



The Yellow Bus Project

Diana Clarke

In the Yellow Bus Project, an intern teacher in Moose Jaw attempted to discover whether the amount of time that some students spend riding on a school bus is detrimental to their academic achievement. Her study targeted rural children in grades four to eight, some of whom often travelled over an hour a day to a city school.

Clarke surveyed the students and their parents to gather feedback on six variables that she thought might affect the impact of school bus travel on students:

1. Whether or not adults were present when the student caught the bus,
2. Whether or not the student had an adequate breakfast,
3. Whether or not the student experienced stress on the bus,
4. How long the student spent on the bus,
5. Whether or not (according to their parents) there was an acceptable balance in the student's life between school and other activities, and
6. How much time the child spent studying out of school.

She then compared the responses for each student on these variables with the student's academic marks. Permission to access academic marks to carry out this comparison was provided

by school division authorities, the students, and the students' parents or guardians.

Problems with sample size and response rate made it difficult for Clarke to draw statistically significant findings from her survey data. Reflecting on these problems, she suspected that some survey questionnaires may not have been returned because parents were not comfortable with the questions being asked. Clarke received 46 survey responses for a response rate of less than 40%. Most responses related to students in grades 5 and 6, and they led her to several interesting if inconclusive findings.

She found that the data did not support her hypothesis that the amount of time students spent on the bus would have a significant detrimental effect on their academic marks. There was no statistically significant evidence that time spent on school buses influences students' academic standing. Also, most students and parents indicated that the students had an adequate breakfast, there were adults present when they caught the bus, and they were satisfied with the balance between the students' school activities and other activities. However, it was significant that those children who had a satisfactory balance of curricular and extra-curricular activities in their lives performed better academically.

One finding that Clarke flagged as needing further study was the amount of stress that both parents and students indicated was involved in

riding the school bus. Some parents had written in the reasons for this stress, which usually involved bullying in some form. Clarke commented on this unexpected finding:

It is particularly disconcerting, in an age in which we pay more than lip service to the elimination of bullying in our schools, to see that we may not be doing well with respect to the elimination of bullying for some of our students in the hour or so before and after school. Despite the fact that this small survey indicates stress appears to have little bearing on academic performance, it is well known that the effects of stress may manifest themselves in various ways many years after the stressful events occurred. This concern is one that should be explored further.