this I am hopeful and optimistic that a brighter and better future lies ahead for the majority of Sierra Leoneans. Floresca-Cawagas and Toh (1989:17) agrees, "[transformative] peace education has to be hopeful, not in an idealistic sense that the world will somehow get better, but in the dialectical sense of simultaneously appreciating the grim realities." Further more, they emphasize that "[TPE requires]... working as hard as possible to transform unpeaceful structures and passing on
the spirit of hope to even more fellow human beings” (Floresca-Cawagas and Toh, 1989:17). This is a challenge that all Sierra Leoneans must embrace. The study focused on the voices of some of the male and female prefects and teachers who served in the disciplinary committees because they handled most of the student-student and student-teacher conflicts. The voices of the students and teachers without positions of power have not been heard. Therefore, TPE should include the voices of the marginalized students, especially the female students, the students belonging to the gangster groups, the students physically challenged and the teachers at the margins should be listened to as well. The study did not include the voices of the other stakeholders in the running of the schools, such as the Principals, members of the PTA, members of the Board of Governors of the schools, the proprietors and members of the old students associations. I hope that the findings from this study have provided some kind of direction for further research that would address these concerns. I intend to replicate this study and carry out further related studies that would include the above-mentioned groups. The findings of this study must be viewed as a first step towards further research in this growing field of knowledge. Against this background, I would like to suggest the following research questions as food for thought:

- How do marginalized secondary school students and teachers in Sierra Leone perceive conflict?
- What methods do marginalized secondary school students and teachers in Sierra Leone use to manage the conflicts they experience in school?
• What nonviolent conflict management techniques do secondary school teachers in Sierra Leone use to manage student-student and student-teacher conflicts?

• What are the students’ and teachers’ strategies for building a culture of peace in the secondary schools in Sierra Leone?

• What approaches do the Principals of secondary schools in Sierra Leone use to build a culture of peace in their schools?

• What aspects of indigenous Sierra Leonean conflict transformation approaches are relevant to the resolution of contemporary intra-school conflicts?

I intend to disseminate the findings of this study and follow-up research in order to make this work more meaningful and relevant. In the light of this, I would make this study available to the YES Ministry, selected local and international NGOs, religious institutions civil society groups in Sierra Leone, interested in promoting peace education in the schools. I would also like to publish the results of my findings in international Peace and Conflict Resolution Journals. The findings of this study will also be presented in international Adult Education and Peace and Conflict Resolution Conferences and Seminars. Copies of this study would also be made available to some Canadian Universities such as the University of Toronto, the St. Francis Xavier (including the Coady International Institute). In Sierra Leone, I hope to share the findings of this study with the two constituent colleges of the University of Sierra Leone; the Milton Margai College of Education, and some of the Teacher Training Colleges and Libraries.
I also intend to solicit financial and material assistance from interested NOGs in Sierra Leone and elsewhere to fund a Pilot TPE Programme for at least three secondary schools. The programme will include funding for the improvement of the schools' basic infrastructure and for the provision of other essential school materials and equipment. Lessons from this pilot programme will be used to improve and expand the programme gradually.
**Prayer for Enlightenment**

In conclusion, let me bring this thesis journey to a ‘spiritual pause’ with a prayer for Sierra Leoneans both at home and abroad, in these words. The words are drawn from St. Francis of Assisi, other writers who have influenced me and from my own heart.

Lord, make Sierra Leoneans instruments of your peace:
Where there is hatred, let them show love;
Where there is injury, let them show pardon;
Where there is discord, let them show union;
Where there is doubt, let them show faith;
Where there is despair, let them show hope;
Where there is darkness, let them show light;
Where there is sadness, let them show joy;
Where there is injustice, let them show justice;
Where there is tribalism, let them show multi-tribal tolerance and acceptance;
Where there is gender inequality, let them show equality;
Where there is unpatriotism, let them show patriotism;
Where there is oppression, let them show liberation.
Where there is ignorance, let them show critical consciousness;
So for your mercy and truth’s sake, *Sierra Leone’s* national motto of Unity, Freedom and Justice would become a dream come true. Amen!
References


Appendices

Letter Requesting the Ministry of Youth, Education and Sports’ Consent

C/O Mr. Alimamy P. Koroma
General Secretary
Council of Churches in Sierra Leone
Freetown
March 8, 1999.

The Director General of Education
New England Vile
Freetown

Dear Sir,

Request for Approval to Conduct Research in the Secondary Schools

I am a Ph.D. candidate in the Adult Education, Community Development, and Counseling Psychology Department, at the Ontario Institute for the Studies in Education of the University of Toronto (OISE/UT), currently researching on: An examination of intra-secondary school conflicts in complex emergencies: The case of Sierra Leone. The purpose of my study is to describe how selected secondary school teachers and students perceive and manage interpersonal conflicts during complex emergencies, with a view to identifying the challenges for building a culture of peace and for further research.

The study will include two semi-structured interviews involving 3 teachers, 3 students and the Principal or his or her vice. Each interview will last for about one hour. All interviews will be tape-recorded. Information will also be collected through my own personal observations and analysis of some relevant non-confidential school records. To maintain confidentiality, the schools’ names and those of the participants will be coded. Participation in the study will be voluntary and the schools and the participants can withdraw at any time they feel uncomfortable with the study.

The information collected will be used purely for educational purposes. I would also like to inform you that this study is not an evaluation of the schools although the outcome has the potential to be interpreted as such. A summary of the report will be sent to the schools if requested. All recorded tapes of the interviews and relevant school documents provided will be locked in a cabinet and the tapes will be destroyed at the end of the study. School records used will be returned as well. Against this background, I would be very grateful if you could permit me to conduct the above-mentioned research in any of the senior secondary schools approved by your Ministry. I thank you for your co-operation and assistance in this matter.

Yours sincerely,

Thomas Mark Turay
Dear Mr. Turay,

REQUEST FOR APPROVAL TO UNDERTAKE RESEARCH IN SOME SECONDARY SCHOOLS

I am directed to refer to your letter of 8th instant on the above topic and to convey approval for you to undertake research in Senior Secondary Schools in Sierra Leone.

You are at liberty to make your choice of schools and to discuss the issue and schedule with the respective Principals.

By copy of this letter, Principals of Senior Secondary Schools are hereby requested to co-operate and assist Mr. Turay in his research programme.

Yours faithfully,

Mr. Salieu Kamara
For Director General (Admin.)

Copy
All Principals,
Senior Secondary Schools
**Letter Requesting the Schools' Board of Governors' Consent**

C/O Mr. Alimamy P. Koroma  
General Secretary  
Council of Churches in Sierra Leone  
Freetown  
March 8, 1999.

The Chairperson  
Board of Governors

Dear Sir/Madam

**Request for Administrative Consent for your School to Participate in my Study**

I am a Ph.D. candidate in the Adult Education, Community Development, and Counseling Psychology Department, at the Ontario Institute for the Studies in Education of the University of Toronto (OISE/UT), currently researching on: *An examination of intra-secondary school conflicts in complex emergencies: The case of Sierra Leone*. The purpose of my study is to describe how selected secondary school teachers and students perceive and manage interpersonal conflicts during complex emergencies, with a view to identifying the challenges for building a culture of peace and for further research.

The study will include two semi-structured interviews involving 3 teachers, 3 students and the Principal or his or her vice. Each interview will last for about one hour. All interviews will be tape-recorded. Information will also be collected through my own personal observations and analysis of some relevant non-confidential school records. To maintain confidentiality, your school’s name and those of the participants will be coded. Participation in the study will be voluntary and your school and the participants can withdraw at any time they feel uncomfortable with the study.

The information collected will be used purely for educational purposes. I would also like to inform you that this study is not an evaluation of your school although the outcome has the potential to be interpreted as such. A summary of the report will be sent to your school if requested. All recorded tapes of the interviews and relevant school documents provided will be locked in a cabinet and the tapes will be destroyed at the end of the study. School records used will be returned as well. I would be very grateful if you could complete the attached two consent forms. Please keep one copy for your records and post the other copy to me as soon as possible. Against this background, I would like to apply for your board’s approval of your school’s participation in this study. I thank you for your co-operation and assistance in this matter.

Yours sincerely,

Thomas Mark Turay
School Board's Consent Form

Name and Address of Chairperson
____________________________________
____________________________________
____________________________________

Date ________________, 1999.

Dear Mr. Turay

This is to acknowledge receipt of your letter (including the two consent forms), requesting our board to approve the participation of our school in your research for your Ph.D. degree at OISE/UT.

On behalf of the Board, I would like to approve ________ or disapprove (the appropriate response is hereby ticked) your request and accept ________ or do not accept (appropriate response is hereby ticked) that the information collected be used for your study, as well as for other educational purposes. I understand that my school and the participants in our school can withdraw at any time from your study and that the name of the school and the names of the participants will be coded to ensure confidentiality.

I hereby enclose the completed and signed consent form. I have kept one copy for my records.

Name, Title and Address
____________________________________
____________________________________
____________________________________

Signature__________________________ Date____________, 1999.
Letter of Consent from the Participants

C/O Mr. Alimamy P. Koroma

Dear ________________________

Request to Participate in my Research Interview

I am a Ph.D. candidate in the Adult Education, Community Development, and Counseling Psychology Department, at the Ontario Institute for the Studies in education of the University of Toronto (OISE/UT), currently researching on: An examination of intra-secondary school conflicts in complex emergencies: The case of Sierra Leone. The purpose of my study is to describe how selected secondary school teachers and students perceive and manage interpersonal conflicts during complex emergencies, with a view to identifying the challenges for building a culture of peace and for further research. You were recommended by the administration of your school. I would like to interview you twice (one hour each time) in March - May 1999. The first interview will be to explore your understandings of the meaning of conflict, the major types of student-student and student-teacher conflicts you experience or observe in your school, what causes these conflicts and the methods you use to respond to them. The second interview will be used to verify and validate the main themes and issues that I got out of the interview. The interviews will be tape-recorded and transcribed. Information will also be collected through my own personal observations and analysis of some relevant non-confidential school records. To maintain confidentiality, your school’s name and yours will be coded. Your participation in the study will be voluntary and you and your school can withdraw at any time you feel uncomfortable with the study.

The information collected will be used purely for educational purposes. I would also like to inform you that this study is not an evaluation of your school although the outcome has the potential to be interpreted as such. A summary of the report will be sent to you if requested. All recorded tapes of the interviews and relevant school documents provided will be locked in a cabinet and the tapes will be destroyed at the end of the study. School records used will be returned as well. I would be very grateful if you could complete the attached two consent forms. Please keep a copy for your records and post the other copy to me as soon as possible. Against this background, I would like to request for your participation as an interviewee in this study. I thank you for your co-operation and assistance in this matter.

Yours sincerely,

Thomas Mark Turay
Dear Mr. Turay

This is to acknowledge receipt of your letter (including the two consent forms), requesting our Board to approve the participation of our school in your research for your Ph.D. degree at OISE/UT.

I hereby accept ________ or do not accept (the appropriate response is hereby ticked) to be interviewed for your study and accept ________ or do not accept (appropriate response is hereby ticked) that the information collected be used for your study, as well as for other educational purposes. I understand that my school and I can withdraw at any time from your study and that my name, as well as that of my school will be coded to ensure confidentiality.

I hereby enclose the completed and signed consent form. I have kept one copy for my records.

Name, Title and Address

____________________________________

____________________________________

____________________________________

Signature_________________________________ Date______________, 1999.
Sample of Interview Questions

The following interview questions guided me while I explored the central research question and sub-questions earlier discussed.

Form Masters/Mistresses

General Information
1. How long have you taught in this school?
2. What subject(s) do you teach?
3. Which forms do you teach?
4. What is the size of your class?
5. What languages do you speak?
6. What ethnic group do you belong to?
7. What part of the country do you come from?
8. What committees do you belong to in school?

The Meaning and Types of Conflicts
1. What is your understanding of the meaning of conflict?
2. How does conflict affect your interpersonal relationships with your students?
3. What types of classroom conflicts do you encounter with your students?
4. What types of classroom conflicts do students refer to you? How do you respond to them?

Causes of Conflicts
1. Based on your own experience, what are the major causes of these conflicts?
2. What do students say are the major causes of these conflicts?
Methods of Responding to Conflict

1. What methods do you use to respond to the student-student conflicts that are referred to you?

2. What methods do you use to respond to student-teacher conflicts you experience in your school?

3. What other methods do students and other teachers use to respond to student-student and student-teacher conflicts.

Students/Form Prefects

General Information

1. In what grade/form are you currently?

2. How long have you attended this school?

3. Which ethnic group do you belong to?

4. What languages do you speak?

5. What part of the country do you come from?

The Meaning and Types of Conflicts

1. What is conflict?

2. How does conflict affect your relationships with your colleagues and teachers?

3. What types of classroom conflicts do you encounter with your fellow students and teachers?

4. What types of conflicts do other students encounter with their colleagues and teachers?
5 Who do you refer your conflicts to?

Causes of Conflicts

1. Based on your own experience, what are the major causes of these conflicts?
2. What do other students and teachers say are the major causes of these conflicts?

Methods of Responding to Conflict

1. What methods do you use to respond to the student-student conflicts that are referred to you as well as those you experience?
2. How do you respond to the student-teacher conflicts you experience in school?
3. What are the students' methods of responding to student-student and student-teacher conflicts?