CURRICULUM AND INSTRUCTION TRENDS IN BRITISH COLUMBIA:
THREE DECADES THROUGH THE EYES OF TEACHERS

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B.Ed., University of Victoria, 1991

PROJECT SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF
THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF
MASTER OF EDUCATION

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THE UNIVERSITY OF NORTHERN BRITISH COLUMBIA
December, 2002

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Acknowledgements

I would like to thank my friends, family, and advisors who were all pivotal in helping me reach the end of this journey. In particular, I would like to thank my peer advisor, Cathy MacMillan-Sihoe for her valuable insight and perception (as always).

My thanks goes out to my parents-in-law, Joan and Rob Haynes, for their encouragement, praise, and support throughout the past three years (and for all the five dollar bills!).

I am very grateful for the contributions of the two participants in this study. I was surprised and delighted by the time, energy and interest they showed throughout the project. Their valuable insights provided material for the study, as well as learning for the researcher.

Lastly, I would like to recognize and thank my husband, Stephen Haynes, from the bottom of my heart. Throughout all of the tears, anxiety and joy he was there to offer his love and support.

Dedication

This project is dedicated with love to the memory of my father, Cecil Busch.

See Dad - I am using the brains God gave me!
ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to examine the instructional and curricular practices and trends in the 1970s, 1980s, and 1990s, as seen through the eyes of two teachers who have been teaching in a central British Columbia district for more than 25 years. Two teachers were interviewed and gave their views on what guided their practice over the decades examined. There are some limitations to the study, and recommendations for further research are made.
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Chapter One - Introduction

*General Problem Statement*

In 1987, I returned to University as a mature student with the intention to complete my Bachelor in Education and acquire a teaching post in an elementary school. During my time at the university, I was struck by the plethora of teaching practices propounded by various individuals in the academic setting as well as out in the schools. While the Primary Program (Ministry of Education, n.d.) was the document touted in many of my courses (my concentration was in primary education), this was not necessarily the document of choice amongst those preparing novice teachers for the field. “There is no one right way to do it” and “every child learns in a different way and at a different pace” were the catchwords of my teacher education.

My first job in 1991 cemented for me the fact that there is indeed a variety of methods employed by teachers in schools. As well, the content that was taught seemed to vary to a certain degree. I observed everything from traditional transmission teaching using a manual and addressing the students from the front of the room, to cooperative learning employing teaching strategies and children’s literature. My own elementary education in the 1960s was not like this! Yes, my grade 7 teacher taught us Canadian folk songs, but he was young, and “from the city.”

These observations caused me to wonder how the practice of teaching got to its present state of apparent “anything goes.” I was not sure what influenced teachers and what they considered when deciding which instructional method to employ, and what content was important for children to learn. What had occurred from the time of my own education to the late 1980s and early 1990s to cause this shift in educational practice?
What had teachers learned about how and what children learn that had caused such a
dramatic change from the *one way* to the many ways? I wondered if teachers were doing
their own thing, or whether in fact there were guidelines, however loose, that they
followed. I also wondered if what I had been taught in university was necessarily
reflective of the best practices for how children learn, or whether I was simply being
shown the bandwagon of the time. I was curious about whether the experienced teachers I
observed continued to draw on just their training, subsequent workshops or courses, their
experience, or curriculum mandated by the Ministry of Education. This led me to
eventually consider my present project.

How closely does individual teaching practice compare with provincial educational
policy, particularly when the practicing individuals are geographically removed from the
centre of the policy-making? Indeed, are individual practitioners aware of the policy of the
day? Does this impact on what they teach and how they teach it? Are there similarities
between the curricular and instructional practices of individual practitioners? In this
project, I conducted interviews with two teachers in central British Columbia who have
taught in the same district for more than 25 years, and are presently teaching in that same
district. My goal is to examine curricular and instructional practices and trends in the
1970s, 1980s, and 1990s as seen through the eyes of these two teachers, and to compare
that with provincial policy of the time.
Preliminary Literature Review

The literature review for this project took the form of a time line retrospective that examined the curricular and instructional policies and practices in education in British Columbia during the 1970s, 1980s, and 1990s. Educational reports, commissions and policy of the provincial government were examined with regard to the decades being discussed.


The Chant Commission Report, generally seen as a response to Russian Sputnik, was released in 1960. According to Barman and Sutherland (1995), “The Soviet Union’s world-circling Sputnik supposedly demonstrated the failure of American science, and especially the teaching of science in American schools. Since Canadian curricular rhetoric was so similar to its neighbor to the south, its science and other teaching shared in this condemnation” (p. 418). The race to conquer space was on, and the Russians were displaying their superiority. This was considered a mandate to evoke change. In the Commission’s report, school subjects were ranked according to perceived importance and the intellectual development of the students was the priority of public education.

In 1967/68, the British Columbia Teacher’s Federation (BCTF) published a report which acknowledged that increased teacher education inspired individual teachers to make changes to the curriculum and their instruction as they saw fit. The report contended that
teachers were better educated and trained than in the past, and thus more equipped to select a curriculum which would best meet their students' needs (Barman & Sutherland, 1995). This report "listed the factors that it found inhibiting and this list included external examinations, prescribed textbooks, supervisory personnel, some administrative forms and procedures, and teachers' hesitation to depart from subject content with which they felt secure" (p. 420). According to Kilian (1985), "By the late 1960's, teachers were increasingly impatient with Sacred attitudes towards education, and increasingly confident of their own power to influence policy. In 1967, the BCTF set up its own commission on education. ... That commission produced a new blueprint for education in B.C., stressing two major premises: education should be humanized and personalized, and the development of the intellect should parallel development of emotional maturity and social responsibility" (p. 36).

The 1970s in British Columbia were a time of political change as the New Democratic Party (hereafter, NDP) took control after two decades of Social Credit government. While the NDP only retained control for three years, they did make some changes. A former teacher, Eileen Dailly, was given the post of Minister of Education. During the three years, there were two commissions: one on elementary and secondary education; another on post-secondary education and, as well, a committee was struck to review teacher education (Barman & Sutherland, 1995).

Canada in general was beginning to open up in terms of educational debate over practice and policy. In his address to the 50th conference of the Canadian Education Association, Nason (1973) told his listeners that "political thinkers, good and bad, have realized the importance of education as a foundation of citizenship" (p. 11). Nason also
expounded on the idea of the development of the individual in education: "I think people in Canada agree that the real dynamic in Canadian education is not to be found in administrative structuring, or in theoretic research but in the school's practical and personal interest in the individual boy or girl. It comes through clearly to me that Canadian people accept firmly the principle that the interests and abilities of the learner are not to be subordinated to the interests of anyone else" (pp. 13 – 14).

In terms of curriculum, a 1976 assessment of Language Arts found that "teachers expressed dissatisfaction with the usefulness of the present provincial curriculum guides, but also indicated their possible importance as a tool for aiding instruction" (Department of Education, 1976, p. 22). The following year, 1977, a report was published which assessed British Columbia's Social Studies curriculum. The first recommendation was for curriculum revision and suggested a goal in the area "of improving intents (goals and means), practices and outcomes" (Aoki, Langford, Williams & Wilson, 1977, p. 39).

The curriculum revisions continued, and the 1981 report from the Minister of Education stated that

There is no question that over the past five years the public school system has experienced a major curriculum overhaul. There are a number of reasons for this. One is that in certain subject areas curriculum guides and textbooks were left unattended for many years and were badly outdated. Perhaps the most significant reason, however, is that in the late sixties and early seventies educators and boards of school trustees demanded greater local autonomy in all areas of the curriculum. In response, the Ministry issued curriculum guides that were very general in scope. In the mid-seventies, due to public concern over educational standards as well as
teacher demands for improved provincial curriculum guides, the Ministry began developing more specific guidelines. (Smith, 1981, p. 15)

In the early 1980s, the Social Credit government announced a new program to curtail government spending. The program, known as Restraint, "provoke[d] opposition and great hostility among organized labour groups, including provincial employee unions and the British Columbia Teachers' Federation" (B.C.'s History of Education Homeroom Timeline, 1980s, p. 1). This led to "unprecedented hostility between the provincial government and public school workers. Teachers and school support staff [took] part in a 3 day strike to protest reductions in education funding" (B.C.'s History of Education Homeroom Timeline, 1980s, p. 1). According to Kilian (1985), this "agenda for change" came out of the government's "longstanding attitudes which consider human resources expendable and human service professionals as adversaries" making "education ... a perfect target" (p. 40). This acrimonious era in education in British Columbia saw "all levels of government ... concerned by what they saw as the escalating cost of education" (Barman & Sutherland, 1995, p. 420). In the public as well as the educational arena, arguments abounded about "what knowledge was of most worth, and how the young should acquire it" (Barman & Sutherland, p. 421). This led to an increase in research and ideas and "vigorously competing theories and practices pervaded literature, and each found its proponents and practitioners amongst teachers. ... Teachers increasingly demanded greater control over school and classroom practice" (Barman & Sutherland, p. 421).

In 1987, the government appointed Barry Sullivan to conduct a formal review of education in the province. The Sullivan report was published in 1988 and the provincial government "accept[ed] nearly all of its 83 recommendations, including a blueprint for an
innovative curriculum program known as Year 2000" (B.C.’s Homeroom Timeline, 2002). Although the government was resoundingly behind the recommendations of the report, the Year 2000 ideas did not fully take effect owing to public opinion and rising government costs and economic recession across North America in the early 1990s (Barman & Sutherland, 1995). With rising public pressure, the government made some changes in 1994 that centralized budgeting and made salary bargaining for teachers a province-wide process (Barman & Sutherland, 1995). This call for “accountability, higher standards, curricular relevance and ‘back to the basics’” (p. 423) led to the release in the mid 1990s of the Integrated Resource Packages, the new guiding documents for curriculum.

**Significance of Proposed Study**

There have been many reports, commissions and policy changes during the 1970s, 1980s and 1990s. What impact has this had on individual teaching practices? Have teachers been following the recommendations of these reports and instituting curricular changes requested by the provincial government?

This study explores the considerable storehouse of knowledge to be found in the memories of experienced teachers, particularly when they have practiced in the same district for an extended period of time. There are trends identified in the nature of the teachers’ curricular and instructional practice over time. The Ministry of Education is the directive force for education in this province. As such, they direct the boards of education for each district, with regard to the curriculum content and the accepted instructional practices utilized in educational institutions. My question, therefore, is: are the curriculum and instructional practices of individual teachers largely based on their experience and
training, on the mandates of the provincial ministry, or a combination of these and other forces?
Chapter Two – Design and Methodology

My project is in the form of qualitative research, specifically conducted as an ethnographic study. While there is an historical connotation to my project in that I am examining curricular and instructional trends of the past three decades, the form of the research is ethnographic in that it is an “analytical description” of the “shared feelings, beliefs, (and) practices” of the subjects (McMillan & Schumacher, 1997, p. 427). Spradley (1979) suggests that “it is best to think of ethnographic interviews as a series of friendly conversations into which the researcher slowly introduces new elements to assist informants to respond as informants” (p. 58).

My research was conducted through interviews with teachers in a particular school district within the public school system, in a rural community in the central interior region of British Columbia. In my research, I endeavoured to establish my researcher role as an “interested learner.” During the interviews, I tried to be mindful of any tendencies for me to lead or make assumptions about the information provided. At all times, I attempted to probe only when necessary, in order to clarify information provided. As a researcher, I agree that “ethnographic research is based on a naturalistic-phenomenological philosophy of human behavior. An ethnographer attempts to understand people’s constructions – their thoughts and meanings, feelings, beliefs, and actions as they occur in their natural context” (McMillan & Schumacher, 1997, p. 429).

Sampling Strategies

In my project, I utilized the strategy of
snowball sampling … in which each successive participant or group is named by a preceding group or individual. Participant referrals are the basis for choosing a sample. The researcher develops a profile of the attributes or particular trait sought and asks each participant to suggest others who fit the profile or have the attribute. (McMillan & Schumacher, 1997, p. 398)

I also utilized the technique of “judgmental sampling” where “ethnographers rely on their judgment to select the most appropriate members of the subculture or unit, based on the research question.” (Fetterman, 1989, p. 43). One basic requirement was that participants had taught a minimum of 25 years in the school district so that they would have been practicing during the decades discussed. A further requirement was that the participants had maintained an elementary school focus for their teaching, so that I could be better informed with regard to my own practice. Two participants were used for my study.

It should be noted that ultimately, the participants were key informants in the sense that they had “a greater experience in the setting” and were “especially insightful about what (went) on” (Bogden & Biklen, 1992, p. 67). Spradley (1979) suggests that “through the use of special questions, ordinary people become excellent informants. Everyone, in the course of their daily activities, has acquired knowledge that appears specialized to others” (p. 25). Key informants “are usually chosen because they have access to observations unavailable to the ethnographer” (McMillan & Schumacher, 1997, p. 448), and this was certainly the case as I myself had not taught during two of the decades discussed. I learned over the course of my research that “informants are a source of information; literally, they become teachers for the ethnographer” (Spradley, 1979, p. 25).
In discussing the nature of my project with a colleague, a prospective participant was suggested. Upon consulting the seniority list for the district (a list which indicates start date of teachers and length of service with the district), I discovered that this potential participant met the qualifications outlined. I telephoned this person and asked if they would like to participate. Whether this person agreed or refused, my intent was to then ask for referrals from this person after explaining the requirements for participants. All potential participants were initially contacted by phone, and both the study, and their part in the interviewing process were explained. Prior to, or at the time of the first interview, participants were asked to review and sign a letter of consent (see Appendix A).

Confidentiality of the participants' comments were respected in the following way: the transcripts of the interviews were only accessed by the researcher and the names of people and places were protected using aliases. Participants were ensured that everything possible was done to protect their anonymity, however, they were advised that this may not always be possible given the nature of the sampling strategy utilized.

Interviews were to be conducted after working hours or on weekends, based upon the availability of the participant and myself. The following choices of locations for the interviews were suggested: school board office, my home or school office, interviewer's home or school, library, or a room or office available in a local college building. The choice of location was made by the participant, in order to respect their comfort level and with regard to convenience of travel.

At the end of the work with the first participant, I asked for suggestions for further participants for my study. After outlining the requirements, a person was suggested, who was then contacted by phone. This second prospective participant did not meet the
requirements for the study. I re-contacted my initial participant, who gave me two further names. The initial person contacted was on leave from the district, but the next participant agreed to participate.

Data Collection Strategies

Data was collected through taped interviews, and participants were informed that this could require approximately two hours for each of two interviews. The first interview took just over three hours, with a short 10-minute break. The participant was asked several times if she wished to continue, and because she expressed interest to continue, the interview was completed in one session. The second interview took just under two hours.

Interviews were conducted using the “Interview Guide” format, where “topics are outlined in advance. [The] researcher decides the sequence and wording during the interview. Interview probes can increase comprehensiveness” (McMillan & Schumacher, 1997, p. 447). When a participant alluded to information specific to curriculum and instruction, but then appeared to be ready to move on, a carefully worded probe elicited more information in the area being studied. Fetterman (1989) refers to this specific type of interviewing as a situation in which “the ethnographer uses retrospective interviews to reconstruct the past, asking informants to recall personal historical information” (p. 50).

Before beginning the interviews, I went over the general approach for the interview: first, general background information about the participant, particularly the participant’s training and first teaching assignment; second, questions about curriculum and instruction in the 1970s, awareness of government policies at that time; next, the same for the 1980s; and finally, the same direction of questions for the 1990s. Participants were
asked to try to confine their responses to the decade being discussed, but were encouraged to add anything they felt might be relevant to the interview at any time. (See Appendix B for an outline of specific interview questions.)

Questions were checked for validity by two education colleagues (K. Link, and C. Froese, personal communication, Jan., 2002). Both checkers were given an explanation of the intent of the study and the proposed problem statement. They were then provided with the list of questions and asked to examine the questions for content and context.

Following the interviews, I transcribed the tapes of the interviews. After transcription and review by the subject, the tapes of the interviews were destroyed. A hard copy of the transcriptions was made and stored on computer disk. The disks and the hard copy are stored in a locked location in my home.

I examined the transcripts to determine how the participants' experiences were similar and/or different. The information gleaned was "stated as a description narrative." (McMillan & Schumacher, 1997, p. 596). All names and locations have been changed to protect the confidentiality and anonymity of the participants. Transcripts will be destroyed five years after acceptance of the project. The results will be available at the University of Northern British Columbia's library.

**Inductive Data Analysis**

In terms of data analysis, I first provided a copy of the transcription to the participants who were given the opportunity to suggest corrections. I then highlighted sections that referred to curriculum, instruction, changes in curriculum or instruction, locus of control, provincial policy, etc. The first step compared the experiences of individual
participants (patterns, similarities, differences, occurrences of note), and the second step cross-compared these experiences to the provincial policies of the time. I examined the transcripts in the light of any government-mandated directions for curriculum and instructional practices relevant to each decade studied. These sections were also highlighted. Review of each highlighted section helped discern the most representative and descriptive selection for inclusion in the results section. (See Appendix C for an example of the data analysis procedure.) Participants were asked to read their contributions in the final project, and had the leeway to either delete or change any information they provided.

Because “objectivity in qualitative research refers to the dependability and confirmability of the researcher’s interactive style, data recording, data analysis, and interpretation of participant meanings” (McMillan & Schumacher, 1997, p. 408), I remained aware at all times of my own bias in any and all aspects of this study. Having conducted a literature review, I brought to the interviews an awareness of the government policies of those times. I spent time examining the transcripts carefully for any cases where my use of probes led the subject to discuss an issue that was of my suggestion.

As I was acquainted professionally with both participants, my interpretations of their responses could be coloured by the fact that I already knew their personalities, and the interpretations might not be based solely on their actual responses. In order to reduce the possibilities of my own bias, I utilized a peer debriefer, who discussed and posed questions which helped me “understand (my) own posture and values and (my) role in the inquiry” (McMillan & Schumacher, 1997, p. 409). This use of a colleague proved to be very
valuable and this individual did point out areas of concern that I had not thought about previously.

For the purposes of anonymity, the first participant will be referred to throughout this paper as Cathy, and the second participant will be known as Doris.

Limitations of the Design

Due to the small sampling of this population, any results or interpretations apply only to the practice of these individuals during the times examined. It is probable that participants left out information that they may have deemed unflattering or inappropriate, as they are still practicing in the district to which they refer, or because they had been colleagues of the researcher. Further, the information is not appropriate for generalization to other teachers or other school districts as this is only the experience of certain individuals in a particular district during the decades examined. A retrospective interview “does not elicit the most accurate data. People forget or filter past events” (Fettering, 1989, p. 50).

While my own bias may be that particular historical governmental commissions and reports would have had a greater impact on the instructional practices of teachers, it is also possible that their own particular training led them to a certain type of curricular choice and instructional preference. Individual school district policy may have had an impact on the training of one or both of the participants. This may influence the choice of information presented, and may connote a large limitation. As well as utilizing a peer debriefer, I needed to be vigilant in ensuring that I employed “continuous self-questioning
and reevaluation of all phases of the research process” (McMillan & Schumacher, 1997, p. 408).
Chapter Three - Results

The information obtained from the two participants was rich with professional memories and information. The first interview resulted in over 45 pages of transcript, and the second constituted over 35 pages. For both interviews, the participants were comfortable and cooperative, and willing to share their professional history, thoughts, and remembrances. The interviews covered both teachers’ training, first teaching appointment, and the 1970s, 1980s, and 1990s in terms of curriculum and instruction.

Both participants had worked in the district for over 25 years and had seen, and taught through, a variety of changes in policy and educational practice. Cathy began her teaching career in 1966 in the same district in which she is now employed, as did Doris, who began teaching in 1969. Some background information was obtained with regard to training: nature of training, place of training, and credentials obtained.

Cathy was hired to her first teaching position with less than two years of training from the University of Victoria. She was 20 years old at the time and had been working toward her Elementary Basic (E.B.) certification. At that time the E.B. “was good for so many years and then you did have to upgrade eventually to a three-year which was a permanent certificate, an E.A.” Cathy completed her training less two courses which she later picked up at summer school because “the district at that time in ____ was crying for teachers and so they were giving letters of permission and I was offered three schools without actually being certified.” During the years 1964-1966, according to Cathy, the teachers-in-training from the University of Victoria, while taking methods courses as well as academic courses such as English, Math, and English history, were sent out to schools
once a week as soon as they started their first year. The Math course was difficult for Cathy and many other students as “it was the switchover from the ‘old math’ to the new math. ... Most of us who were in the courses had the old math in high school. ... All of a sudden the new math was a new way of teaching with the sets and the groups and far more hands-on theory rather than rote. ... It was a switch in mindset for teaching. ... The methodology was a bit different and the theory ... the vocabulary and the language was different than we had been taught in school ourselves.” She remembers methods courses in Art and Physical Education and others, but her recollection is that the academic courses were the “heavy-duties.”

Doris’s training was at Simon Fraser University. She attended the professional development program after three years of university and then received a four-year teaching certificate. Doris believed in Simon Fraser’s teacher preparation because “it was a new and innovative program” and “anybody who went through teacher training at Simon Fraser was hired right away, because it was such a good program.” She emphasized the fact that there was support provided, plenty of time for practicing teaching when you felt ready to do so, and prospective teachers learned how to make up unit plans and write out lesson plans from which to teach.

In their article on teacher education, Sheehan and Wilson (1994) report that in British Columbia, after 1956, “responsibility for the training of elementary school teachers was assumed by the universities” (p. 4). This was a change from the “one-year course following high school graduation in what was called a normal school.” (p. 4). The authors note that by 1962, the “requirement for a permanent certificate for elementary school teaching” was “3 years’ study toward the BEd degree” (p. 4). By 1970, “most elementary
teachers were … receiving at least 2 years of university education and the goal of a BA or BEd for all teachers was within sight.” (p. 4). This description fits with the training obtained by both Cathy and Doris. In Cathy’s case “the supply of and demand for teachers had a continuing effect on certification requirements …. as the effect of the ‘baby boom’ ran its course through the schools” (p. 4); hence, she was hired on a letter of permission.

Cathy began teaching in 1966 in a rural school in a Grade 2/3 class. She was 20 years old. According to her memories, she used a “standardized reader” that came with a “great manual because it told you what to do … it had all the elements that you would need – it had the phonetic elements, background knowledge element, and a comprehension element.” Use of this text complemented what she had been taught at university. She recalled that the reading program she was using was the one that was provincially prescribed – “all the districts had the same reading textbooks … so that no matter what district you went to, the reading program was the same.” Cathy remembers that “as a beginning teacher, the reading program was a wonderful thing to teach out of. It gave you a map.” When asked what the key components of the curriculum were at that time, Cathy replied: “There was a math textbook. There were workbooks that went with both the reading program and the math program…. Reading skills with a scope and sequence. The scope and sequence was laid down by the reader and readin’ and writin’! … The math was a lot more basic, a lot more adding, subtracting, multiplying, dividing, story problems. Not so much … higher thinking skills.”

It was apparent that Cathy felt that what she taught was controlled by the department of education for British Columbia. As she put it: “You didn’t have the leeway to go off and teach pieces of literature. That wasn’t sort of even the mindset. You had a
reader, you had a math textbook, you had a spelling textbook – at least the teacher had a spelling textbook. You used the lists that were given for the spelling program.” She recalled that there was a curriculum guide for physical education, but that she didn’t refer to it, rather, she used the textbook that she was given at university. In fact she doesn’t “remember curriculum guides being high on the list of ‘this is what you should teach’ – you taught from the manual …. You were given a textbook and you were given a manual, and everything you needed was in there.”

In 1966, Cathy’s district was beginning to develop a resource centre. The elementary supervisor drove a bus from school to school to bring around boxes of materials for teaching science. As Cathy recalled: “These unit boxes were developed by the district using the curriculum that was provincial – that’s how it worked – so that these units were made available to us in a package deal. Everything from worksheets, hands on materials, everything was in these boxes.” During her summers at university, Cathy discovered that her district was “one of the first” to be developing such a resource centre. She felt that “there was a lot of initiative in this district to make materials available to teachers …. Our resource centre was wonderful.” While science and social studies were something she taught, Cathy suggests that they “were really secondary to teaching the kids how to read and write. They didn’t have as broad a focus as they do now.”

Instructional practices at this time were based on a lecture-style form of teaching where “the teacher presented the information. The information was in the textbook, and the teacher presented it.” Language instruction, particularly reading, was based on small ability groupings. “Math was whole class. Socials and science were whole class.” In
general terms, Cathy remembered workbooks and worksheets — “a lot of worksheets, a lot more filling in the blanks, especially as you moved into the 1970s.”

The findings of the Chant Commission were released in 1960, six years before Cathy began teaching, and coincide with the information relayed by Cathy about curriculum at that time. With regard to textbooks, the Report states: “it was apparent that the text-books that were in use determined to a considerable extend [sic] the contents of the courses that were taught. In general, the instruction seemed to follow closely the text-book material” (Chant, 1960, Section XXIV). This textbook-based approach was commonly accepted and considered the norm. Although the report states that “for the experienced teacher in particular, the text-book will largely set the pattern for the course,” it is apparent that for Cathy, as a new teacher, this was also the case.

The Chant Commission recommended that the subjects be ranked in the following order: Central Subjects (Reading, Language, English, Arithmetic); Inner Subjects (Science, Social Studies, Languages); Outer Subjects (Fine Arts, PE, Agriculture and Home Ec., Health and Personal Development), with the Central Subjects being “those that can and must be taught, if necessary to the exclusion of others” (Section XX). This is in keeping with the way that Cathy was trained, and with the way she delivered the curriculum in her first classroom.

In terms of an overall or general perspective, the expectations that Cathy had for her own teaching were in line with the recommendations of the Chant Report. In reading through the report, I was struck by the difference in philosophy between the Department of Education and the Chant Commission with regard to the purpose of schools. Egan (n.d.) suggests that there are three strongly held precepts by the stakeholders who influence
education. The first is the socialization of children which suggests that “central to any educational scheme is initiation of the young into the knowledge, skills, values, and commitments common to the adult members of the society.” (p. 3). Secondly, is “Plato and the truth about reality” (p. 6) wherein the “intellectual cultivation of the young …. should not be primarily concerned with equipping students to develop the knowledge and skills best suited to ensuring their success as citizens, sharing the norms and values of their peer.” However, it should be “a process of learning those forms of knowledge that would give students a privileged, rational view of reality” through a “disciplined study of increasingly abstract forms of knowledge” (p. 6). The third precept involves “Rousseau and nature’s guidance”, the central theme of which “was that if you want students to understand what you teach, then you must make your methods of teaching conform with the nature of students’ learning” (p. 9). In Section II (Aims of the B.C. Education System), the Department of Education states: “A good school programme develops children in two ways – as individual persons, and as citizens.” This reflects a combination of the thinking of the socialization and the Rousseau camp. The Commission obviously did not agree with this attitude and had the following recommendation in the section “Defining the Major Aim of Education”: “The commission recommends that the primary or general aim of the educational system of British Columbia should be that of promoting the intellectual development of the pupils, and that this should be the major emphasis throughout the whole school programme” (Chant, 1960, Section II). This is a testimonial to the Platonic idea that the academic curriculum is most important. This recommendation certainly was carried through in Cathy’s teaching in 1966.
Doris began her teaching career in the fall of 1969. She was 21 years old and “arrived up here on the bus, not knowing anybody.” She was given a split class of 35 Grade 3 and Grade 4 students at a school in town. She was provided with a reading program that came “with a guidebook that laid everything out as to what to do – what the board-work was, what worksheets … everything was there.” In terms of the key components of the curriculum, Doris felt that “the teachers’ guides were very valuable because everything was in there to teach” and that “the guidebook went with what was in the Ministry’s guidelines.” In math, it was basically the same thing with “a guidebook, workbooks, plus other activities.” She felt that what she was given to teach with concurred very well with her education at university. She had prepared units for her practica for science and social studies based on the curriculum guides provided by the ministry of education. Doris recollects that the teachers’ job at that time was to teach “reading, writing, and arithmetic.” She acknowledges that her class was large and very busy but recalls that “they were different children in those days. The parents took more responsibility about parenting and they really appreciated education – the fact that their children were getting an education. It was quite different then compared to what it is now. Some parents these days figure teachers should do everything. We weren’t expected to do everything then, we were just expected to teach … to teach, mark, assess.”

In terms of instructional methods, Doris recalls that “in language arts it was direct teaching” and that she would “set up sheets for different stories in the book” and “most of the students would progress at their own rate.” She used what she called “the contract system” where each child progressed at his or her own individual rate through the stories and through the readers. They would complete the activities from the “sheets of paper.” In
Math, she would “stand at the front and teach them” and then “move [her] chair around and help each student out.” In science and social studies, she would “teach the unit’ and then “let them go ahead and do activities in groups.” While she said that allowing students to do an assignment in a group of three was not necessarily what other people would be doing in 1969, she said that she had learned some teaching methods from her father, who was a teacher. As with Cathy’s teaching, Doris’ curriculum revolved around what was commonly referred to as “the 3 Rs.”

It is possible that the 1967/68 BCTF report did have some impact on Doris’ training; however, it is apparent that neither teacher was willing to “change the curriculum to meet the needs of children” (Barman, et al. p. 420).

The 1970s

After a two-year leave, Cathy returned to teaching in 1969 in mainly intermediate classrooms. She had taken a leave from teaching in 1973 when her son was born, and returned in 1977 as a learning assistance teacher, working with students from Grades 1 through 7. Cathy recalls few changes to the curriculum in the early 1970s. She was “just following what was laid down in the textbooks for those grades.” She says that the “reading program was changing – 1970/71, and we were moving into Copp Clarke (or whatever it was). A different reading series had been prescribed to upgrade, so that they weren’t old.” Cathy maintained that the reading program had not changed much in theory: it was still utilizing a sight word program, the vocabulary was “graduated from easy to hard”, and the “methodology ... was still the same.” What she did notice as a significant difference was that the “pictures were newer” in the texts, and that they had “modernized
the settings and that sort of thing.” Specifically, more “unisex stories. ... Little girls doing things that were more adventurous and things less old-fashioned in their ideas about what little girls did and what little boys did. ... The little girls didn’t wear ankle socks and dresses in the pictures – you might see them in a pair of coveralls or jeans.” This is vividly recalled by Cathy because, as she points out, up to that point “we weren’t allowed to wear pants to teach in.”

Cathy’s recollection is that the real change in the language arts curriculum occurred later in the 1970s with the move “into the Language Patterns program” which was “considered a phonetic based reading program.” This was a shift “from the sight words” program that had previously been employed. She does recall that there were still “manuals” and “they still had workbooks.”

In terms of education changes, Cathy had a specific focus in that she was a learning assistance teacher. Up until the mid to late 1970s there were no learning assistance teachers, just a “reading specialist” who “covered the whole district, and it was a forerunner to the learning assistant.” When she first began her new job, she didn’t “recall hearing the words learning disability as much ... this child just didn’t understand this bit so you took them out of the classroom and you tried to make them understand it by giving them different ways to look at it.” She also recalls “a provincial shift in thought patterns” where “they started to decide that isolating students with severe problems wasn’t educably sound. It wasn’t the way to go. And so they were starting to put those kids back into the classrooms in some ways.”

A concern to Cathy during the 1970s was her professional upgrading. She was supposed to have her four-year degree completed by the late 1970s, but because she “was
doing the Mom thing” she was unable to complete her courses in that time frame. As a result, by the time she was able to go back, the bar had been raised, and she was now required to complete a fifth year in order to obtain a degree.

For Doris, the 1970s were a time of teaching in primary grades, starting with Grade 3, then Grade 2, and finally Grade 1 where she stayed for most of her career. She remembers that for the bulk of the 1970s, language arts teaching was “basically a sight word program, then we switched into Language Patterns which was a phonics program. The program was enjoyable for Doris because she “found there were some kids who did better learning how to do phonics. I had never learned how to do phonics either, so I learned how to teach phonics.” Doris had learned to read with a sight word program and learning and using the new phonics program was enjoyable for her. When asked where this shift in programming came from, Doris replied that “the government said - the Minister of Education said – we’re putting out these new readers.” She was “sure it was the ministry of education because it was prescribed.” In this case, the curriculum that Doris taught did not complement her training, rather “it was completely different.” She recalls that they “had a primary supervisor at that time and she helped us with it. She came around and we had mini workshops … introducing the book and how to teach phonics. It was amazing how many people didn’t know how to teach phonics!”

With regard to the math curriculum, Doris remembers very little changing through most of the 1970s. She was still teaching “basic facts, money concepts, time, and a little measurement.” In science and social studies “it pretty well all stayed the same. You did your units.” Physical education was the “usual activities; games, etc.” which came from “ministry guidelines.” Instructional practices stayed essentially the same in Doris’s mind:
students sat in rows; she would give the lesson and then walk around and “they’d ask questions if they were stuck.”

Doris recalls that at this time there was a surge in her school’s population, “so the open area classroom went up into the lodge” beside the school, and “they opened up the gym there and made it into four open-area classrooms.” According to Doris, this was a “new style of teaching that had come out … in the late seventies” where “everybody teaches in the same area, but you were divided off, but you could hear everybody teaching.” In looking back, she states that “the teachers that were in it didn’t like it.”

In the very late 1970s, as she remembers, Doris was part of a group of teachers in the district who were trained on a new math program called Math Their Way. This new program “was a different concept altogether, where the children had different ways of learning math. … It was much more interactive. You didn’t exactly teach a lesson – you got the kids down on the floor with their job boxes, which were boxes full of materials … to make different kinds of patterns and number quantities. I still use them! … It was a new innovative program. It started in the States and it came to Canada, and I think everybody just loved it because it was one of those programs where the primary children got down on the floor with all these hands on materials. It was concrete. … The philosophy was that it was a better way for children to learn how to do math. They figured that if you directly taught them they didn’t see it; they had to work with hands-on to get the concept.”

Changing her instructional methods for math was exciting for Doris. She stated that she “loved it” because “it made sense to [her].”

In the area of provincial policy and/or politics, Doris was not aware of any initiatives because she “wasn’t interested in that kind of stuff.” She was “a new teacher
and new to the game,” so was more focussed on her own classroom. One thing she did remember from her experiences in the 1970s was the influx of English as a Second Language (ESL) students into her school. Many of the students “couldn’t speak a word of English. ... It was difficult in the school because there weren’t any ESL teachers.” Although Doris found it difficult to cope with helping these students learn, she does recall that “the parents really appreciated education because they thought that it was important to have education to get on in the world,” and that the students were “some of the best” that she had in that they were “working hard, and being well-behaved.”

Although Cathy was teaching in intermediate grades, and Doris was in primary, there are still some areas where their recollections coincide. They both remember the introduction of Language Patterns, the phonetic-based reading program, and the fact that it was a significant shift away from the previous sight-based programs. In the arena of social change, both were aware of what affected them personally: for Cathy it was the change in the support for students with needs, and for Doris it was the influx of ESL students who also required additional support. As both were still fairly new teachers and changing jobs with some frequency, they were possibly not yet aware of politics and its potential impact on education.

With regard to provincial policy in the 1970s, changes were largely in the area of political shifts. In 1971, “the Department of Education is reorganized. ... The position of Superintendent of Education [was] eliminated, and the superintendent’s statutory duties [were] transferred to the Deputy Minister of Education” (B.C.’s History of Education Homeroom Timeline, 1970s, p. 1). In 1976, the Department of Education was changed to the Ministry of Education, and in 1977, the 106th Annual Report of the Public Schools
decided that a core curriculum was to be established which had three categories—“that which must be taught, that which should be taught, and that which may be taught” (B.C.'s History of Education Homeroom Timeline, 1970s, p. 2). Perhaps the most important political change occurred in 1972 when the longstanding Social Credit government lost to the NDP. Kilian (1995) stated that “everyone agreed that the teachers were a major factor in the defeat of the Bennett government in 1972. ... The teachers [had] formed a Political Action Committee (TPAC) which raised and spent thousands of dollars to defeat the Socreds” (p. 39). According to Kilian, “in less than a decade, B.C. teachers had gone from a nonpolitical interest group to a political force” (p. 39). However, for Cathy and Doris, changing curriculums and changing jobs were the focus of their attention and concentration, not the changing educational front in the form of teachers becoming a political force.

The 1980s

From 1977 to 1984, Cathy was a learning assistant teacher. She returned to the classroom in 1984, and taught Grade 2 and then grade 3, mostly in job-sharing situations. Her primary focus was language arts, with some math and some social studies also being part of her responsibility. She was aware that some teachers in the district had begun utilizing a program called language experience, which she describes as “teaching from where a child is. ... Instead of reading a book and responding to the book, they wrote the story and practiced reading it. ... The words they use in their writing come from their own experience. ... and they read that back and so they learn to read those words from their own language.” Although not all teachers were practicing this new methodology, Cathy
saw it as “a big shift and it wasn’t adopted provincially or district-wide. It was a method that some people were using.” Cathy sees this as just one example in an era where things were “starting to filter in. So, in other words, instead of the teachers feeling that they were totally tied to a reader and a textbook, people were starting to branch out.” She also alludes to the late 1980s when “these people from the coast” started these so-called ideas that Cathy and other teachers were “already doing,” but it was more of a “packaged” program.

Cathy did not “see as many changeovers and turnovers in the math” program during the 1980s. She remembers that “the district had an initiative where they put together a binder of materials for science” for each teacher in each school, “and in that it had the units that were available, and what should be covered.” She saw it as a “mini-curriculum guide that was exclusively for this district.” She acknowledged that it complemented ministry mandates but had more detail including learning outcomes and the resources the school district had available.

Cathy stated that at this time a new Social Studies program was coming out that was “based on the curriculum – community change.” She believes that the social studies curriculum from the late 1970s to the present has not particularly changed in terms of content. She recalled that the new program, with its new textbooks, was novel in that it included “a lot of integration into the language arts program.” This spurred a memory on Cathy’s part: “Whereas before, I guess, if you really want to think about it, there was your social studies, ... reading, ... math, and everything was separate. And ... as we move into the late seventies, early eighties, we were starting to integrate our subjects more. So that what I taught in social studies flowed over into my language arts. So ... that’s sort of
when themes began .... more cross connection in your classroom from one subject to another.”

Cathy recollected a variety of reading programs coming out during the 1980s: *Language Patterns* was one and at least two editions of *Ginn* reading programs. While the intent from the publisher was still, perhaps, to do the reading text from cover to cover, Cathy recalls that in her instruction, she wasn’t doing that, and in fact, this is the time when teachers began to have “a choice.” Phonetic approaches and sight word programs and combinations of both were all “completely authorized.” At this time, Cathy considered herself “experienced as a teacher. So, what [she had] done may not have been what another Grade 3 teacher did.”

When asked who controlled what she was teaching in the 1980s, Cathy replied, “I’d say district.” With the advent of “more choices” and the “lists” provided by the ministry, she did not see it so much as having “to stick to that prescribed textbook.” For her, it was “more of a district issue – what is the district going to provide?” The district resource centre, at that time, had “humungous amounts of stuff for language arts material, for instance, that you could use in your classroom” and Cathy thinks this helped teachers tend to “delve into more areas.”

When asked what the language arts curriculum actually was at this time and if there were curriculum guides, Cathy responded as a seasoned educator: “We were stuck with the same curriculum for years and years and years, and I think people stopped looking at them quite honestly. You’d seen them and the materials were right there and you just used the materials you had and then, I already had in my head my curriculum guide, and I think
that happens as you teach. You already have a scope and sequence chart up there somewhere of what skills need to be taught first before you get to the others.”

Cathy believed that this shift was largely a matter of having more choices. Included in that is what she refers to as “the development of children’s literature” that “was beginning to take root a little bit” at that time.

Math was “taught pretty much the same way” as previously, but science was now taught using the “discovery method” where the students would set up experiments and they had to extrapolate information from what they saw. So, we’ve gone from feeding them information to letting them figure it out.” Again, Cathy reiterated that this was just one more area where teachers now had choices in how they taught. Cathy noticed that P.E. moved “more towards teaching team sports” and “from a game-oriented P.E. to a skill-oriented P.E.” She saw this move as more of a precursor for the skills students needed for intermediate P.E., which had a greater emphasis on basketball and other team sports. Along with this shift, was the idea of giving students “the tools and … the skills, and they had to create cooperative games.” Cathy remembers that the cooperative learning stream “was running through in all subjects” and that there were many “workshops” provided in the late 1980s on this teaching style. She recalls that this was part of the “initiatives coming through the department of education.” Upon further probing, Cathy related that what she saw happening in interior districts was that teachers in the lower mainland districts would get together and try something new and then come up to the “hinterland, and then the people there buy into that and then it spreads.” When asked if these were ministry initiatives to which she referred, she replied, “I think it comes out of, for instance the ___ school district, but becomes a ministry initiative after it’s become a district
initiative, which is kind of interesting.” She saw this as a big change from when she had started teaching, and even through the 1970s when the “chain of command” was from the ministry to the district to the principal.

“Learning strategies” was another “buzzword” from the late 1980s, according to Cathy. Instructional practices were greatly affected by this “shift to using literature and learning strategies rather than fill in the blanks or workbooks, or answering comprehension questions.” Teachers were learning how to employ strategies to show students how to present their knowledge and demonstrate their understanding. Cathy also recollects that this is when the words whole language appeared. Her understanding of whole language is:

“You didn’t teach grammar, you didn’t teach phonics, you didn’t teach reading, you didn’t teach them all separately. It was all supposed to happen at once. And so if a child was doing a piece of writing, and you saw that they needed to learn how to do quotation marks, well, you taught them. And if everybody in the class wasn’t ready to do quotation marks, then you didn’t teach them. It was more on a small-group basis but only on need, not by command. ... So, what the problem was with whole language, was that some teachers decided that they didn’t have to teach any of that stuff and so there wasn’t a lot of formal instruction on how to write and spell and all that sort of thing. ... Whole language became a dirty word ... because some teachers felt that it wasn’t an eclectic enough approach.”

When asked who was controlling what was taught at this point, Cathy’s reply was a curt “Nobody. When the primary program came out, all those prescribed textbooks and things that we had had were no longer prescribed.”

In summary, Cathy perceived the 1980s as “a real era of change.” She calls the 1980s “the pot, where a lot of things were stirred up.” In terms of politics and political
policies, she said that she didn’t remember much except that “somewhere early on … the B. C. Teacher Federation wanted to get rid of the political party that was in power, and I think it was the Social Credit then. … It was called the ‘apple campaign’, and it was the only time I can remember that the teachers actually, sort of got behind something that political.” She acknowledges that her memories are fuzzy and that what she specifically remembers is that the teacher’s federation wanted to get “the NDP elected, because they thought that they would support the teachers.”

For Doris, the early 1980s were a period of many changes in her teaching career. She began with Grade 1, then switched the following year to a different school in Grade 2, and after a ten-month leave, returned to Grade 2. After a further short leave, she began teaching Grade 1 at yet another school, and remained there, teaching Grade 1 or Grade 1/2 over the course of the 1980s and 1990s.

With regard to the key components of the curriculum in the 1980s, Doris recalls that “there was a big workshop on Project Read in the district”. She describes this program as “a totally phonetic approach where hands-on, kinesthetic, auditory activities were used. Children had different ways of learning how to read and this was totally for them. … The children can really learn through it because they can see things, they can hear things, they can “arm spell”, they see things in their heads. They just love the program and so do I and I’m really thrilled about still teaching it!” In terms of how well this new program meshed with ministry guidelines, Doris recalled that it did so “very well. … It was all set out, in a logical sequence, to establish a new language arts curriculum.” When asked if it was the curriculum that was driving the program, Doris replied that it was in fact the program driving the curriculum and that she believes “the curriculum changed because
of *Project Read.*” When asked to elaborate, she stated that “quite a few of the people who write the curriculum at the ministry of education are teachers so they saw this program coming out so they changed the curriculum slightly to adjust to the new program coming out.”

In math, Doris was still using the *Math Their Way* program, and following a revised math curriculum that now allowed for “teaching in a different style.” Science and social studies were basically the same – the study of particular content units using guidebooks and curriculum guides. Doris recalls that teachers “developed [their] own theme” and the resource centre provided all of the materials needed for the activities in the unit. When asked who controlled what was taught at that point, Doris replied that it was “the Ministry of Education guidelines, the school district, and supervisors for primary, intermediate, and high school grades.” She sees this as a distinct difference from the beginning of her teaching career when things were much more “rigid” and the control came “from the ministry of education – definitely!”

In general, Doris’ instructional methods in the 1980s were very much “active learning – participation.” She would “demonstrate, and include the students in a variety of hands-on skills, let them go ahead and do their activity, and then … walk around and watch them and assess them as they were doing it.” She used this approach for all subjects.

When asked about the provincial policy and politics at that time, Doris remembered a dramatic change. She believed it was “about the middle part of the eighties” and that “it drastically changed from Social Credit to NDP. So we went from people who had no interest in unions at that time to unions – unions of the people – government was for the
people, not for the business people.” According to Doris, what she “remember(s) is that people voted for NDP like you wouldn’t believe, because it was a whole new concept. … People were more interested in unions and helping out each other … and the same outlook was more prevalent in the schools at that time.” This had an impact on teaching, she says, in that “you totally changed your style of teaching for the good of the students. They needed to be brought up as good citizens. … It was a whole different style of thinking in government and policy. It was just very refreshing.” In looking back, Doris believes that there was a change in the way that children and learning were viewed: “Now, you had flexibility. You could say, … you have these choices: this one or that one or these, and why would you take that choice? Whereas before, it was just one choice. … When that whole different style of teaching came in, we gave them choices … but they had to tell you which choice they wanted to do and why. Which made it really good for them – taught them decision making. And so in that way you saw their thinking – thinking skills came in at that time. Critical, analytical, literal – … which really helped develop the kids’ learning and thinking styles. They became reflective too, as did the teacher!”

In terms of other “political” policies of the 1980s, Doris does remember that job-sharing became very popular for female teachers in her district. She felt that the school district supported this because “they knew that women who were parents wanted to teach part time … and still have time as a Mom.” Doris also reported a shift in the power that principals had in the school: “In the sixties and seventies … this is what the administrator said, and this is what you did. It was all laid out in black and white.” She relates that “as the years went by, the principals became more sort of ‘overall’ looking, and so they liked
to have staff input, and so that’s where staff input came from. Whereas in the sixties and seventies there was none of that!”

There are several similarities in Cathy’s and Doris’s remembrances with regard to the 1980s. Both saw it as an era of change in terms of the locus of power: while Cathy saw it as teachers driving the curriculum, Doris saw it as the programs driving new curriculum: either way, it was coming from “the field.” As well, while Doris saw the 1980s as a period where more control was coming from the district and supervisors, Cathy saw it as a time of total choice for teachers in terms of what and how they taught. While Cathy emphasized that this was an era of many more choices for teachers, Doris perceived it as a time of teachers beginning to provide more choices for students. Both teachers related a shift in both curriculum and instructional methods, but for Cathy, that shift was much more emphasized in the plethora of new programs and strategies coming “down the pipe”; it was a time of people constantly trying new things. Both teachers mentioned the district resource centre as a pivot point from which the new ideas were supported.

Although both teachers recognized that there were dramatic political scenarios in the 1980s, their memories do not exactly coincide. While Cathy recalls that the teachers wanted to get rid of the government in order to get in a government that would support the teachers, Doris remembers it as a whole new era in political thinking on the part of the people in trade unions. For Cathy, the political climate was as Kilian (1995) states: “In the mid-1980s, … the politics of education, at least in British Columbia, was just a matter of voting the cautious rascals out and the confident saviours in” (p. 60). Indeed, the 1980s were a time of political unrest in British Columbia due to the Social Credit’s “Restraint” program which provoked opposition and great hostility among organized labour groups,
including ... the British Columbia Teachers’ Federation” (B.C.’s History of Education Homeroom Timeline, 1980s p. 1). In 1983, “teachers and school support staff (took) part in a three-day strike to protest reductions in education funding” (B.C.’s History of Education Homeroom Timeline, 1980s p. 1). At this time both public and professionals were increasingly divided as to what knowledge was of most worth, and how the young should acquire it. All levels of government became concerned by what they saw as the escalating cost of education. Vigorously competing theories and practices pervaded literature, and each found its proponents and practitioners amongst teachers. ... Teachers increasingly demanded greater control over school and classroom practice. (Barman et al., p. 421)

The political and public unrest with regard to education resulted in the government appointing Barry Sullivan to conduct an inquiry in 1987 that was known as “The Sullivan Royal Commission.” The government accepted “nearly all of its 83 recommendations, including a blueprint for an innovative curriculum program known as Year 2000” (B.C.’s History of Education Homeroom Timeline, 1980s p. 1).

*The 1990s*

For Cathy, coming into the 1990s was a time of “eclectic teaching methods” and being trained along with the rest of the northern region on the new *Primary Program*, and implementing it in classrooms. For Cathy, this was simply being “given permission to do what we had been dabbling in for a long time, but now we were doing it with the doors open. And we were sort of given permission to use everything.” The Primary Program, according to Cathy, “came from the teachers to the government and back out. ... There
were people from all over the province who had teachers put the primary program together. It came from teachers.” Cathy refers to it with some trepidation however, calling the experience the “primary program scare.” She feels that “a lot of people reacted with a real flip of the pendulum rather than take it in and use it and go with it.” The reason for this, she claims, is “because it was laid on you – you had big hype sessions. These teams were sent .... out ... and we were all told to go to ____ (large urban centre) to this big auditorium. ... The way it was presented, I think, made people feel that they had to do this. This was the ‘new way’ and ... it was presented like this big extravaganza.” She does acknowledge that people later became “more relaxed about it” and didn’t think it was “the Bible anymore”, but “when it first came out, that’s the impression that I got.” What Cathy found most distressing at this time was that “new teachers coming in the system had no guidelines, ... and a new teacher wouldn’t have that concept that these are the beginning skills that the kids pick up first, so that’s where you should start. There wasn’t that sort of skeleton/framework put on specifically in the language arts.” She did not in any way believe that there were not components of merit in the program: “My term was don’t throw out the baby with the bathwater. We know that these things are working, so take what’s new that’s coming in, and add to that. Try the new things if they’re new to you, add them and stir the pot and use everything you have. Don’t throw out all of your phonics; don’t throw out all of your whatever. Use that along with the others. And I saw a lot of experienced teachers doing that, and becoming more eclectic in their approach.” Cathy also perceives that the primary program helped teachers begin to see that “you don’t learn anything in isolation” and so you no longer needed to be “streaming your subjects with no correlation.” Another positive offshoot, according to Cathy, was in the way that
research became part of the way we look at how children learn. “Studies say, researchers say, that this is the way children learn how to spell and so, therefore, until they get to this stage in their progression of spelling skills, then it’s not feasible to do a formal spelling program.”

In the science curriculum, Cathy remembers very little changing, except that some of the units changed between grade levels and there were “far more experiments, far more research.” She does remember the math curriculum changing quite significantly after the early 1990s. Up to that point, she “tended to teach from a binder” that had been made up by groups of teachers in the district because they “really didn’t have any up-to-date math materials in the schools.... The textbooks weren’t covering what we needed to do.” The teachers “went to the curriculum guide” and “then put a scope and sequence together of our own and built a weekly unit.” When the new math program came in, it was concerned more with “hands on and using concrete materials,” relating “math to the real world”, “adding more and more concrete to the abstract rather than ... teach a process,” and “visualize and verbalize – talk about math.”

In the late 1990s, Cathy sees the IRPs as the driving force of the curriculum. “I think we’re being controlled by IRPs in most subjects a lot more. Remember when I told you that I didn’t even look at a curriculum guide? Well, nobody told me to. It wasn’t the focus. Things were coming through the district and the materials were being provided for me in the district and that’s what I used – my textbooks and my manuals, and they’ve taken those away. So you have to use an IRP to teach because you don’t have a manual that tells you that this is what you’re teaching. So I guess it’s shifted in some ways to more provincially again. Not that they’re providing the materials that I use, but they’re
providing me with a guide to teach.” Cathy took a leave for a year in the late 1990s to complete her degree at university and discovered while she was there that the professors were “using what was coming from the ministry to teach the students who are going out into the field. So I guess it’s really coming from the ministry, but someone had to show them the research that fed it, so the research, I would guess, is coming out of the university.” She believes that this new “accountability” is partly “money-driven” because of the “overspending for many years.” She also perceives that parents became more involved, “governments are saying parents need to have a say,” and so teachers “have to keep a tighter rein on what we do in the classroom because you have to prove that you’re doing the right thing.” In Cathy’s mind, the IRP is the document that she would pull out if a parent questioned her about what she is teaching. All in all, says Cathy, “as teachers, we are more curriculum-guide or IRP-guide focussed than we were ten years ago.” Part of this, she maintains, is a result of the backlash from the primary program document which “is a very loose document when it [comes] to actual content.”

When asked about provincial policy of the 1990s, Cathy’s reply once again reflects the new direction she sees in terms of accountability: “The nineties ... well, the IRPs are, I think, a very political move. ... in the sense that they gave parents what they were asking for.” When asked what was controlling or influencing teaching in the 1990s, Cathy readily chose the word influenced. She saw teaching as “becoming more global.” Her view is that teachers began to “connect more”, and that it was the end of the time of the “closed door teaching policy.”

Doris continued to teach language arts using Project Read as one of the bases for her instruction, and Math Their Way being the running focus of her math program. She
recalls that there were many “other innovative math programs” offered over the 1990s, but to her mind, they “weren’t nearly as good as Math Their Way.” She recalls the Primary Program/Year 2000 and whole language coming out around the same time. She was not impressed with the whole language ideas that she saw. According to Doris, “I wasn’t impressed because teachers who came out with that kind of training .... knew how to teach whole language, but ... they didn’t know what to do when it came to teaching phonics or sight words. .... I did the three separate programs because I found that not all children learned the same way. .... A lot of teachers who were experienced ... didn’t really like it, because it wasn’t a very good program, to put it bluntly.” Doris also remembers that most of the publishers were offering whole language texts and that that was what the district purchased. She did acknowledge that she “took a course actually in whole language, and ... did do it one year when a new reading program came in.” She remarked that after trying the new approach, she did incorporate elements into her “own program.”

Doris felt that the Primary Program itself was “actually received quite well.” She describes the basic tenets of the program in the following way: “Students were considered to be more creative and flexible in their thinking, more imaginative, more hands on. The whole concept was ... that you didn’t teach one strand of something. .... If you’re teaching a water unit, .... you could enlarge upon the theme of the whole broad nature of water. .... And the same thing in math – you did not do just strictly addition – you could do patterning with addition, you could do number concepts. .... That was the philosophy.” She thought that teachers were receptive to the program “because it just gave you more flexibility. You know, you just didn’t have to stick to a straight idea, you could enlarge upon that idea. We had things like brainstorming and webbing, which the kids really
enjoyed. So there was all this creative thinking and imagination going on and you could get the kids really thinking … and then get ideas from each other and brainstorm on each other’s ideas, so it was really fantastic.” She reports that instructional methods “changed drastically” after the primary program was brought in. She thinks that ultimately, the program went “by the wayside because the ministry didn’t have enough money to fund it.”

Initially, there were workshops provided and resources as well, but when the government changes “another Premier comes in and says ‘Oh, we can’t spend that much money on education now.’” This lack of funds progressed in the 1990s with the IRPs finally coming in “with no resources provided.” Doris was incredulous that teachers were expected to implement the IRPs without the necessary resources. She did not have a positive view of the IRPs: “I don’t find them very useful at all. In fact, I find them very vague. … There’s not much of use in there, I mean it doesn’t specifically say, like the old guidelines – you do this and this – you use this resource and this one. It has all kinds of resources that you can’t buy because you don’t have enough money. That’s ridiculous! … I know what they’re all about, but I don’t use them.” When I asked Doris who controls what she teaches right now, she laughingly replied, “I do! I control how and what I teach!”

In terms of politics of the day, Doris recalls that there was provincial job action in the “winter of ’93, and that [it] was over working conditions.” By working conditions, she meant class sizes, and at that time, it was considered that “the smaller the class, the better the learning.” When probed as to where that came from, Doris saw it as coming from the teacher’s union. She tells it this way: “Teachers established those changes. The government was NDP at that time and they looked upon us as a union, so they said ‘Okay, we agree with what you’re doing – you’re the professionals.’”
While Cathy and Doris had some conflicting ideas about the Primary Program from the beginning of the 1990s, and the IRP documents near the end, they both saw them as the driving forces of curriculum and instructional change during this decade. Both mentioned funding as a contentious issue, but Cathy seemed to feel that it was more of a necessary end than did Doris. By this point, they were both experienced teachers who had seen a lot of change in their professional careers, and a lot of fads and programs come and go. It is interesting that both felt that a teacher should adopt those components of the new ideas that they felt were beneficial to children’s learning.

With regard to the Sullivan Commission, Gammage (1991) says that “the Provincial government accepted and adopted the majority of the recommendations with commendable speed.” (p. 1). Certainly, the report was largely adopted within a couple of years in the Primary Program/Year 2000. Gammage also states that the document describes the basic principles of the ... system as follows:

1. Learning requires the active participation of the learner.
2. People learn in a variety of ways and different rates.
3. Learning is both an individual and a social process. (pp. 8 – 9)

There is no doubt that these tenets were adopted by Cathy and Doris. True, they had come to most of these realizations along the way, but for both, it seemed as if the Primary Program document underscored a lot of what they believed about the teaching of primary children.

Barman and Sutherland (1995) agree with the themes that Cathy and Doris established in terms of the curricular happenings of the 1990s. They state that
rising government costs and economic recession characterized the early 1990s across North America. … In British Columbia aspects of the Sullivan Report implemented through the Year 2000 initiatives came under hard scrutiny. … The NDP provincial government was forced to redraw its educational priorities. … If fast approaching, Year 2000 was also receding from view. (pp. 421 – 422)

A far cry from the Chant Commission recommendations for “intellectual development”, the Year 2000 mission statement asserts that “the purpose of the British Columbia school system is to enable learners to develop their individual potential and to acquire the knowledge, skills, and attitudes needed to contribute to a healthy society and a prosperous and sustainable economy” (Year 2000: A Framework for Learning, n.p.). Both Cathy and Doris recognized that the time for the Year 2000 priorities was over, and the movement towards the IRPs was a fait accompli. Doris believed that the next change in government would bring about another change in educational focus, while Cathy perceived a trend back to the provincial government being the locus of control for educational direction.

Both participants were able to remember a great deal about their teaching practices and the instructional methods used by themselves and others during the decades discussed. The participants both remarked that they had not previously noticed the patterns in education that they now noticed, having looked back on the last three decades in such full detail.
Chapter Four - Discussion

Teaching Implications

The candour and wealth of information conveyed by both participants was very valuable to this project. Truly, teachers who have taught for over three decades have a valuable breadth of professional insight and retrospection. A path was described that wound through the decades showing many changes along the way. First teaching assignments relied heavily on the manuals provided, which were basically the only instructional tools available. The provincial education mandate was for teachers to follow these programs closely. During the 1970s the teachers continued with prescribed programs, albeit some content and pictures may have changed. This was a period when the school district began to acquire a prominent position in terms of what it could provide for teachers through its resource centre. The 1980s saw a plethora of new and innovative ideas being brought into classrooms, and it developed into an era of experimentation and flexibility. While Doris saw the control as still fundamentally in the hands of the provincial government, with some control now exercised by the local school board; Cathy saw more of a movement from the district office to the choices made by individual teachers. The 1990s saw a culmination of teacher expertise reflected in the Primary Program and Year 2000 documents, but then a quick shift to the IRPs — the new blueprint — a framework of reference, a new curriculum but without the resources. Underlying the comments from both teachers was how they learned to use experience as their ultimate
curriculum guide. This occurred somewhat during the 1980s, but with more conviction in the 1990s,

My research question asked how closely teachers who worked in a district that was geographically distant from the centre of educational change followed the policy coming from the government. I found that the participants’ teaching practices did tend to reflect the policies that came from the province. Both participants spoke of many curricular and instructional workshops that were provided by the district in which they worked. When there was a large-scale change, like the Primary Program, they took part in regional presentations that were given all over the province.

For the most part, both teachers seemed relatively aware of the policies of the times, reflected in the mandates of the provincial governments. While the 1970s was a period where the authority rested firmly with the provincial department of education, the 1980s was a time of upheaval with restraint and a public unhappy with the education system. This was reflected in the many new programs as educators and government alike grappled with the “best way” to educate future citizens. The 1990s brought some new educational policies, but most of the practices had already become part of both teachers’ repertoires. The policies of the times were reflected in what the two teachers taught and how they taught it. This is illustrated in their awareness of phonetic prescribed texts, whole language, and new math programs to coincide with new math curriculums.

There were a number of similarities in the recollections of the two participants in terms of curricular practices and curricular and instructional changes. The major difference was in how they perceived the change in the locus of power: for Cathy it was a movement of ministry to district to individual teachers and then back to the provincial
ministry; for Doris it was ministry, then ministry shared with district, and then her own experience as a teacher.

The data suggests that while these two participants have largely different views and understandings of government policies, and/or large variations in individual practice in the same district at the same time, their evolution of experience tended to guide their practice, as much as policy and/or politics.

It is important to consider that the recollections of the two teachers interviewed presented only their views, in their experience, in their district, over the time examined. It should not, in any way, be construed as applicable to any other experience of other teachers in the same or in other districts.

One of the most interesting parts of the interview process, for me, was at the end of the interviews when I spontaneously asked the teachers what they determined to be the direction of education. They both had very firm views on where we had come from, and where we were going in education. They also had definite ideas of what was “wrong” with how we were educating children, and what the problems with the system might be. For Cathy, it was the fact that “we keep raising the bar of what we think an average child should achieve in a year. ... We’re having them do research on the net at eight years old! All they had to focus on before was a reader and a workbook.” Cathy also sees the introduction of more curricular strands as creating problems for the children: “Not only do they have reading and writing and math, but they have French and Art and Grammar and P.E. and Personal Planning, and I don’t think they have as much time to be successful at anything. They don’t get to practice anything; we just keep adding more and more, and I think that affects their learning. ... They don’t have time to learn how to play and do that
problem solving on their own anymore.” She thinks that for some children, the ones who have “the computers and the travel” and therefore the “background knowledge” and the “language and the vocabulary”, that “they’re ready to take off” but that there are other children who are “without the advantages and don’t have the skills to work through what we’re presenting to those other kids” and because of this, “the gap is widening.” She believes that this creates “a problem for self-esteem with some of these children.” She acknowledges that “the kids have changed ... behaviourally, but is that the chicken or the egg?” Cathy’s feeling is for the children and what we are expecting of them in school and in the other parts of their intellectual lives: “They aren’t having time to be children. We’re expecting them to be sophisticated, and they’re pulling all this stuff off of Discovery Channel and they only half understand it. So, academically, I think that maybe their brains are too full. [laughter]. Please sir, can I go home, my brain is full!”

According to Doris, “Things are going now towards more traditional teaching, where some schools are going back to the basics, getting rid of all the frills. ... (such as) career preparation, computer technology, personal planning.” She thinks of the “basics” as “reading, writing and arithmetic” and perceives that the time to work on those things needs to be addressed for children to do well in school. She sees the focus back on the basics as being driven by “the parents in the province, because they see all these superfluous things going on, and they think well, my child needs this and this and this to get through school and get their education farther on, and they think all the other stuff is not necessary.” Although Doris acknowledged that she had said that in the past it was the teachers who influenced the direction of education, she now thinks that it is “probably more the parents that are changing things now – the parents have the influence.” To Doris, it is all part of a
“big cycle.” In teaching, “we’ve gone through all the different evolutions and now we’re going back to the beginning again!”

**Future Research**

I think it would be of benefit to examine what experienced teachers perceive as the past trends in education, and how they impact on where we are, and where we are headed. Their experience with curriculum and instructional trends over three decades might help us learn more about possible present and future trends. It would also be interesting to examine the reminiscences of teachers from other interior districts with regard to the 70s, 80s, and 90s. The curricular and instructional trends identified would offer some comparison points between the two teachers in this district and those of others with similar backgrounds and geographical location, in order to ascertain if the trends are similar. If indeed it is a “pendulum” as Cathy describes, then this might be reflected in a further study.

The discussions with regard to the locus of power in terms of who dictates curricular and instructional practices indicate a possibility for further study. While the two teachers’ opinions differed as to the focus of this control, it was apparent that both considered that there were changes along the way. Is it possible that there is yet another movement on the horizon that points to parents directing what is taught in schools? Is there a chance that the control could become a partnership between all of the stakeholders in education? Is this already the case, or has it been in the past?

Finally, of what worth are the understandings of teachers who have taught for several decades? Is there a plausible use of this wealth of knowledge to help guide the
teachers of the future? There would seem to be a treasure trove of enlightenment to be gleaned from the experiences of these elite educators. The willingness and motivation to share are certainly there, and finding a good use for this knowledge would be an important area for further study.

Conclusion

For these two teachers, their instructional methods and choice of content were based on sound educational thinking combined with both a knowledge of how children learn and a well-honed educational instinct for what works best when and with what child. Their training began many decades before their current practice, but their education as educators continued and continues throughout their careers, reflected with more confidence as the years progress. To their minds, there is a best practice; it is their best practice, given the knowledge and perspective which they have acquired through years of experience, training, and reflection. New ideas, new governments, new curricula, new district initiatives and new classroom settings did not necessarily greatly change the way they taught, but each influence added to a mix that was already being refined and improved along the way.

In my experience, I find that this is also true of my journey as an educator; I am constantly searching to learn more about how children learn and more about what and how I teach in order to be most effective. While I was initially trained in the “Primary Program” era, I have subsequently learned a great deal from courses, workshops, district initiatives, new curriculum, new classroom settings, and the reactions and reflections of the students I teach. Some of what I have learned, I have incorporated into my teaching
repertoire; some I have chosen to leave behind. It is certainly true that I have also learned in many ways from other teachers; their experiences and reflections offered freely in many staffrooms. This sharing, like the sharing of Doris and Cathy, offers a depth of understanding of the big picture in the history of education that cannot be gleaned from numbers collected along the way.
References


http://virtue.unbc.ca:2209/fulltext.asp?resultSetId=R00000001&hitNum=1


Appendix A

February 6, 2002

Dear __________,

As discussed with you on the phone, I am undertaking a project to complete my Master's degree with the University of Northern British Columbia (UNBC).

The purpose of my research is to examine curricular/instructional practices in the 1970s, 1980s and 1990s in our district as seen through the eyes of several teachers, and compare that with district and provincial policy of the time. I believe there is a rich store of information held in the memories of teachers who have practiced in the same district over time. This information may help us identify trends in curriculum and instruction, and may give us some idea as to how closely individual practice compares with provincial policy when the practitioners are geographically removed from the provincial capital.

I will be interviewing elementary school teachers who have taught a minimum of 25 years in the district, and are presently teaching. I will be taping interviews that will ask participants for their perspective on what they were teaching and how they were teaching it during the decades mentioned. Taped interviews will probably occur over 2 - 2 hour sessions (a total of 4 hours). Participants may be asked for suggestions for names of further participants. Interviews will be transcribed, word for word, and then the tapes will be destroyed. Only the researcher will have access to the transcript. The transcripts of the tapes will be destroyed 5 years after acceptance of the final project. Participants will then be given a copy of the transcript in order to add/change/delete any incomplete/incorrect information. All person and place names will be changed to ensure anonymity and confidentiality. As well, the participants will have access to a copy of the project before officially submitted, in order to read their contributions and delete/change any information they had provided. Participants have the right to withdraw from the project at any time.

Should you have any questions about this research, please feel free to contact the interviewer, Diane Haynes (250-992-0966), or Paul Madak (250-960-6520) or Colin Chasteauneuf (250-960-5401) at UNBC. Should you wish to lodge a complaint about the project, please contact the Office of Research, UNBC (250-960-5820).

Your contribution will be greatly appreciated. Please advise the researcher if you require a copy of the signed consent form.

I agree to take part in this study.

Signature of Research Participant  Date  Witness

________________________  ______________________  __________________________
Printed Name                        Date                        Printed Name

I believe that the person signing this form understands what is involved in the study and voluntarily agrees to participate.

Signature of Investigator  Date
Appendix B

Interview Questions

Type of Interview: Interview guide: "Topics are outlined in advance. Researcher decides the sequence and wording during the interview. Interview probes can increase comprehensiveness." Interview is "conversational and situational." (p. 447 McMillan & Schumacher).

Introduction: Welcome and thank participant. Explain that the approach for the interview will take the following format:

- first, general background information
  - age now, age when began teaching, type of training (where, when, etc.)
  - first teaching assignment (grade placement, etc.)

- then, questions about the 1970s
- then, the 1980s, and finally the 1990s
- please try to confine your responses to the decade being discussed in terms of curriculum and/or policy changes.

1. What kind of training did you receive to prepare you for teaching. Where and when? Tell me about your training.

2. What was the date of your first teaching appointment? What was the grade to which you were appointed? What preparations did you make? What materials were available to you?

3. What were the key components of the curriculum at that time? What did you teach? Who controlled what you taught? Did these things jive with your training?

4. What types of instructional methods did you utilize? (Why?) How were they different for different subject areas? How did that compare with your training?

5. What kind of district initiatives do you remember from that time?

6. What had gone on or was going on in provincial policy and/or politics that you were aware of at that time (re-iterate that responses should be confined to that particular decade).

7. Repeat Q. 3 – 6 for 80s and 90s.

8. Do you have anything else to add?
Appendix C

Researcher’s words are in italics; participant’s words are in regular type.
Sections that were highlighted are underlined; sections used as quotes are in bold print.

Well, we don’t have a textbook, and it’s come all this way. If you look at it – it’s matched the curriculum guide up to this point, and if you look at the IRP now, those elements of community change and stuff are still in there.

Did the curriculum guide change then?

Not much.

*I mean from the late 60’s one to the 70’s and the new textbook?*

The curriculum guide that we were using in the 70′s, and the new IRP’s – there wasn’t much change to the socials program.

*Just a new textbook?*

Ya, you went from more of this – there was a big set of pictures that we had with the first textbook. They came in big cardboard flats and community change, and there was....

*Same idea?*

Same idea, and on the back of the posters there were questions and information. Then, the new textbook came out, and it had a MANUAL with it to follow, that had 10,000 ideas that you could never cover.

*What do you mean by ideas? I feel like we may not be covering instruction....*

*How to teach it, and a lot of integration into the language arts program. Whereas before, I guess, if you really want to think about it, there was your social studies, there was your reading, there was your math, and everything was separate. And I guess that now that I start to babble about it, as we moved into the late 70′s, early 80′s, we were starting to integrate our subjects more. So that what I taught in Social Studies flowed over into my language arts. So that ya - well, yes, when you think about it, that’s sort of when themes began!*

*But you were still presenting information and they were responding basically?*

Um hmm, but a *lot* more activity based. For instance in doing the socials program, one thing that sticks in my mind is you studied the difference between rural and cities, so we wrote poems in language arts that had to do with rural and city and so you started to see *more cross connection in your classroom from one subject to another.*
You were incorporating.....

Ya, and I could never teach a story that I didn’t like. So, if there was a story in the reader that I just couldn’t get my teeth into, then I’d skip it and go on to the next one.

Right, but when you first started teaching...

No.

Meanwhile, you’re going back to U.Vic. still and catching up on people from all over the province, correct?

Ya, on and off over the years I did 2 years of university at summer school – 2 and a bit.

Okay, so at this point, who controlled what you taught?

I’d say district.

I think I asked – the 70’s was sort of the same as when you started – it was the ministry – did you call it the department of education?

Yes.

So, 80’s – you’re telling me it was more district.

From what – we used to get lists, okay, like this is prescribed by the ministry, and this is authorized by the ministry, and so I saw it as starting to have more choices. There were more on the authorized list that you could use – you didn’t have to stick to that prescribed textbook. And so I, and so then I see it as more of a district issue – what is the district going to provide?

Okay.

So, if you look at our resource centre, we had humungous amounts of stuff for language arts material, for instance. That you could use in your classroom. You tended to delve into more areas.

This is sounding quite different from the “here’s the curriculum which totally parallels the book and the teaching guide and that’s what you teach. This isn’t like ....What was the curriculum at this time? Were there curriculum guides?

We were stuck with the same curriculum for years and years and years, and I think people stopped looking at them quite honestly, right. You’d seen them and the materials were right there and you just used the materials you had, and then.
I think I saw it move more towards teaching team sports. We went from a game-oriented P.E. to a skill oriented P.E., where the kids wanted to know how to play basketball, you know.

*Can you go back to the game oriented p. e. – give me some examples?*

Fox and Squirrels, Frozen Tag, that kind of a thing. It was more of a game based program, and then it went more to a skill, team kind of thing. Basketball, Volleyball, track and field, were things we played. So you got almost more into an intermediate kind of concept. And then it went into creative games.

*This is in the 80's?*

Ya. The reason this sticks is because in one of my summer school sessions I had to take a P.E. course, and the focus from the instructor was that we taught skills to primaries through games, and we taught the children how to make their own cooperative games. So... you worked into intermediate. So the idea of the P.E. program was that you gave them the tools, and you gave them the skills, and they had to create cooperative games.

Cooperative games...?

Ya – oh ya – and that gets into good old cooperative learning, which I tried to ignore a lot of. Actually, when I think back, that stream was running through in all subjects. We went to workshops on cooperative learning.

*In this district?*

Yes.

*So, we're still in the late 80's?*

Yes. I think the 80’s, as I taught, was a real era of change, because there’s so much in there, when you think about it. (apologetic)

*Well, don’t rush, we have lots of time.*

I did miss the middle of the 70’s, so there was a block there when I was out of the loop. I see the 80’s, when you think about it – we’re going to another pendulum swing in the classroom: cooperative learning. And when I think about it, workshops were cooperative learning workshops.

*And that was for specific........*

And the books came out, you know, all about cooperative learning and how groups work: there had to be a reporter; there had to be a scribe, you know.