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EDUCATORS' PERSPECTIVES ON ASSESSMENT:
TENSIONS, CONTRADICTIONS AND DILEMMAS

FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES

by

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DATE

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this interview study was to understand the perspectives of 17 educators towards assessment of reading-language arts in the public education system in British Columbia, Canada. The study used G.H. Mead's (1932) notion of a "perspective" and A. Strauss' (1978) construct of a "negotiated order" to examine the dynamic, tensive relationships educators enter into with "others" (Mead, 1932) including themselves, when they carry out reading assessments in the public school. With these constructs, the development of a modern-day "mode of cognition" (Gellner, 1964) and the concomitant development of attenuating, "structural processes" (Strauss, 1978) that form the hidden backdrop to assessment are elucidated. Against this backdrop, the participants accounts, gathered through reflective conversations, were interpreted as a set of agonizing relationships (Hillman, 1983) that revolve around dilemmas inherent in assessing children's growth and ability in reading. The study concludes by exploring the nature of some of the dilemmas the educators in this study faced, and presenting an argument for the necessity of deliberation and agony in coming to know, teach and judge children in reading.

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DEDICATION

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CHAPTER ONE

Purpose and focus of the study

This study focuses on the personal understanding of 17 educators with regard to the assessment of reading-language arts in the public education system in British Columbia. More specifically, it examines the symbols these people use, the norms, values and imperatives they attend to, the assumptions they tacitly accept, the relationships they enter into with those they assess and the conflict, contradictions and ambiguities they must negotiate in discharging their formal responsibility to assess students in an institutional setting. The intent of this study is to discover and understand how these "insiders" are oriented towards reading assessment, that is, symbolically where they "stand and assess from", within the organization, as evidenced by their reflective accounts. The inquiry will be approached from a particular sociological perspective, that of symbolic interactionism.

Problems in reading assessment

Although assessment in general, and in particular reading assessment, has been a persistent and knotty problem in education for at least 100 years (Linn, 1986; Resnick, 1981, 1985), currently it is receiving renewed attention from educators, parents, politicians and researchers alike (Broadfoot, 1979, 1984; McLean, 1985; Squire, 1987). Much of the public concern appears to emulate from the perception that "standards" are declining, that illiteracy rates are high, and

generally, that schools are not providing adequate educational opportunities for students or "quality control" (Calamai, 1987; McLean, 1985; Resnick, 1985). As well, issues of fairness and equity loom large in the public eye, heightened by growing awareness of the bias, discrimination, inconsistency and limitations inherent in the methods used to assess reading (Farr & Carey, 1986; Johnston, 1989), and by the stiffening competition for extended educations and the resulting certificates thought to be necessary for access to highly prized places in our society (Broadfoot, 1984; Matthews, 1985). Now, more than ever, perhaps, society feels it has the right to "call to account" those responsible for assessing their children (Broadfoot, 1984).

At the same time, those inside education appear to be more concerned ultimately, with whether or not "the process of weighing the baby has interfered with the growth of the child" (MacLean, 1985, p. 5), and this concern is particularized in the intense controversy over the use of standardized instruments and formal examinations (Johnston, 1984; Pearson, 1985; Pearson & Valencia, 1987; Wigdor & Garner, 1982). Many see the problem in assessment as an overreliance on tests and the concomittant dominance of a "testing mentality" that focuses attention on questionable ends to the exclusion of more desirable means (Eisner, 1984; Dore, 1976; La Mahieu, 1984). Other critics focus on the isolation of assessment from teaching and learning (MacLean, 1985), still others on its inconsistency with extant notions of pedagogy (Bussis & Chittenden, 1987; Goldstein, 1986; Johnston, 1989), or on the inappropriate use of tests to make educational decisions (Kearney, 1983;

Butler & Wood, 1985). A few have noted the atrophied state of viable alternatives to current practices (Farr & Carey, 1986; Lunzer & Gardner, 1979; Johnston, 1984; 1986; 1989), that is, they are concerned with the "stunting" effects of testing on professionals and the profession as well as the deleterious effects on students.

As one can see, the list of criticisms is long and the tone of many of these decidedly bitter, e.g., Hoffman's (1976) litany on "The Tyranny of Testing". In spite of this, standardized testing continues to enjoy remarkable growth (Farr & Carey, 1986; Gardner, 1985; Wigdor and Garner, 1982). Part of the problem, Broadfoot (1984) argues, is that "Public issues...remain detached from teacher professional concerns...Test constructors, test users and test critics remain isolated from each other, locked into their professional communities and idiosyncratic concerns" (p. 2). Consequently, we have been left with some uneasy compromises, and even outright contradictions that exert conflicting pressures on various groups of educators. This lack of agreement between the "oughts" and "shoulds" adds to the confusion, ambivalence and lack of understanding concerning assessment.

The need for this study

For all of these reasons, assessment warrants close and careful scrutiny, with an eye to understanding the process, as opposed to controlling it, predicting it or empirically testing some aspect of it.

To date, the vast majority of the research, discussion and debate in reading assessment has occurred almost entirely within the arena of

"what" and "how" (Broadfoot, 1984). The focus has been primarily on the functional aspects of assessment, that is, the relevancy, dependability and practicality of the various instruments and methods or their lack of these and other qualities deemed critical to the process of measuring human endeavor (Linn, 1986). Given the pragmatic nature of education and the perception that it is an applied discipline, it is not difficult to understand why such a course of action has been pursued for so long and with so much vigour. However, we need to step back and assess this pursuit carefully, because when we examine the "results" we see that a well developed, widely integrated set of procedures has not been forthcoming. The problems in assessment persist, perennially (Farr and Carey, 1986; Lippman, 1929; British Columbia Department of Education, 1939; Wells, 1892) and the list of dangers and caveats continues to grow. For the time being anyway, it appears that the "best" in reading assessment has eluded our grasp. Even the much vaunted "continuous informal assessment" techniques currently being promoted in the literature have not escaped serious criticism. As Broadfoot (1984) notes, "it [teacher-based, continuous assessment] may in practice be a more insidious basis for social discrimination and social control...The studies in this volume demonstrate that there is more than a little danger that conformity rather than ability will be rewarded" (p. 11).

The notion that assessment is not just mathematically or theoretically driven, but also that those bases are ultimately built upon ideologies or notions of what is right and good, has only recently begun to surface. Such a realization has caused some theoreticians in

the field of reading assessment, most notably Peter Johnston (1989), to assert that "the relentless pursuit of objective, valid measures of human performance is inappropriate and counter-productive to the improvement of teaching and learning" (p. 7).

Thus, it has become increasingly clear that the problems faced by educators are not rooted in the surface behaviours of assessment. Any assessment practice has built into it, at least implicitly, a particular view of reality, of human nature and learning (Farr and Carey, 1986; Madaus, 1986). Assessment "untouched by human minds" is just not possible asserts Johnston (1988), and further to this:

But even children's overt behavior which is presumed to reflect mental activity cannot be seen without being interpreted. There is no way to avoid this state of affairs. We look with our eyes, but we choose what to look at and we see (interpret, make sense) with our minds. The point is that no matter how we go about educational evaluation, it involves interpretation. Human symbol systems are involved, and thus there is no "objective" measurement. Tests are constructed by people with their particular frame of reality, responded to by people within their constitution of reality, and responses are analysed by people within their own version of reality. (my emphasis, p. 5)

By focusing almost exclusively on methods, the consciousness that lies beneath these more visible behaviors and artifacts of reading assessment has remained hidden or largely obscured. Discernment, judgement, interpretation, choice--these processes play a major role in shaping human action, and yet as Madaus (1986) maintains, in assessment "the temptation to relegate the human factor to minor significance is a growing trend" (p. 88).

Shulman's (1986) comments then are hardly surprising:

the essential task for the teacher, therefore, is to appraise, infer or anticipate the prior cognitive structures that students bring to the learning situation...[However] most of the cognitive research on teaching has ignored the teacher's cognitive processes in this sense. There have been no studies of teacher's knowledge, of the schemata or frames they employ to apprehend student understanding or misconceptions (p. 25).

The time is at hand to examine those "particular frames of reality" that Johnston (1988) speaks about.

The major constructs undergirding this study

Because the study is focused on understanding how people define or interpret a social phenomenon in an institutional setting, it falls within the rubric of interpretative sociology. The broad purpose of interpretative studies is to "bring out" the meaning carried in human

situations and relate them to other meaning and meaning systems (Berger & Kelner, 1981).

A useful way to characterize meaning system is through the construct of "perspective". In this study a perspective means a tendency for an individual to experience and understand the world through an interpretative framework. Perspective is a symbolic structure that an actor brings to situations, consisting of "meanings (or concepts) ideas, and values in differing states of clarity and coherence" (Worstay, 1961, p. 152). Processes of interpretation derive from perspectives, but they also act back upon them (Hammersley & Hargreaves, 1983) so that perspectives develop in the course of social interaction (Mead, 1938; Becker, Geer, Hughes & Strauss, 1961; Stebbins, 1975). In the case of reading assessment, a perspective may influence the kind of information a teacher or administrator will seek to find out about a student's ability or growth in reading, the way in which that information is gathered and how it is interpreted and shared with others. Perspectives then are implicated in decision-making in reading assessment and as such are crucial to the process itself.

Bound up with the notion of an individual perspective is the notion of a social order, a world peopled by "others" that influence the way we talk, think and act. Because we are not free to say and do as we please, because our speech and actions have consequences beyond our immediate "selves", others must be taken into account. To do this, this study uses Strauss' (1978) notion of a "negotiated order" as a metaphor to view life within an organization. It gives the notion of structure a

living quality by construing it as an interconnected web of relationships or contexts that "stand around" the interactions that take place. These contexts, which include history and convention, or what Hall (1987) calls the "sediments of the past", both facilitate and constrain the way things like assessment are viewed and play out. The fundamental tenet of the negotiated order construct is that organizational structure is really like a noun in gerund form, not fixed or static, but constantly emerging in response to the transactions undertaken by the participants. Strauss' (1978) pithy phrase "structural process" characterizes nicely some of the dynamics that are built into the process of assessing reading in this society.

Guiding questions for this study

The intention of this study is to look carefully at the way educators orient themselves to reading assessment. The questions formulated below serve to facilitate this process, helping to shape the study and define its limits. A brief rationale is offered for each question to help situate it within the theoretical perspective taken in this study.

1. What elements constitute various perspectives toward reading assessment?

It is assumed that individual perspectives exist and that they contain certain defining characteristics which make them distinguishable from other perspectives (Becker, et. al, 1961; Boag, 1980; Janesick, 1977; Stebbins, 1975).

2. Are there common or shared perspectives, or common elements of different perspectives?

It is realized that "individuals are bound together by networks of communication or universes of discourse. Whether the members are geographically proximate or not, they share important symbolizations, and hence also share perspectives on 'reality'" (Lindesmith, Strauss & Denzin, 1978, p. 437-438). Hence, the focus in this study will be on what is common or shared.

3. Is there an historical precedence for the various perspectives or elements of perspectives?

It is also assumed that the demands and imperatives of the institution will influence an individual's perspective. Some of these influences will have a history, and therefore identifying historically embedded meanings and influences is thought to be crucial to understanding existing perspectives (Maines, 1977, 1987; Hall, 1982, 1983). As Mead (1938) asserts "The past is impressive as it emerges into that form and structure which gives solidity and significance to the hasting and evanescent present" (p. 100).

4. What assumptions about reading and reading assessment support these perspectives?

Finally, assumptions are thought to be important to understanding perspectives, for they are what the individual takes-for-granted about the situation. Assumptions then are not necessarily "mulled over" actively by the individual. They may not enter into someone's working consciousness, but instead be tacitly held to

support the construction and reaffirmation of one's perspective. Shibutani (1962) argues that "to understand what a man does we must have some appreciation of his definition of the situation and this requires knowing something of what he takes for granted" (p. 143).

Design and methodology of this study

Due to the focus on "point of view", this is primarily an interview study. Like other studies concerned with understanding the subjective interpretations of individuals (Bussis, et. al, 1976; Geertz, 1973; Scarth, 1984), it required that the researcher get involved with participants in reflective conversations. Thus the procedure known as "depth interviewing" (Adelman, 1981) was employed as the primary method of data gathering.

To provide a context for the interviews, a document analysis was conducted in each case. Documents consisted of those produced personally by the participants for the purposes of assessing reading as well as those produced by the school, district and Ministry outlining positions, policies and procedures for assessment. As well, publications of the various professional associations were examined for evidence of a particular perspective towards reading assessment. These materials helped establish both an historical and situational context, within which the interviews were interpreted. A total of 17 educators from the three action contexts (Hall, 1987) within public education, the school, the district and the Ministry were interviewed between one and seven times for a total of 55 interviews. Of these, 42 were transcribed

completely. A listing of all the interviews conducted can be found in Appendix A.

The results were not wholly constructed from the interviews of the participants, nor is it possible to do this given the assumptions about human sense making made here that are discussed in the next section. The "analysis" or interpretation went through several phases that started long before live data collection began and continued up until the time of writing this dissertation. These "moments" of data analysis and the two basic levels that exist within them are discussed more fully in Chapter 3.

The limitations of this study

At the most fundamental level, this study is concerned with various perspectives that individuals take or "make" in response to their participation in a social world. As such, it rests upon some crucial assumptions about human existence that both guide and shape the nature of this inquiry and define its limits.

This section will attempt to outline the "stubborn particulars" that this study had to work with. They have to do with our inability to escape the experiential world we live in, with our own participation in bringing that reality into being, with the phenomenon of language and the act of knowing, and with the complex, shifting nature of human intention and social convention. As can be seen, many of the limitations for this study are specific instances of the kinds of limitations that affect all inquiry, and some are particular to studies

such as this that focus, through talk, on some aspect of the social world.

As to the first and foremost limitation, Meighan (1986) states it clearly thus:

if meanings are defined by social conventions, the sociologists who are after all, fundamentally products of the system in which these conventions operate, are constrained to use analytical categories, descriptions of the world which are far from objective; sociology, therefore, is itself constrained by the very forces it seeks to describe. (p. 243).

Hammersley and Atkinson (1983) call this the "principle of reflexivity", the fact that we cannot escape the complex web of relationships that we have spent our lives building, to obtain a disconnected "god's eye view" of the social world. Thus the "objects" of study for this dissertation, the particular orientations of the participants towards assessment, do not lie outside our own experiences, language, thought and relationships.

Because we take as a given the fact that we are active, intelligent beings our connectedness to things has further implications. We make choices, bring interpretations to bear upon our perceptions and participate actively in shaping what we see and know (Bruner, 1986; Wood, 1988). As John Wheeler (1973), a well known physicist at Princeton notes:

May the universe in some strange sense be "brought into being" by the participation of those who participate?...The vital act is the act of participation. "Participator" is the incontrovertible new concept given by quantum mechanics. It strikes down the term "observer" of classical theory, the man who stands safely behind the thick glass wall and watches what goes on without taking part. It can't be done, quantum mechanics says (p. 1273).

The point being made here is that words like "orientation", "assessment" and even "standards" are used to refer to concepts we create and use to describe the connections and interrelationships we perceive. There is no word or concept of "standards" apart from people. Like all our concepts, "standards" are human creations that develop together with certain practices. They are constantly revised through a procedure of mutual adjustment (Mead, 1938) and negotiation (Strauss, 1978).

To "find out" or gather data then means to participate in this process of negotiation. In the largest sense then the data generated for this (and any) study is an artifact of the study; the researcher and his methods did not simply intrude on the phenomena "out there," but participated in their creation (Bruner, 1986). The data gathered can be "objectified", that is, they can be talked about, submitted to scrutiny, held to be warranted and reasonable, and changed if they are not, but

they remain human constructions woven into a complex set of relationships.

To say that language played a key role in this process is perhaps mundane, but the implications of this statement have escaped many researchers in the past. Language has been described as "a window into the mind" and such a phrase suggests that it is a clear, undistorted lens through which we can obtain an unobstructed view of consciousness. Edward Sapir (cited in Mandelbaum, 1955) reminds us of the limitations imposed by language itself.

Human beings do not live in the objective world alone, nor alone in the world of social activity as ordinarily understood but are very much at the mercy of the particular language which has become the medium of expression for their society. (p. 162)

There is, in Merleau-Ponty's (1964) words:

a certain opaqueness of language. Nowhere does it stop and leave a place for pure meaning; it is always limited only by more language...it is never composed of absolutely universal meanings which can be made completely explicit beneath the gaze of a transparent constituting consciousness (p. 42)... every attempt to close our hand on the thought which dwells in the spoken word leaves only a bit of verbal material in our fingers. (p. 89)

Expression of meaning, through language, can never be complete, absolute or univocal. In Polanyi's (1967) words much of knowledge has a "tacit dimension" to it. As he states, quite simply, "we know more than we can tell" (p. 4). In this study because the participants were talking about assessment, i.e., engaged in "reflection on actions" (Schon, 1983) rather than being engaged in the concrete procedures of assessment, it was assumed, as Schon (1983) asserts, that some of their understanding remained within their "doing", that is, within the ongoing relationships they had with their students.

Quite understandably, some participants were better than others at reflecting on their intentions and actions and expressing those abstractions through talk. It is these participants that became "key informants" in this study, that is, "subjects who are unusually perceptive and articulate" (Bogden & Biklen, 1982, p. 15). Naturally, more interviews were conducted with these people, greater rapport developed with them, and more time and effort was spent analyzing what was said and meant by them. Thus no statements about whether or not these "results" apply to "any and all" educators can be made because the number of participants was small, 17 in all, they were not randomly sampled, but instead volunteered or were solicited for specific purposes, and they were not all treated equally. By "equal" it is meant that the questions in the interviews were not posed according to predetermined schedule, nor were all questions posed to all participants. Instead, questions were directed in a personal way, in

response to what was said, disciplined more by the developing topic at hand than the researcher's agenda.

Further limitations to the free choice of questions by the researcher (and to the "results" of this study) and the unrestricted flow of answers were imposed by the informal social practices and values that are implicated in conversational "contracts" in this society. Wood (1988) notes that:

People have the right to remain silent if they wish and there are implicit conventions that inhibit us from going "too far" in probing people's motives, proclivities, behaviour and beliefs. Privacy has to be respected and we must be aware of the bounds over which we should not pass. These bounds, of course, vary according to our relationship and degree of intimacy with the person with whom we are talking. Insistence upon "the total truth", upon absolutely clear and unambiguous utterances and full disclosure, is threatening, disruptive and rude.

(p. 37)

As well, it was assumed that during the interviews, both conscious and unconscious interests were at play on both sides. As Goffman (1955) would say the conversations were carefully "managed", that is, neither researcher nor participant allowed a completely unrestricted view of "self" to emerge.

Gaining an answer then is not just a linguistic, psychological or social issue, but a moral and political one as well, i.e., it was constrained by the researcher taking into account what answering the question would entail for the participant. If the respondent is forced to experience a loss of face or rights, if their professional lives are placed in jeopardy, the damage done will likely far outweigh the benefits accrued. Rapport could never be established, and if established, would soon be destroyed if the researcher assumed the role of a "prosecuting attorney" and simply began "grilling the witness". These ethical considerations, wherein practitioners were not pressed to "foul their own nests" constrained the interviews and prevented them from becoming an unwavering pursuit of information.

The delicacy of the situation was no doubt heightened by the presence of a tape recorder, although Hammersley and Atkinson (1983) contend that other approaches to recording data, like making field notes, can be even more disconcerting, particularly if it requires "hasty scribbling throughout the conversation" (p. 162). They also contend that generally the repressive effects of a tape recorder dissipate over time, and since most of the interviews were multiple ones, the benefits of taping were thought to outweigh the disadvantages. The researcher relied largely on the development of trust and rapport along with assurances of anonymity and the granting of full authority over transcripts to the participants in order that they be as frank and honest about their orientations as the situation and their good sense allowed. The interviews proceeded best when the

discussion was handled as "two reflective men [sic] trying to find out how things happen but the less informed one (the interviewer) deferring to the wiser one and learning from him" (Dexter, 1970, p. 56).

Whatever was lost by this approach was more than made up for by the opportunity to examine an important aspect of the assessment process: the underlying conceptions that guide it.

The contributions of this study

The primary purpose of this dissertation is to understand how educators within a system are oriented towards a particular aspect of their practice, assessment in the language arts. By engaging these people in reflective conversations, their particular definitions of the situation emerged and became the "objects" of scrutiny and the "subjects" of this study. By listening to the "back talk" of these practitioners, as they confronted the array of ill defined "messes" inherent in their situations (and partly of their own making), it was possible to cast some light on how these people "acted their minds" (Harrison, 1978), given the complex web of shifting relationships and historical precedents that ensnared them. This contribution is seen as an important first step in improving educational practice, for as Fullan (1982; 1985) has shown, any conception of what "ought to be" must take into account and be built upon the meaning that practitioners give to their practices and the concerns they have for change. Ultimately, it is the people in the setting that must come to live with the poverty of "what is" and the promise of "what might be."

For some of the participants, this dissertation was also a contribution to their own sense of self, that is, it provided them with a means to achieve a clearer picture of who they were and what the meaning of their practice was. For them, this also was an important first step in becoming "different sorts of people in different sorts of social arrangements" (Schwandt, 1989, p. 14). Their commitment to engage in conversation was a commitment to find out what their world was like, a commitment shared with them by the researcher.

This shared sense-making also contributed to the researcher's own understanding, particularly of that aspect of assessment where the "stubborn particulars" of every day experience, theoretical constructs, language and social relationships meet. Schon (1983) calls this largely unexplored zone a "swampy lowland where situations are confusing 'messes' incapable of technical solution" (p. 43). It is an important and challenging area to study, one that typically falls between the technical-rational notions of "theory" and "practice". For the researcher, grappling with the complex puzzles that exist in the common sense world of educators yielded insights that can be shared with others, as a contribution to the conversation that will help us all decide "how we want to belong to the world, how we want to set about understanding it, living it, changing it" (Seller, 1988, p. 181).

The shape of this dissertation

Chapter Two is concerned with the literature that bears upon this dissertation. It begins by describing studies that have been concerned

with painting the "big picture". That is, their focus is on the large order relationships that exist between assessment, schools and society. These relationships help us see that there may be important influences at work in the milieu that the participants in this study must take into account in carrying out their responsibilities. These studies are part of a burgeoning new field called the "sociology of assessment" (Broadfoot, 1975; 1984). As well, the studies in Chapter Two, that are concerned either directly or indirectly with how teachers, administrators, parents, and children regard assessment will be described.

In Chapter Three, the design and methodology for this study are described, and a rationale offered for the procedures that were undertaken to study assessment as a social historical and psychological phenomenon. As well, the conceptual framework that was used to understand and explain the accounts of the participants in this study is set out in more detail.

Chapter Four contains a historical discussion of the development of a frame of mind that predominated in science and education from the 17th century onward. The undergirding logic from the past that continues to influence our thinking about assessment and the working out of that logic is the focus for this section.

Chapter Five is an examination of the ways of knowing of the participants in this study. It is here in the participants accounts that the echoes of Cartesian logic and the older "participating consciousness" can be seen, as well as a struggle between the "agonies"

that help us understand (Hillman, 1983), that is between certainty and uncertainty, proximity and distance, knowledge and ignorance in reading assessment.

CHAPTER TWO

This chapter will review the research that is central to the focus of this study: the existing orientations or perspectives towards assessment and reading assessment held by educators in the public school system. To the researcher's knowledge, there are no studies that have as their focus educator's "ways of knowing" in reading assessment. Although the authors reviewed here all point to the need for inquiry into the way practitioners think (and feel) towards assessment, most of them only mention orientations or perspectives in passing, tiptoeing around the edge of this complex, unexplored area, and "its capacity to breed uneasiness in the various research communities" (Pearson and Valencia, 1987, p. 9). Thus it is as Shulman (1986) asserts: "There have been no studies of teacher's knowledge, of the schemata of frames they employ to upperhand student understanding or misconceptions" (p. 25). Nor have there been any studies to date, of the relationships teachers enter into with students when they assess them and how those relationships are tempered by the "dominant mode of cognition of a western industrial society" (Gellner, 1964, p. 71). This then is the "object" of focus for this study. For now we must turn to the "snippets" that exist in the literature, the "interesting asides" uncovered by other researchers pursuing different questions.

Jackson's "Life in classrooms"

Jackson (1968), in his conceptual analysis of teaching, discusses

at length what he calls "the distinctively evaluative atmosphere that pervades the classroom from the earliest grades onward" (p. 20). He describes the dynamics of classroom evaluation under four headings: the sources of evaluation, chiefly the teacher, but also student peers and selves; the conditions under which evaluations are communicated, from public to private; the referents of evaluation, academic attainment, adjustment to institutional expectations and the possession of specific character traits; and, the quality of those evaluations, from positive to negative. He also goes on to describe several strategies teachers and students use to cope with evaluation: the blunting of harsh judgements by the teacher, and the attempts by the students to increase the flow of rewards, conceal negative evaluation, win the approval of both teacher and peers and "cool out" poor marks.

But Jackson, by his own admission, shies away from the personal meanings of these events "principally because the picture becomes even more complex. Fortunately...we need to focus only on the more objective aspects of the student's evaluative experience" (p. 20). Later in a chapter entitled "Teacher's views" he does briefly discuss their orientations to standardized tests. Here he is surprised by what he called "the absence of reference to objective evidence of school learning. Testing when it is mentioned at all is given little emphasis. These teachers treat it as being of minor importance in helping them understand how well they have done" (p. 123). These particular teachers, according to Jackson, avoid using paper and pencil tests for several reasons: the scarcity of what they considered to be useful

instruments, poor administrative practices, and a general mistrust of tests springing from their beliefs that students behave atypically on tests, that tests reflect native ability rather than teaching effectiveness and in the extreme case, that tests were completely disconnected from what was occurring in the classroom. Essentially these teachers were denying that the standardized instruments available to them had any construct or content validity, and this issue is central to much of the spirited debate expressed in the literature, and in the data for this dissertation. Thus Jackson (1968) found teachers to believe that test information often does not continue the teacher's judgement derived from her classroom contacts. Furthermore, when these contradictions between test scores and teacher judgement occur, the teacher seems more likely to deny the accuracy of the test information than to alter her previous assessment of the student...when this view is present it is hardly surprising to find the teacher looking upon testing as if it were just a nuisance (p. 124-126).

At the end of his discussion pertaining to teachers' views towards assessment, Jackson alludes to something he sees in his participants: an uneasiness with assessment. "Our interview material reveals some signs of this discomfort even among teachers who have achieved an enviable reputation in their school systems" (p. 126).

These results are confirmed in part by this study. By probing carefully, however it was found that "discomfort" with assessment was not a steady, static state of mind, but instead existed in a relationship with being at ease with what was known and done. Comfort

and discomfort then, ebbed and flowed during different phases of knowing in assessment, as we shall see in Chapter Five.

Lortie's "Schoolteacher"

Lortie (1975), in his landmark sociological study touches here and there on issues of assessment that are of concern to this study.

In general Lortie (1975) found that "the teacher's craft is marked by the absence of concrete models for emulation, unclear lines of influence, multiple and controversial criteria, ambiguity about assessment timing and instability in the product" (p. 136). This uncertainty on a number of fronts is a minor theme running through other studies that touch on assessment reviewed here and it is the compelling phenomenon that lies at the heart of the historical review in Chapter Four and the participants accounts in Chapter Five.

In focussing specifically on assessment, Lortie (1975) notes "It is safe to say that no aspect of the teacher's work evoked as much emotion as this issue of assessing outcomes. That teachers found such inquiry trying was apparent in the earliest pilot interviews: early attempts to probe deeply into the subject had to be revised lest respondents break off the interview" (p. 143).

In spite of changes to the way the question was asked, he still found this to be the only topic where a kind of emotional "flooding" took place and a number of "illogical" answers were produced. He comments:

Thus a seemingly simple question on problems of evaluating progress unleashed a torrent of feeling and frustration; one finds self blame, a sense of inadequacy, the bitter taste of failure, anger at the students, despair and other dark emotions. The freedom to assess one's own work is no occasion for joy; the conscience remains unsatisfied as ambiguity, uncertainty and little apparent change impede the flow of reassurance (p. 144).

The tension Lortie senses in the teachers in his study, between certainty and ambiguity, between freedom and control, are major themes that also run through the majority of the participants' accounts in this study as well. In Lortie's (1975) study their presence was significant enough to have him conclude that "Special research should be instituted into the perceptions and values of teachers in this area" (p. 128).

McLean's "Craft of student evaluation"

It was a study by Leslie McLean (1985) commissioned by the Canadian Education Association, entitled "The craft of student evaluation" that first caught the attention of the researcher and outlined, not just the need for a study such as this one, but also hinted at some possible directions that an inquiry into assessment in the elementary school might take. McLean's (1985) final recommendation is this:

This study barely caught a glimpse of the real process [of evaluation] in secondary schools and

didn't really see it at all at the elementary level.

It would serve everyone well, including the intrepid scholars who hope to advance the theory of assessment and destiny to document the beliefs, skills, fears and talents of a number of teachers about the student evaluation work they do (p. 50, my emphasis).

Through questionnaires and interviews McLean attempted a "modest beginning" to probing the "confusion and inadequate data base underlying many [perennial] concerns" (p. 11) about assessment in Canadian schools. He focussed on the clarity of evaluation policies in the education departments of six provinces (British Columbia, Alberta, Ontario, Quebec, New Brunswick and Newfoundland) i.e., "how explicit they were at each level, how clearly they were perceived by district and school personnel and problems arising, if any" (McLean, 1985, p. 12). Through questionnaires and interviews, McLean spoke to department of education officials, and in the high school, to administrators and high school teachers, thus his comment that he "didn't really see it [process of evaluation] at the elementary school" (p. 12). Although the present study, included (as McLean's did) Ministry officials, and school board members, as well as district level staff, its main focus is on the processes of evaluation (i.e., knowing) at the elementary school level, and the relationships of these evaluators to their responsibilities (be they regulations, parents or students).

McLean's (1985) findings point to some interesting issues that are probed more deeply in this study. He alludes to the importance of "an informal sizing up of students that can influence their [teacher's] allocation of teaching time in profound ways" (p. 25). This process is dealt with in detail in Chapter Five, within the metaphor "sitting beside to assist". It represents what Pearson and Valencia (1987) call "an approach to assessment that is so informal as to be indistinguishable from instruction" (p. 13), one that has remained largely hidden up until now beneath the hard surface of technique and method.

In many ways McLean's study is disconcerting for he paints a picture of a "neglected craft with a weak scholarly base" (p. 47). Note what he says about how it is that professionals come to know evaluation in Canada.

Teachers receive little formal training in evaluation (sometimes none at all)...teachers learn about evaluations from other skilled practitioners [if they are available]. According to their accounts they learn by experience with little or no supervision and in-service opportunities are becoming fewer and fewer every year...They are seldom prepared to learn from general examples and still less by deductions from theory [McLean, 1985, pp. 33-34].

This finding would be a lot less troubling, if there existed a strong "community of conversation" (Gadamer, 1983, p. 31) that teachers were socialized into once they took up their positions in the field. But apparently this is not the case: "The majority rarely discuss evaluation", McLean (1985) asserts,... "if one were considering terms such as democracy to describe decisions about evaluation the term anarchy would be more accurate" [p. 38, his emphasis]. This theme, of pervasive individualism, or as McPherson (1962) noted "possessive individualism" is taken up in this study. The historical roots of its development are explored in Chapter Four and some disturbing manifestations of this condition, e.g., the loss of a "sense of place", are discussed in Chapter Five.

McLean (1985) also notes the pressure rapid technological change is bringing to bear upon schools, juxtaposed by a "remarkable stability in evaluation" (p. 43). This curious condition, that is the presence of "flux and fossilization" is confirmed in the accounts of the participants in this study in Chapter Five, as well as in the history of assessment dealt with in Chapter Four. It is seen in this study as one of the "agonies" (Hillman, 1983) or tensions inherent in assessing elementary students in reading. It brings to light an old and troubling question: What is the proper relation between tradition and emancipation?

Bullough's "First year teacher"

In Bullough's (1989) case study of a first year teacher, he

recounts a condition similar to what McLean (1985) discovered in his study. That is, "Kerrie stepped into a vacuum [of expectations for assessing students] and could, apparently do as she pleased; she would have to solve the conflicting assumptions in grading on her own" (Bullough, 1989, p. 69). She never does, nor is this surprising, for the entire field is caught, as Pearson and Valencia (1987) note, in "a dilemma with some devilish characteristics" (p. 7). In Bullough's (1989) study, Kerrie has problems, as do Mark (a first year teacher), Robert and John (experienced principals) in this study, with the lack of a "sense of place", and an old epistemological question that troubled Descartes: "How do you know?" Note what Kerrie says:

Fairness is what? I don't know...It's grading the kids equally who can be graded against each other. I don't mean "against" but together on the same criteria and sticking to that. So, you have this...pool of [students] who are held pretty much to the same criteria? How do you decide who is in that group? I don't know. That's part of the scariness [about grading]. It is [scary]. It's horrible.

Kerrie exhibits here what Bordo (1987) calls "epistemological insecurity". Conditions are uncertain and there are "no rules for the application of rules" as Kant (1787/1964) would say. Part of this comes no doubt from the fact that Kerrie is a first year teacher, and part because she feels, as Hume noted "absolutely alone in the universe"

(quoted in Windsor, 1990, p. 30). There is no "community of conversation" available to help her get her bearings, no mentor, and the "infinity of the open space" in her knowing frightens her.

Kerrie also reaffirms Lortie's (1975) and McLean's (1985) assertions that her pre-service education hasn't helped her know whether the decisions she is making or actions she is taking are appropriate.

Grading is still kind of a problem with me. I wouldn't mind taking a class on grading. I think grading could be hit much better in college. I'd give that low marks. I just didn't really know what to do, kind of" (Bullough, 1989, p. 69).

Her description here of "not knowing what to do" relates, if we consider Schon's (1983) assertion that "doing" is a way of knowing, more to practical action that it does to formal, rationalized, abstract knowledge about assessment, the kind offered in many university courses on evaluation. McLean (1985) argues that giving teachers this kind of knowledge is as irrelevant as teaching potter's how to do spectral analysis of their glazes. The problem is that this form of knowledge (rational-analytical) has come to predominate in our society and our schools (Goodlad, 1984; Schon, 1983; Hlebowitsh, 1990). The problem can not be addressed simply by "taking another university course", but instead, as this study will show, involves developing ways of knowing and doing through living with children.

We come face to face with Kerrie's problems again in Chapter Five, where Mark, a beginning teacher, wrestles with the same isolation, loss

of a sense of place and multiplicity of alternative frameworks that Kerrie struggled with.

The sociology of assessment: Scarth's "Teacher's attitudes to examining"

The last study examined in this review is part of a burgeoning new field known as the sociology of assessment. The expressed purpose of this particular wing of sociology is to situate the controversies that surround assessment "in a more general understanding of the relationship between school and society" (Broadfoot, 1984, p. 1). Researcher's working in this area agree that it is "the complex machinery of assessment that links the structure and values of society to the day to day work of the school" (Eggleston, 1979, p. 10). Since assessment procedures form the "explicit basis of communication between school and society about the nature of educational priorities and the performance of individual pupils" (Broadfoot, 1984, p. 9), it is felt that examining these processes will yield insights that may help us decide how to be "different sorts of people in different sorts of social arrangements" (Seller, 1988, p. 17).

Thus questions such as these are examined: "Why are the assessments of most incidence (teacher's) given least significance, and those of least incidence (province-wide) given highest significance" (Meighan, 1986, p. 14); Why does "certification continue to hold such a powerful grip on schooling if its role in selection for jobs is often as irrelevant as it is dominant"? (Broadfoot, 1984, p. 4); and in a more

sinister fashion, researchers like Ranson (1984) ask "Does informal (continuous, teacher-based) assessment perpetrate a pervasive and irresistible surveillance by means of which individuals are categorized and judged according to a norm that they have no power to resist?" (p. 229) These are interesting questions and the pursuit of them leads to a deeper understanding of the dual conflicting goals of education: as a means to liberate and empower individuals and as a mechanism of social control and reproduction. As we shall see these contradictions are enfolded within the relationships that teachers enter into with pupils, existing as dynamic perspectives or responses to the interplay of historical, social and psychological forces that are brought to bear on life in the classroom.

Within the field of sociology of assessment only one study could be found that was related (somewhat tangentially) to this study. It was a case study by Scarth (1984) concerned with "Teacher's Attitudes to Examining" (p. 221).

Although his study is focused solely on high school teachers' perception of and orientations to examinations, it is relevant to this study because Scarth is concerned with the process of examining, a central means of assessment for many teachers, both elementary and secondary. Because he is concerned with the notion of "assessment as constraint", Scarth (1984) begins with a question that is of interest to many educators working in this area: Why, in the face of so much strident criticism, do exams persist?

A widely accepted notion, ascribed to by both Jackson (1968) and Lortie (1975) and by others concerned with the history of assessment like Broadfoot (1979), Johnston (1984), Resnick (1982, 1984) and Tomkins (1986) is that exams and tests were and are largely "foreign agents," foisted on teachers by administrative fiat because of pressure from an external audience sent on directing, controlling and making teachers account for what goes on in their classrooms. Although Scarth (1984) does not deny that this may indeed be the case, and certainly there is plenty of support for this thesis in the data from this study, he does argue that this focus has diverted attention from the essential service that exams (and by extension tests) have for teachers. The teachers in Scarth's study did not see examinations as set apart from teaching, acting as an external constraint upon it, but rather as a normal, natural and, because of their "enabling capacities," necessary part of teaching. Teachers' orientations in this study were dominated by a "practicality ethic," that is, if something worked in terms of facilitating their task as a teacher, then once "found", it quickly became routinized. Given the immediacy and urgency of the demands of classroom life (Jackson, 1968; Lortie, 1975; Janesick, 1977), Scarth's (1984) study shows how "teachers were able to minimize the demands assessment procedures placed on their time and energy whilst maximizing their enabling capacity for facilitating classroom order, curriculum design, teacher self evaluation and pupil guidance" (p. 6). Given these conditions, Scarth (1984) concludes "only when structured changes in society as a whole have eroded ties facilitating function will teachers

begin to question seriously the central positions of examinations in 'school life'" (p. 99). Although this may seem to be a fairly deterministic conclusion, it points to the delicate balance that exists between freedom and control, a reoccurring theme throughout life in society and this dissertation. As we shall see, not all the participants in this study were able to (or interested in) maintaining this balance.

From a social constructivist point of view, the individuals in Scarth's study are not just conforming to the expectations of the existing institution, they are also recreating that institution (Berger and Luckman, 1966). Examinations are both external to and produced by these teachers. Scarth's point is that to see them simply as constraints, and taken further, to label them as bad or undesirable is to misunderstand the processes involved in examining as it is woven into the fabric of school life. Perhaps the easiest way to illustrate this finding is to quote a participant in this study: "Exams are like God, if we didn't have them we'd invent them" (6:2, p. 17)

In this study as we shall see exams and tests performed another "enabling function"--they helped many of the participants achieve a "sense of place" with their children and helped them "make it all fit". This desire for stability, clarity and a sense of fit in the larger order of things has both historical and contemporary roots. These will be explored further in Chapter Four and Five. For now we will turn to the theoretical underpinnings and the methodology that flows from these concerns.

CHAPTER THREE

This chapter will offer a rationale for approaching this study from the perspective of symbolic interactionism, set out some of the basic tenets of this view, describe the important sociological constructs that were used to interpret the data for this study, outline the way the study proceeded and describe the processes of interpretation used.

Rationale for the approach

The choice to base this study on the theory of G.H. Mead and approach it from a symbolic interactionist point of view came about primarily because of the discipline's obvious commitment to the image of humans as conscious, creative and socially responsive beings (Blumer, 1969; Fisher & Strauss, 1978; Maines, 1982). The metaphor used by interactionists themselves of "man-the-communicator" (Stone & Faberman, 1981), captured in a simple yet profound way the essential underpinnings for a study concerned with assessing reading within a larger social system. Although this image is by no means exclusive to symbolic interactionism, being readily apparent in the work of other developmental theorists like Jerome Bruner, John Dewey, Jean Piaget and Lev Vygotsky, it was interactionists' particular focus on the social nature of man's existence, as a negotiator of meaning through the use of language, that provided the key constructs for this study and helped the researcher "see" and understand what was "there" in the data to a greater extent.

The micro order constructs of interactionism

As the term implies, symbolic interactionism is concerned with language and communication. From this perspective, meaning is placed in communication as opposed to being located strictly in "words" or "things" or "inside the head". It arises, is maintained and changes in communication or as Mead (1934) contends in "the conjoint adjustive responses of interacting and communicating individuals" (p. 78). Interactionists maintain that meaning then is "preeminently social" (Stone & Faberman, 1981) as opposed to being predominantly "cognitive" or "behavioral" in nature; it arises through an act of interpretation with an "other".

Interpretation, according to Mead (1938), is an exclusively human act made possible by the existence of a dynamic "self". A self is an inner entity that enables individuals to be the object of their own attention and thought. One can act towards the "self" as one acts towards others. A self is not a fixed entity that reacts to the world, but a "constantly emerging facility of relating to the world, of attending to and interpreting the world" (Perinbayanagan, 1979, p. 84). Flux and transformation characterize a "self", but it does exist in two distinguishable states: the "I" and the "me". The "me" consists of the total set of attitudes, both those imagined and those experienced, that have been internalized and organized into a "generalized other", a role we take or make that allows us to "look back" at ourselves as an individual. The "I" is the "incalculable spontaneous response" (Mead, 1938) of the organism to the "me". The "I" gives us our differences,

our idiosyncracies and enables us to be imaginative and creative. Through "empathic processes" (Stone & Faberman, 1981) or role taking (Mead, 1934), an individual is able to vacillate between these two persona, and carry on an internal conversation. This internal dialogue, moderated by symbols or inner "significant gestures" (Mead, 1938) is the means by which humans take things into account, i.e., reflect on these representations to give them meaning. It is also how they organize themselves for future action. It allows them to recognize their own individuality and prepares them to "take the role of the other" in an external relationship, to be able to share meaning and communicate. David Hargreaves (1985) articulates the full force of the Meadian concept of self thus:

In Mead's analysis of the self, the individual becomes a kind of society in miniature, for he can engage in a form of internal social interaction. When, through the process of taking the role of the other, the self acquires its reflexive quality and attains self-consciousness, the individual is no longer at the mercy of the forces of nature. He does not merely respond to those forces which play upon him from inside or outside, as is the case with objects or organisms that lack a self. In short, his behaviour is no longer determined. With a self, the individual ceases to be subject to the direct impact of other stimuli, for he can withhold his

response to such stimuli and estimate their significance and consequences for particular lines of action toward them. His ability to anticipate makes several possible future lines of action available in the present; and from such future possibilities he can make a choice. The person thus constructs and chooses what he does; his acts are not predetermined responses.

Interpretation then depends upon taking the role of the other and language allows people to do this. It allows people to come to see the world as others see it and see themselves as others see them, to be both a subject and object of their own actions. Experience then entails conscious reflection on the part of the people concerned.

Over time, as a result of the interactions with self and others an individual carves out a "perspective". Perspectives are people's ordinary ways of thinking and feeling about a particular situation or situations; the "place from" in which particular events, objects and people are viewed, or as Mead (1934) first noted "the world in its relationship to the individual and the individual in his relationship to the world" (p. 115).

Tamotsu Shibutani (1955), who extended and clarified Mead's thinking in this area, defines perspectives as:

an ordered view of one's world--what is taken for granted about the attributes of various objects events and human nature. It is an order of things

remembered and expected as well as things perceived,
 an organized conception of what is plausible and
 what is possible; it constitutes the matrix through
 which one perceives his environment. (p. 546)

Perspectives, then, are schemes or frameworks that help individuals create a sense of "place", and make sense of the moment-by-moment reality they are confronted with. They provide human beings with the means to distance themselves sufficiently from the demands of the "here and now" to "think" or in Meadian terms to "fix" things so that they can be "apperceptively grasped." (Mead, 1934, p. 64)

Becker, et al (1961), in their study Boys in white, developed Shibutani's and Mead's notion when they used it to characterize how medical students deal with their internships. They construe perspectives as being "situationally specific patterns of thought...which have grown in response to a specific set of institutional pressures...and are related directly to dilemmas faced by persons who hold them" (Becker, et al, 1961, p. 36). Perspectives then imply relationships with "others", and this is a central feature of their nature in this study.

Becker, et al (1961) differentiate between perspectives and values by claiming that perspectives are more specific, they are tied to particular problems and situations, whereas values tend to be more general, that is capable of being applied across many situations and problems. They further distinguish perspectives from attitudes by positing that perspectives have a "collective character" (Becker, et al,

1961, p. 37) to them whereas values are rarely cast in anything but individual terms.

This notion of the common or social nature of perspective is of central importance. As Mead (1934) notes, "the individual perspective arises out of a common perspective. The common perspective is not built up out of individual perspectives" (p. 99). This claim "situates" the notion of perspective, that is, it ties the individual-psychological aspect of the phenomena to a social base, in the case of this study to an educational institution. "Selves", "minds", and "perspectives" are created and transformed through transactions with others, "generated by a society and a social process that was already functioning" (Mead, 1934, p. 50).

Perspectives, then, are expected to be interrelated: those from the past with the ones in the present, and those in the present with others in the current milieu. Understanding any single perspective, in other words, requires that it be considered in relation to other perspectives and that they be considered in relation to a social context.

Recent critique of the focus of interactionism

Studies such as this one, where the focus is on what sociologists call the micro-order, that is, the participant's perspective on some aspect of organizational life, are often accused of excluding or denying the existence of an overarching social or macro order. Zeitlin (1973) succinctly states the oft-levelled criticism of micro-analyses:

"society from this [symbolic interactionists] stand point becomes a plurality of disembodied, unconstrained selves floating about in an amorphous situation" (p. 218). Janesick's (1977) ethnographic study of a teacher's "classroom perspective" can be seen to be a specific example of this failure to acknowledge a larger order set of constraints. She claims that "for him [the teacher in her study] teaching had to do with students, so he was very independent of outside elements" (p. 165). Granted, he may have been able to operate in relative isolation with a good deal of autonomy in a system that was very "loosely coupled", but his actions were situated within a school and the school within a larger order. Surely he had to contend with historically embedded routines and policies. Timetables, centrally ordered text books, report cards and grades, curriculum guides, the preceding and following contexts that "his" students have and will experience, all of these constraints must have been in operation. It is difficult for us to believe that these did not produce problems or tension, or influence the teacher's thinking or behaviour. As Tyler (1985) comments, "schools are problematic and tension ridden formations", a situation given human nature that appears not to have changed much since Waller (1932) called them "a despotism in a state of perilous equilibrium" (p. 10). We see none of this conflict in Janesick's (1977) study. Thus she has failed to preserve the dialectic between individual and society that is at the heart of Mead's (1934) theory. What is it that Ken [the teacher in her study] works "against"? Do not his actions have consequences beyond the boundaries of his own classroom? Does he not have to take "others" into account?

Or can he simply change the world to his own liking without being affected by that change? As we shall see, this is not the case with the participants in this study. They are connected to the times of the present and the past, part of a socio-historical order, neither free floating particles or "masters" of their own environments.

The negotiated order: A larger view

To better address what has been termed an "astructural bias" (Reynolds & Reynolds, 1973), interactionists have begun to use the metaphor of negotiated order (Strauss, 1978) to view life within an organization.

With such a metaphor they claim it is possible to "raise the level of concern from the micro-domain but without suspending concerns with process, emergence and human agency" (Maines, 1987, p. 10). The approach was first explicitly outlined by Strauss (1963, 1978), but has since been elaborated and extended by Maines (1977; 1982) and more recently by Hall (1982; 1987). Hall (1987) has synthesized a large body of research, including studies that were concerned directly with the negotiated order, into a paradigm of concepts he calls the meso-domain. The terms "meso" is used to designate the middle ground that exists between the micro processes of interpretation and the macro order of structure and function. It is here that Maines (1982) claims that human activity and societal forces can be brought together in a dynamic relationship.

The broad philosophical assumptions of this perspective have been succinctly summarized by Day & Day (1977):

In the case of negotiated order theory, the individuals in organizations play an active, self-conscious role in the shaping of the social order. Their day-to-day interactions, agreements, temporary refusals, and changing definitions of the situations at hand are of paramount importance...[The perspective] emphasizes the fluid, continuously emerging qualities of the organization, the changing web of interactions woven among its members, and it suggests that order is something at which the members of the organization must constantly work. Consequently, conflict and change are just as much a part of organizational life as consensus and stability. Organizations are thus viewed as complex and highly fragile social constructions of reality which are subject to the numerous temporal, spatial, and situational events occurring both internally and externally (p. 132).

Structure, from this view, is not something that is "out there", fixed and rigid, defined by goals, regulations or hierarchical chains of command.

Interactionists argue that organizations are fixed and unchanging only when they are viewed from a distance, only if their "explicate" or

"unfolded order" (Bohm, 1980) is considered separate from time, place and human habitation. Like a whirlpool in a river that has been a "fixture" long enough to be named and charted, the appearance of a stable organizational form is underpinned by a more basic condition of flux and transformation (Morgan, 1986).

Interactionists locate structure within human relationships (Fine, 1984). Just as the whirlpool exists within and is given form by the river, so too does the organization get its form from human interaction, rather than an organizational chart. Form is something that emerges from a process of "collective reciprocity" (King & Ripton, 1970), that is, it is subject to conscious control and there is a political dimension to it. Rules, regulations and roles must be interpreted and negotiated to become operable (Maines, 1987). Negotiations exist with "a temporal framework" (Glazer & Strauss, 1968), they are tied to an "action context" (Hall, 1987) and are grounded in "the various participants awareness of which structural properties are operating or can be brought to operate during various phases of the process" (Strauss, 1978, p. 250, my emphasis).

All of these elements contribute, in ongoing fashion, to the structure which in turn influences the nature and extent of the negotiations. Strauss (1978) has formulated the term "structural process" to refer to structure in its gerund form, as a noun in action, and this term captures more adequately what Maines (1982) calls "the interpenetration of structure and process" (p. 278). Individuals exist in a dialectical relationship with the organization, they create it and

in turn are created by it. Thus, structure is simultaneously a "producer" and a "product" (Maines, 1977).

From this perspective the organization is viewed as a complex communication structure, consisting of a series of nested "negotiative contexts" (Maines, 1977) that are tied together by tasks that require collective activity and by on-going interaction rather than "place" or "position" in the organization. Strauss (1978) uses three central interrelated constructs to characterize the paradigm of "negotiated order". They will be described here.

The first construct is the actual negotiations or the interaction that takes place: the participants involved, the strategies and moves they use and the consequences of the negotiation. Strauss (1978) differentiates this from the second construct, the negotiation context, the "awareness that surrounds and affects the interaction" (p. 99). He posits eight different properties which he claims are not exhaustive or definitive but illustrative of the substance of the negotiation context. These are: (1) the number of negotiators, their experience and whom they represent; (2) the nature of the negotiations, one short, repeated, sequential, linked, and so on; (3) the balance of power displayed in the course of the negotiations; (4) what is at stake for the various parties; (5) the visibility of the transactions to others, their overt or covert character; (6) the number and complexity of the issues being negotiated; (7) clarity of the legitimacy boundaries of the issues; (8) the options or alternatives available to avoiding or discontinuing

negotiations; and (9) the respective actors theories of negotiation, which are usually left unspoken (Strauss, 1978, pp. 99-103).

The third construct Strauss (1978) posits is the structural context, "those relevant features of the setting which enter directly into the negotiations and affect their course" (Maines, 1982, p. 270). These are the circumstances, the conditions that "stand around" and help shape and give direction to the immediate situation, the negotiation context. Hall (1987) claims that the structural context is a gloss, best thought of in the plural, that is, as "a series of larger more encompassing contexts... with multiple horizontal and vertical linkages" (p. 17).

Hall (1987) posits a third kind of context that will be used in this study, a historical one, embedded in the structural context, in the form of conventions and practices or "generally accepted and shared habitual, taken for granted ways of understanding, communicating cooperating and doing...[including] arrangements, methods procedures, schemes and techniques as categories of the collective aspect of coping and accomplishing" (p. 13). This temporal framework stands in a dialectical relationship to the negotiations, i.e., "pasts bring sediments...that limit presents and futures. Yet pasts continually are partially reconstructed and selectively recast to generate new [multiple] futures" (Hall, 1987, p. 15). Some of these "sediments" that bear directly upon educators perspectives, that both constrain and facilitate their way of viewing assessment will be discussed in the next chapter.

From the above description it is possible to get the impression that anything and everything is continually being negotiated, that the entire organizational structure must be recreated anew with every exchange. Interactionists are quick to point to the "limits" of negotiations, arguing first and foremost that those limits (or structures) are an empirical question, not something that can be assumed as an "all or nothing" social fact (Strauss, 1978).

Secondly, they assert that not all structures are relevant to all phases of the negotiation, that is, structure appears and disappears according to the nature of what is being negotiated. Strauss' et al (1973) study of patients dying in a hospital ward showed that different administrative structures (roles, rules, procedures) came into play during different phases of the dying process. That is, organizational structure should be viewed as a set of "possibilities" rather than external "givens". Their "potential" is realized in human action (Silverman, 1970).

Thirdly, there are the effects of history and society to contend with. Roy's (1968) study of teacher-pupil negotiations in a high school found that the historically produced "functional requirements" of schooling and society limit the possibility of many outcomes, and this verifies other interactionists' (Mead, 1934; Couch, 1984) contention that "pasts" constrain "presents" and "futures".

Fourthly, it is acknowledged as Scheff (1969) points out, that some actors, and this can mean "groups" as well, within an organization have more power and control, that is they can access and mobilize resources

to a greater extent than others, and can to a large extent impose a definition of a situation on them. John, a principal and a participant in this study, has done this to his staff by specifying the instruments to be used to assess students in reading. In effect he has attempted to create a set of "givens", limit the negotiation of possibilities, and "shut down" the active interpretation of signs and symbols by his teachers.

Fifthly, there is the phenomenon of "reification" (Berger & Luckman, 1966) that has been documented in a variety of everyday situations. People can apprehend the products of human activity "as if they were something else than human products--such as facts of nature, results of cosmic laws or manifestations of divine will" (Berger & Luckman, 1966, p. 89). Kleinman (1982) demonstrates this in her study of a holistic health centre. She found that the people who worked there made assumptions about the nature and scope of the negotiation process and this limited the negotiations. In an earlier study of the socialization of recruits into a seminary, Kleinman (1980) also found that cultural traditions were presented to the new and uninitiated as though they reflected the reality of the organization and therefore were not open to negotiation. Such was the case with Mark, a first year teacher in this study, where the issue of "standards" was treated by his colleagues as if they were fixed, objective and unambiguous, and because of that unassailable. Hall and Hall's (1982) study of two school districts found that "much of school life was routine and unnegotiated",

but that there were pockets in the district, like special education, that were "replete with negotiation" (p. 329).

Interactionists assert then that not everything can be negotiated, nor will it. However, what is important is that, as Wallace and Wolf (1986) claim, "As an individual I can act and react; I can create new institutions and recreate (and thus maintain) old ones, but in either case reality is grounded in the on-going process of interaction and negotiation" (p. 258). The negotiated order metaphor allows us to "see" this process, however slow, however localized, and however little it occurs.

Methods and Procedures

Rationale

The purpose of this study was to discover and explore educators' perspectives about reading assessment. Since these are symbolic structures (Becker, et al 1961, Shibutani, 1967, Janesick, 1977) that are not readily apparent in the surface behaviour of individuals, a method had to be employed that allowed the researcher to get close to the participants and "dig into" their thinking (Blumer, 1969). This precluded the use of survey questionnaires or other standardized protocols that denied the possibility of exchange, and left little room for the meaning of questions and answers to be discovered, explored and clarified (Mishler, 1986). Therefore, the study was designed around reflective conversations so that the researcher could hear, to the

fullest extent possible, what the participants had to say in their own terms about the relationships they entered into with children and where they assessed from.

In British Columbia, educators from all three of these contexts, that is teachers, principals, board office and Ministry officials are charged with the responsibility of formulating, administering and monitoring reading assessment (British Columbia Ministry of Education, 1984). In this way all of them are implicated, either directly or indirectly in assessing reading in the classroom. The researcher was interested in following the thread of assessment along a "seam" in the organization so that, as much as possible in a study of this size, the various points of view that "stood around" and influenced this complex social act be understood, explicated and interrelated. Thus participants for the study were sought from the three common "action" contexts of the public school: the school, the board office and the Ministry.

The [interview] approach has been used extensively in education to study various dimensions of meaning and sense making that underlie practice such as: construct system with regard to curriculum (Bussis, Chittenden & Amarel, 1976); belief system for teaching beginning reading (Duffy, 1977); teacher images in action (Clandinin, 1986); medical patients narrative histories (Mishler, 1986); and women's ways of knowing (Belenky et al, 1986), to name a few. In most cases, using this approach, the researcher was able to establish rapport and engage in the kind of exchange that allowed presuppositions, frames of reference and

the interior life of the participants and their relationships with others to emerge.

A brief history of the study

Initially, soliciting participants for this study was done through written correspondence with the superintendents of three school districts surrounding the University of Victoria and through a telephone conversation with the head of one of the branches at the Ministry of Education. Of the three districts approached, two indicated preliminary interest in the study. In one district, a presentation of the study to the principals, arranged by the director of instruction, yielded five teachers and two principals as volunteers. Through the further efforts of the director, two supervisors of instruction, an assistant superintendent and a helping teacher also agreed to participate.

No volunteers came forward from the second district in spite of a meeting with the school board, two meetings with the district research coordinator and the [alleged] forwarding by him of two sets of letters to individual schools. Access to the third district was denied by the superintendent. At the time, the potential cost of attempting an "end run" around these gatekeepers, and placing in jeopardy the researcher's or University's future relationship with these districts, and the need to "get on with it", were felt to outweigh the potential benefits of having participants from all three districts. Consequently, the volunteers from one district were involved in the study and data collection began at two school sites with teachers and principals

simultaneously. In this way, the interrelationships between the intentions, imperatives, values of teachers at the classroom level and those of the principals at the school level could be examined and compared. Interviews and classroom observations continued at these sites from January 1987 to May 1987. At that time, confrontation between the school districts and the Ministry of Education produced a one day "work stoppage" and a "work to rule" order from the Teachers' Federation that made participation in the study by teachers and principals awkward and difficult. There was a feeling of tension and general "dis-ease". One teacher withdrew from the study, another expressed ethical concerns, and the scheduling of interviews during school time when teachers had little time to prepare seemed morally indefensible, so data collection at the school sites was temporarily suspended and begun again in September when the "work to rule order" was rescinded and the air had cleared somewhat. During the interim in May and June the researcher began working with the volunteers from the school board office and this continued into the fall and spring of 1988.

In September of 1987, two other participants, a teacher and a principal, joined the study. Both were solicited on theoretical grounds for their ability to "round out" the data and provide rich authentic accounts of where they stood in regard to assessment in the classroom. Mark was a first year teacher, surprised and somewhat overwhelmed by what was occurring to him. Essentially he was an "outsider" to the school and the classroom. His "first time throughness" (Denzin, 1978) made the tensions of the experience especially vivid and he was eager to

talk about what he was "going through". Barb was also an outsider of sorts. She was a principal on leave from her school for a year to do graduate work. A naturally reflective and articulate person, she was "in the process of rethinking my stance towards a lot of things", and assessment happened to be one of them.

In October 1987, access to participants at the Ministry of Education was granted and after initial presentation of the terms and conditions of the study, three participants, whose work pertained to the classroom and assessment, were solicited and agreed to join the study. Data collection began there in January 1988.

The final interview included in this study was conducted in August 1988, so that "live" data collection spanned a total of 20 months.

Seventeen different participants were interviewed between one and seven times, for a total of 54 interviews. Of these, eight were not recorded: three because of equipment failure and five because the researcher felt, at the time, that a tape recorder would unduly restrict the participants and the conversation. In three of the five interviews where tapes were deliberately not made, an unanticipated interview had developed on the spot, in the remaining two instances the participants displayed dis-ease throughout the course of the conversation. It is interesting to note from field notes, that in both of these cases, the interview, in the researcher's opinion, never really got off the ground. That is, both participants repeatedly denied being well informed about assessment, e.g., "all I know about assessment you could fit in the corner of your eye...and it wouldn't hurt very much at all" (field

notes, participant 4:2; 4-15-87). Both gave terse responses that were vague, i.e., "I haven't really thought about that" (field notes, participant 4:3; 4-22-87) and in both cases the researcher felt as though he was "dragging the participants through the entire session" (field notes, 4-15-87; 4-22-87). Of the remaining 46 interviews, four were judged to be not worth the expense and 42 were transcribed completely. A complete listing of the interviews recorded and the tapes that were transcribed is available in Appendix A.

In addition, 14 classroom visits were conducted between January 1987 and May 1987 in two grade one classes (four visits each), a grade two class (three visits) and a grade three class (three visits). These lasted between 45 minutes and two hours. In each instance the observation was conducted so that the researcher could get a better "feel" for the topics that were under discussion in the interviews with each participant.

As well, primary documents authored by the participants were collected. For the teachers, these represented mark sheets, anecdotal comments and report cards. For the administrators, they consisted of school policies they had authored or co-authored. For the school district personnel, these consisted of reports, and district assessment policies, as well as educational literature they felt expressed particular views they were sympathetic to. For Ministry Officials, these consisted of documents produced for current projects, policy statements and circulars and, again, documents that were referenced or offered by them as "interesting" or "worth looking at".

For example, one district-level person volunteered a three page summary she had made of a study by Butler and Wood (1985) entitled Testing of English Language Arts in British Columbia with this notation: "This is the document I referred to in our discussion on April 14th (1987)...I made notes from it and am enclosing a copy of my summary. You may find my selection is revealing of my biases regarding assessment" (field notes, participant 3:3, 3-16-87). A partial list from one participant at the Ministry includes an article from the New York Times Educational Supplement dated April 10, 1989, entitled "America's Test Mania" volunteered on April 29, 1988 (with the participant's underlining), a statement of the "Purposes and Audiences for Grade 12 provincial exams" presented by the participant in workshops he was conducting, volunteered May 29, 1988, a "specification table" for the English 12 Provincial Exam, volunteered January 18, 1988, and so on. These documents were offered and used to enhance the understanding of the participant's perspective that unfolded during the interviews.

Conducting the interviews

It became clear during the first pilot interviews conducted that if the researcher was interested in "seeing things from the participant's point of view" he had to allow the participant as much room as possible to structure the conversation. This type of interviewing is referred to as "depth" (Schatzman & Strauss, 1973) or "intensive" interviewing (Mishler, 1986), and it is qualitatively different than the single "hit and run" (Tyler, 1956) interview or the more common form of survey

interviewing. To a large extent this meant that the questions that were asked were contingent upon the participants' role in the organization and upon the meaning that was evolving out of the conversation, that is, the interviews were "co-structured". Although specific questions were asked that were common to all interviews, their timing and placement occurred differently for different participants. With some participants, a certain amount of small talk typically led into more substantive issues, while others simply jumped straight into weightier concerns.

As mentioned, an attempt was made to tape record all the interviews for this study because it was assumed that it was important for the researcher to listen carefully and be alive to the conversation, that is, to participate fully with the individual in constructing the meaning that emerged in the dialogue (Blumer, 1969). It was also assumed that a large proportion of the meaning of the conversations could only be (and still is being) grasped retrospectively after much deliberation and analysis (Schutz, 1964). Tape recording allowed the researcher to be free of the burden of trying to capture everything by taking notes, an impossible task where the responses were long and did not fit into neatly prescribed categories. It also allowed for the participants' own language to be preserved instead of being changed inevitably through translation into field notes. These aspects were felt to be crucial to this study, so that the advantages of proceeding in this manner were thought to outweigh the limitations imposed and the problems encountered. These will be discussed later in the chapter.

With each participant, a brief summary of the nature of the study was given, that is, that:

1. the researcher was attempting to discover and understand the different points of view about reading assessment;
2. a number of teachers, principals, board office personnel and Ministry officials were being solicited, anticipated, at that time, to be about 20 people;
3. the maximum anticipated time commitment was about six hours and would involve a series of interviews scheduled at their convenience;
4. the researcher would like to record the interviews so that he could listen during the interviews as opposed to trying to talk and write at the same time;
5. the interviews would be transcribed by persons unknown to the participants and when the transcriptions were complete the tapes would be erased;
6. the participants would be presented with the transcription, would retain full editorial power over them, and anything that they felt should not be included would not be quoted;
7. at any time, if they felt uncomfortable with the tape recorder being on or they wished to say anything "off the record" it was not a problem for the researcher to shut the tape off;
8. their identities and interests were being protected as much as possible by the procedures in 5, 6 and 7 and their names would be changed and no specific identifying labels would be used, e.g., "a

grade 5 teacher at such and such a school in such and such a district";

9. they were free to withdraw at any time if they did not "feel right" about participating in the study.
10. there was no set number of questions, no right or wrong answers; the researcher was attempting to find out what they thought about assessment and to represent those ideas as truthfully and clearly as he could.

This summary was not given verbatim, in this order to all participants; some began asking questions after the first point, e.g., how long would this take, who else was involved, what was I trying to "prove" and so on. In three cases, the participants launched right into what they thought before the tape recorder could be introduced. In the case of Mark and Barb, the researcher became involved with them in a discussion about assessment before they were asked to participate. However, before any data were used formally, every effort was made to make the intentions and conditions of the study clear, and an agreement in writing to participate was secured from each participant.

Generally then, strategies for finding, exploring and clarifying meaning had to be employed, rather than specific question protocols. The most important of these (strategies) was to communicate the idea that the informant's views are acceptable and important (Berger & Kellner, 1981; Mishler, 1986). This means that regardless of what the investigator believed at the time as an ordinary person he accepted what he heard at face value, believing "everything" and "nothing"

simultaneously. As Schatzman and Strauss (1973) comment, "He may nod 'yes' at every statement but the nod is a sign of understanding, not necessarily of agreement" (p. 69). Since the purpose of the study was to try and understand how the participant defined the situation, intensive focused listening was the primary tactic employed across all encounters.

In addition, there were three other general strategies employed in the initial stages of interviewing a participant.

1. Beginning the interview with comments or asking questions where the key words are quite vague and ambiguous. This is to allow the interviewee room to as much as possible define the situation in his or her own terms (Dexter, 1970; Hammersley & Atkinson, 1983). For example:

Jim: So, if we just start with, like I said, assessment and reading. Maybe if you want to start by saying what comes to mind in the assessment area.

B: Well, I think the first thing is just the background. The early 70's, there was virtually...we were back to nothing again. We had those Basal readers, in terms of story value they seemed to be okay but there was a feeling that activities had to be a little more creative and the guides were not encouraged. And it seemed like all of it came down to preparing their own lessons from the story, and it seemed like the responsibility was in each classroom to come up with the skill areas that you wanted to cover. And...

(participant 1:1, 1-12-87)

2. Pursuing detail: asking for examples, for illustrations, for what is meant by such and such, and conversely, not allowing the interviewee to rely too much on the background knowledge of the investigator (Spradley, 1979). For example:

A: Okay. You talked about shifting. In terms of your own situation. What can you see as you are shifting yourself towards?

B: I'm shifting myself towards...?

A: You know, you say in terms of what...

B: Okay, let's come back to something like this. I know that a year ago, or a year and a half ago, I really wanted to see some hard work done at the district level, in terms of testing and in terms of offering a number of possibilities. I was not hung up on too much, to some extent, but not too too much, on the idea of fine tuning standardized testing. But what I wanted is that if they wanted us to do certain things, then they were going to have to supply the backup assessment to go with it. They couldn't expect the school to keep re-inventing all of this, take the Ginn for instance, we were trying to reorganize those tests, rewrite them, in fact. In fact, we rewrote I think about five or six levels because they were nonsense, they are absolute nonsense.

A: Uh hmm.

(participant 5:1, 6-8-88)

3. Posing hypothetical questions. Participants, if it was judged appropriate, were asked to speculate or imagine how they would face a particular situation. The "what if" question allowed what was

possible or plausible to be explored within the participants' frame of reference, without threatening them (Spradley, 1979).

4. Describing the ideal situation. Participants were encouraged to draw comparisons between what "should" or "ought" to be and what "really is". Both conceptions were left to provide important insights into the intentions of the actors, an important part of someone's way of thinking about assessment. An example of a combination of strategies 3 and 4 follow:

Jim: Okay, if...now I am going to ask you another question. If you could carry...this is a "what if"...question. Maybe you have already answered it. If you could carry out any kind of assessment that you possibly could, the very best kind, you know, you didn't have to worry about resources, time and money. What would it be?

B: Well, I would have a program where the children were not assessed at all by any instrument, parents, or everyone else had to lay off them for four years in school. I would have a setting that made literature and reading like home and learning to talk. I think...the problems I see when I get the children in the third grade are mostly children pressured and so they are so concerned about their reading that they really cannot learn to read.

(participant 2:2, 3-1-87)

5. Testing interpretations. This strategy was employed periodically throughout the interviews, less so in the first interviews, more so later on. Final interviews typically consisted of the researcher offering his interpretations of the participant's point of view and

the participant commenting on the accuracy and completeness of that interpretation. For example:

Jim: Yeah. In other words you wanted something, but you didn't want them to mandate. You wanted them to say "Here are a few possibilities, you know, you can try say the CAT and that will give you a general indication here..."

B: It is information. It is bringing in information. Goodman talks about this. Creating an information environment and what you are doing is expanding that potential. You are saying here are these buckets. Here's what this can do and here are the problems with it. Okay. And here's what we recommend, this is what we are finding gives us the best kind of information and I will go with that because you have given me a good rationale for why that is better than something else. But I want still that choice because there may be a very good reason why I am going to reject CTBS. For instance, with Stanford, we use Stanford. We never used the whole Stanford. We picked certain parts that we were interested in and other parts we felt really didn't give us the kind of information we wanted and gave us the wrong information. I want that kind of choice, you see, I don't want someone saying "You have to now do this."

(participant 5:1, 4-15-88)

6. Presenting the participant with a typed transcript of the conversation. This strategy was attempted with all but three participants. Generally it did not work well. Either it seemed

that the participant did not have the time or inclination to read the transcript carefully or that they were taken aback with the informality of the language, the partial sentences, the "uh huhs" and "yeas", the dropped inflections and so on. In other words, they couldn't "see" the content for the form. Most of the comments received were of the nature that if someone was going to see the quotes they would think badly of people who were supposed to be "well educated". The practice of simply handing transcripts to participants was discontinued and instead they were offered the option of reading them. Interestingly enough, no one took up the offer.

7. Presenting the participant with a written summary of the researcher's interpretation of their point of view. This was a more formal way of checking and verifying the interpretations. It was used as a final check on what was mutually constructed from the conversations. For example:

Jim: What did you think of what you've got there?

A: Well, I thought it was pretty accurate. There were just a few changes that I made with it.

Jim: Okay. We'll got through those.

A: I might have missed things too you know. I wasn't expecting to get...It was what I could do hurriedly. Like I say I was tentative about it, but anyways...Here, No. 8, [reading from the text] "little agreement on the meaning of letter grades the schools, teachers" and the third part was "districts" [new information].

Jim: Okay.

A: And then, the sentence right after that. "Problems arise when the student transfers to another school in the district" [add] "or another district."

Jim: Okay.

A: Turn over the page, No. 10, in Section B, No. 5. Those two really should be together.

Jim: Yes, okay.

A: That's "What Does a Reading Lesson Look Like?" You.

Jim: That's right, okay. Yes, I thought so too.

A: No. 12 there, Reporting to Parents, needs attention and I don't know if I've mentioned this or not but I've thought about it and the first thing that stood out is that there is no standards for measurement and I don't remember if I said that or not.

(participant 1:1, 2-16-88)

As with the questions, not all of these strategies were employed with all the participants, across all of the interviews. In four cases a single interview occurred. In three of these, it was felt that the possibilities had been exhausted, so summaries were generated and sent to the participant. Of the three, only one returned the summary with changes. The other two did not respond, in spite of repeated attempts to engage them in further dialogue. The researcher also failed in his attempts to contact the fourth participant to schedule further interviews. It was assumed that further contact with these participants

would not be beneficial to them or the researcher and that they had, through passive resistance, withdrawn from the study.

Analysis as an interpretive process

Because this was an interpretive study, the "analysis" did not occur as a distinct "stage" in the research project, sandwiched between the acts of data collection and reporting the results. The process began long before the theoretical framework for the study was formulated or the participants were interviewed, when as Dobbert (1982) asserts "the first tentative questions arise in the mind of the researcher" (p. 270), and continued throughout the writing of the thesis, both guiding and being guided by it. The analysis arose out of the "dialectical relationship between the researcher and that which is being researched" (Dwyer, 1979, p. 211).

In this study the constructs associated with interactionism, that is, the concepts of "self", "perspective" and the "negotiated order", were not used to generate or test hypotheses, or to formulate an "ideal" position on assessment against which the participants were to be judged [and, no doubt, found wanting]. Rather these notions were used as "sensitizing concepts" (Blumer, 1954) to help the researcher, at a primary level to see and hear the participants' meaning, and at a secondary level, to interrelate those meanings into a larger scheme. The process of interpretation was influenced, not just by these constructs, but by the experiences of the researcher. These included: being a student, a public school teacher, an administrator and a member

of an inservice team at the University of Victoria; discussion with colleagues, academics and members of the doctoral committee; theoretical and research readings; interviewing the participants in this study; reading transcripts of those interviews; and, perhaps most importantly, the writing of this dissertation. The process is not "simply a matter of finding indicators for a concept. Rather there is an interplay between finding indicators and conceptualizing categories" (Hammersley and Atkinson, 1983, p. 185, their emphasis).

The interplay Hammersley and Atkinson (1983) are speaking about is characterized the way Dewey and Bentley conceive of human sense making as a relationship between a "knower", in this case the researcher, the "known", that which is being studied, and the "event", in this study a discussion with a colleague, an interview, the reading of relevant literature or an interview text. An interpretation arises because of the "transaction", to use Dewey and Bentley's (1949) term, between these elements. They stand, not as "irreconcilable elements" but in a relationship that ties them together, a relationship that: "is not linear. It is a situation, an event at a particular time and place in which each element conditions the other" (Rosenblatt, 1978, p. 16). Jean Clandinin (1986), in her study of classroom teachers' conceptions of their practice, asserts much the same thing about her analysis: "there is no one linear relationship between readings, discussions, events in the classroom or interview...each influenced and contributed to the interpretive process" (p. 29). A few specific examples will be given to help illustrate the complex "dialogic" nature of the process.

After a colloquium at the University of Calgary, where the researcher presented his study and talked briefly about the apparent "male-female" dichotomy in orientation towards assessment that was becoming a dominant theme in the analysis, a doctoral student suggested the work of Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger and Tarule (1986). After reading Women's Ways of Knowing, the researcher's understanding of many of his participants' struggle between "intuitive" and "verifiable" knowing in assessment, and the struggle with the same issue in research, was greatly enhanced. The reading did not lead the researcher to develop an account of the intellectual development of women educators in the study, nor was the framework in that study adopted and applied to the data collected. Rather, the reading enhanced the researcher's interpretation of the tensions the participants in this study were experiencing and allowed the researcher to be more sensitive to what previously might have gone unnoticed. In theoretical terms, the researcher, the constructs in Belenky, et al (1986) and the interview transcripts transacted to give rise to an enhanced interpretation.

Similarly, confronted with the specific task of making sense of an interview transcript from an interview with Mark, who was struggling through the ambiguity of being a first year teacher in "the system", a committee member suggested consulting Maines' (1977) work, and it was here that the notions of Strauss (1978), Hall (1987) and others brought to light the conception of an organization, like the public school system, as a "negotiated order". These constructs meshed beautifully with the theoretical assumptions undergirding this study, helped the

researcher see the pervasive ongoing nature of the negotiation that was occurring within the nested contexts of the study and helped him understand more fully Mark's attempts at generating certainty in the ambiguous "spaces" that existed with regard to assessment in a loosely tied social world.

On another plane, Johnston's (1989) assertion that reading assessment has been dominated by "the relentless pursuit of objective measures" (p. 7) was confirmed in interviews with many participants, as well as in their attempts either to live with or suppress entirely the ambiguous nature of assessing children's reading ability. Many of the accounts portray a kind of see-saw struggle between "knowing" and "not knowing", certainty and uncertainty, and in some cases with the total preoccupation with technological methodology. It quickly became apparent that this kind of response--the love of number and certitude, the elevation of technique to pure science did not spring de novo from the laboratories of Wilhelm Wundt in Germany, bursting forth in education like some exotic import in the late 1890's in North America, as most histories of reading assessment would lead us to believe. (see for example Eggleston, 1984; Johnston, 1984; Resnick 1982; Tomkins, 1986) Rather, as a perusal of the literature, in the history and philosophy of science revealed, the thinking that undergirded the dominant forms of assessment, that focused dialogue in the literature almost exclusively on methodology and objectivity, grew out of the thinking of a few men in the Age of Enlightenment. Rereading the theoretical works of Schon (1983), Whitehead (1933), Polanyi (1968), and

Wittgenstein (1975) to name a few, with an eye to understanding the nature and source of "modern consciousness", shuttling back to the transcripts and rereading them and seeing the echoes of these writers insights "ring" throughout the accounts led to a pursuit of first the works of historical philosophers like Berman (1984); Merchant (1980); Daly (1978) and then to the "primary documents" themselves: the writing of the men of the seventeenth century Descartes, Hurme, Kant and Bacon. Once again, rereading the transcripts and seeing in them the "actualizations" of these men and the particularization of this way of thinking in reading assessment led to the development of the major themes presented in Chapter 5.

The researcher is not arguing here for "methodological anarchism where everything is allowed" (Kvale, 1983, p. 180). The analysis did go through systematic phases and occur at different levels that will be discussed below. Rather, the analysis should be seen as a strategic process (Schatzman & Strauss, 1973), a conscious choosing between a number of possibilities that became available throughout the study. Hammersley and Atkinson (1983) comment that "there is no one approach that has unquestioned superiority over the others and that can be recommended as a sure fire guarantee of success...The greatest pitfall of all seems to be the uncritical adoption of one approach or another, so that analysis and presentation are not in keeping, or so that the analysis is robbed of freshness by use of stale formats" (p. 230).

Phases and levels of interpretation

As mentioned, interactionists see analysis as a strategic process, and if this process is set within Kvale's (1983) framework of interrelated phases and levels, it should help make clear how an ordered yet flexible "method" of interpretation was conceptualized and unfolded. The first phase of interpretation, which has already been described, needs only brief explication. It began when the researcher first started to come to grips with the study, with lengthy discussion with colleagues on "what is out there" and "what do we know", through extensive reading of the literature, through the tentative formulation of a set of questions that had not been adequately addressed and the shaping of a dim outline of a design that would help the researcher answer the questions, the pulling together of "sensitizing concepts" (Blumer, 1954) that would provide "the user a general sense of reference and guidelines in approaching empirical instances", not "prescriptions of what to see...merely suggest directions along which to look" (p. 7). This kind of ongoing second level interpretation continues throughout the study. It is the kind of interpretation that allows the researcher to enrich and enlarge the meaning of the dialogue in the interview beyond the self-understanding of the participant (Kvale, 1983), to draw on the meanings of other participants, of personal experience and of theory in order to "see" and develop themes and links between themes, called "configurations" by Bryn (1966). This is essentially the same process that Glazer and Strauss (1967) call the "constant comparative method", although it differs in that the claim is not made here that

this is a purely inductive or "bottom up" form of analysis. It is the interplay of history, theory, common sense and personal knowledge with the data that allows the researcher to pick out themes and connections in the first place.

The second phase of interpretation occurred when the researcher entered into a relationship with the participants, when formal data collection began. The purpose here was to try and understand the participants' point of view and to help the participants see new meanings and relations in what they experienced. During most of this phase, the interpretation was restricted to the first level of interpretation, the self understanding of the participant. This first level is akin to the everyday sense-making that people engage in when they attempt to understand what others are saying or meaning. This is the kind of "analysis on the run" that the researcher engages in to convey to the participant that he is interested, understands or requires more information. The interview strategies outlined earlier are guided by this process of initial sense making.

A specific example will help illustrate this level. In this situation the researcher has come for a second interview with a teacher, scheduled a week after a summary of the first interview was offered.

Jim: Okay, now you've said you had the comprehension, you said a primary goal was that they understood what they read. That they could tell you about it...

B: Right.

Jim: ...right? And that they could answer some questions on it. That was your first goal.

B: And what I did to...what I based it on was...I took all of the activities such as sequencing, summarizing, and story completions, various predicting activities...

Jim: Okay.

B: Put them all together and read them all and got a holistic sense of ...some kind of...

Jim: Notion?

B: ...where is this kid? Are they above or below [standard] and that's...and then I added to that the...what I could from...I did some early observations, in terms of just their reading, and I used some of the checklists and things just to organize my recollection of what the children had done and things like thinking about how they read, did they laugh when I was reading orally to them? Did they laugh out or did they just wait for it to be over?

Jim: Yeah:

B: ...I don't think that that type of an evaluation is particularly good.

Jim: You made a statement that you were relying too much on your intuition, is that what you mean by that? For assessment?

B: Yes.

Jim: That's what you mean?

B: Yeah. It's not what I would consider to be a very well thought out and planned evaluation of what I was doing. It ties in with first year and things were...

Quite apart from the content of the interview, the process of "on-line interpretation" here is enhanced by the deliberation of both the researcher and participant. This is where the themes touched upon were deepened, elaborated and verified. Here again the elements, (the researcher, the participant and that which is being researched, in this case the themes in the participant's perspective), transact to create further analysis.

The taking of field notes during this phase of the interpretation process also falls into the two broad interpretive levels outlined here. Field notes consist of two basic categories of content: descriptive notes and "analytical memos" (Glazer & Strauss, 1967). Descriptive field notes are the whats, hows, whos and whens of data collection that appear relevant or important (Bogden & Biklen, 1982). For example, they contain such things as descriptions of the participant's way of talking, looking and acting, reconstructions of conversations, and physical or verbal sketches of the scene. These are restricted again to the immediate situation and understanding of the participant, a first level of interpretation.

"Analytical field notes" were more self-conscious attempts to detail how the design and analysis of the study evolved (Burgess, 1985; Schatzman & Strauss, 1973). "The emphasis is on speculation, feelings, problems, ideas, hunches, impressions, prejudices" (Bogden & Biklen, 1982, p. 86). The researcher reflected on and tried to record what he learned about the

themes or patterns of meaning that were "coming out," about the strategies used to collect data, and their perceived effect on the participants, and about problems, like "work to rule," that were being encountered. In short, a written record of reminders and instructions was kept so that what is "known" and "sought" was constantly adjusted. This kind of analysis falls into the second level of interpretation and it continued throughout the third phase of interpretation, that began when "live" conversations and observations were no longer carried out. During this phase the transaction occurred between the researcher, his data, the evolving conceptual scheme and theoretical reading pursued to deepen that scheme. (Schatzman & Strauss, 1973).

As the analysis proceeded, more and more of it was given over to confirmation and less to exploration, more of it occurred at the second level of interpretation, less at the first. Systematic searches of the data were conducted to confirm, disconfirm or expand the interpretation being generated, and here analytic memos were made as well.

It should be noted here that separating out the "what happened" from "how it happened" and "why it happened" tends to destroy the dynamic relationship that existed between the researcher's purposes and intentions, what he was "coming to know" and the physical procedures employed. This makes the study seem more simple and straightforward, and less problematic than it really was. Questions about who to see, how to get to see them, how to get to see them again or not see them again, what to talk about, and most importantly, what it "all meant" were ongoing throughout the study. That is to say, these things needed constant "minding"; there simply was

not a recipe, algorithm or technological program that the researcher could "plug into" that would "save" the researcher from "the task of deliberation and decision" (Gadamer, 1983, p. 92).

It should be kept in mind that the cycling and circularity inherent in these processes of sense making and the tensions that produced them tend to be "rolled out flat" in retrospect, when they are forced into linear text. However, in the interests of clarity, the procedures for this study are summarized, and presented here in a condensed form.

1. Participants were interviewed beginning with open questions and then their responses were probed to help them "call up" what was memorable and clarify and elaborate on what was said and meant.
2. General subjective impressions of the interview were recorded, sometimes as field notes, sometimes on tape (and transcribed) that followed these criteria: candid? relaxed? willing to engage? fluent? detailed responses? thoughtful comments? (see Appendix B)
3. The tape was listened to again as soon as possible after the interview once through without interruption and then two to three times more and a summary of the contents was made. Statements that the researcher felt were indicative of themes were copied out for feeding back to the participants.
4. From these statements, a platform of questions was built for the next interview using the participants' language. The partial summaries (old information) and questions (new information) were used as a "backdrop" for the discussion.

5. After a number of interviews with different participants, a preliminary running list of common concerns and issues was made and subsequently it was checked and revised if needed after each interview.
6. When the transcripts became available they were presented to the participants and their general impressions were asked for, as well as whether or not there were any items that needed to be clarified, elaborated or omitted.
7. When the interview(s) had proceeded to the point where the information began to be redundant, a brief written summary in the form of "themes" was made and presented to the participant. A final interview was scheduled, except where noted, and comments as to the accuracy and completeness of the interpretation were invited. The summaries were then revised, if necessary (according to the participants' wishes).
8. The copies of transcripts for each participant were brought together along with documents collected and field notes made, and the entire set was scanned to "see" larger order themes and better answer the question, "What does all this mean?". The process of blocking these themes from the transcripts is illustrated in Appendix C.
9. The themes and illustrative quotes were then selected and brought together into individual summaries. A single example of this is presented in Appendix D.

What has been "factored" out of the above linear explanation is the process of "abduction" (Burgess 1990), "the rapid shuttling between theory and data" (p. 17) that occurred throughout the course of the entire study.

Limitations of the approach

Many of the limitations for this study are related to a large order limitation mentioned earlier, and that is, that the researcher is and was an inescapable part of that which he studies. Meighan (1986) stated it clearly thus:

if meanings are defined by social conventions, the sociologists who are after all, fundamentally products of the system in which these conventions operate, are constrained to use analytical categories, descriptions of the world which are far from objective; sociology, therefore, is itself constrained by the very forces it seeks to describe (p. 243).

In other words, the reality portrayed here is a subjective one, it is "subject to" the influences of time, place, language, and most importantly perhaps to the intelligence, experience, imagination, effort and care of the people in this study.

Essentially we are not focusing on the unfiltered "real" world, but on individuals experiences of that world. Although these become available through language as "objects of study", and hence we can be "objectified", that is, we can look at them, talk about them, even agree with someone else about what we "see", we should never lose sight of the fact that these are interpretations of reality. As Vygotsky (1986) states "The higher specifically human forms of psychological communication are possible because man's reflection of reality is

carried out in generalized concepts" (p. 8). As concepts, they are not actual concrete phenomena, but human constructions of the meaning of a small portion of an extremely complex social world.

Our conceptions of the world are powerfully influenced by the language we use. As Edward Sapir (in Mandelbaum, 1955) maintains

Human beings do not live in the objective world alone,
nor alone in the world of social activity as ordinarily
understood but are very much at the mercy of the
particular language which has become the medium of
expression for their society (p. 162).

At the very least Sapir appears to be acknowledging that language excludes as well as includes, that its use involves choice that both facilitates and constrains our ability to see and to understand.

Another limitation of this study, related to the above, was the ability of the participants to articulate their points of view. It was assumed, for all concerned, that they "knew more than they could say", that part of their knowledge was tacit (Polanyi, 1967) or what Schon (1983) calls "knowing-in-action" and not available for casting into words. As well, it quickly became apparent that not all the participants could talk about the "perspective" with equal facility. As it was, some were better than others at reflecting on their intentions and actions and expressing those abstractions, and it is these participants that became "key informants", that is, "subjects who are unusually perceptive and articulate" (Bogden & Biklen, 1982, p. 15). Naturally, more interviews were conducted with these people, greater

rapport developed with them, more time and effort was spent analyzing what was said and meant by them. Thus no statements about whether or not these "results" apply to "any and all" educators can be made because the number of participants was small, seventeen in all, they were not randomly sampled, but instead volunteered or were solicited for specific purposes, and they were not all treated equally, a condition, given the assumption made here about humans and human relationships that is not "humanly" possibly anyway.

Another set of limitations for this study, related to the above concerns for objectivity, fall under the general term of "reactivity" or the intrusive effects of the method on the phenomena: the presence of the researcher, the questions and the tape recorder. In the largest sense, the data generated for this study is an artifact of the study, that is it is doubtful that the people in this study would have generated carefully thought through, typed copies of their perspective toward reading assessment. In addition, the methods that made it possible to "see" and "understand" also made it impossible to "stand apart from". Understanding involves communication, and communication has a transforming effect on the participants (Stone & Faberman, 1981). This is at the heart of interactionist theory. For as Mead (1934) asserts, the act of sharing meaning is characterized by the fact that all involved are able to "take the role of the other", to be transformed. Without it social life is impossible, that is where communication occurs there is no such thing as an "unobtrusive measure". In this same sense then all the questions were "leading questions", the

purpose of the study was to lead the participant to an understanding and explication of part of his or her "self". While every attempt was made to help the participants be frank and honest about their beliefs, it is possible, inevitable perhaps, that some thoughts were consciously repressed. Participants might have been more candid if the conversations were occurring with someone they knew better (a spouse, a close friend) and were "off the record".

Goffman (1959) contends that in any social situation, some "impression management" is inevitable, that all of us are careful about how we present ourselves in everyday life so that some deliberate "staging" will always be present (Goffman, 1959). Whether or not the tape recorder has any greater effect on that staging is a moot point. Hammersley and Atkinson (1983) contend that other approaches of recording data, like making field notes can be even more disconcerting than a portable cassette recorder, particularly if it requires "hasty scribbling throughout the conversation" (p. 162). They also contend that the effects of a tape recorder generally dissipate over time.

In this study the researcher relied largely on the development of trust and rapport with the participants, along with assurances of anonymity and the granting of full authority over the transcripts to them, to minimize their conscious repression of beliefs and attitudes. The interviewer went in assuming that the participants were, as the research on teaching has begun to show, intelligent "active agents constructing perspectives and choosing actions" (Feiman-Nemser and Floden, 1986, p. 523) and that these constructions would become

available if the participants were treated as "co-researchers". In this sense the participant and researcher were on equal ground and the interviews proceeded best when the discussion was handled as "two reflective men [sic] trying to find out how things happen but the less informed one (the interviewer) deferring to the wiser one and learning from him" (Dexter, 1970, p. 56).

This does not mean that a skeptical stance is not taken, that the accounts were not assessed for their plausibility, the answers for their relevance, or that the researcher was insensitive to the participant being sarcastic, evasive, or even silly. The question here is not one of "truth" but of "meaning" and "relevance". Dexter (1970) maintains that interview data are to be considered to be irrelevant only where the participant shows obvious contempt for the interviewer, or displays undue desire to please the interviewer for whatever reason and engages in constant "fishing" for the right answer. These are matters of personal judgement. Immutable universal laws do not exist that can specify every instance of relevancy or irrelevancy. And if they did, questions about their relevancy and application would remain. As Kant (1787/1964) contends there are no rules for the application of rules.

What was required was that the researcher be alive to the nuances of the situation and come to know the person somewhat before much of what constitutes irrelevant or unduly repressed responses could be "sensed". Whenever the tape recorder appeared to be causing undue strain, the researcher offered to shut it off. Two instances of this occurred during the study. Where it became apparent that the

participant was being evasive, this was noted and treated as important data. If, as was the case with two participants, the interviews turned into what was perceived as an elaborate "cat and mouse" game, the researcher simply eased out of the interview and the relationship and treated what was said with more than usual circumspect.

No claims will be made that the "results" are "objective" for that implies the existence of a single "correct" interpretation. It is feasible that a number of interpretations of this data base, each one "valid", that is, understandable and supported with data, could be constructed. As Stone and Faberman (1981) assert, "concrete reality is virtually inexhaustible" (p. 12). In fact this is one of the characteristics of "rich" data--that it is full of "possibilities" (Bogden & Biklen, 1982; Schatzman & Strauss, 1973). The mandate for objectivity then "is replaced with a mandate to be fair and conscientious in taking account of multiple perspectives, multiple interests and multiple realities" (Patton, 1986, p. 197).

An attempt was made to make the results as credible and trustworthy as possible. This was done by:

1. maintaining a skeptical stance towards what is seen and heard--what Schatzman and Strauss (1973) have termed "believing everything and nothing simultaneously";
2. attempting to see things from the participant's point of view;
3. constantly checking interpretations with the participant's for their accuracy and adequacy;

4. carefully describing what is being done and what perceived effects those actions have; and
5. being explicit in linking the assertions made with the data that are generated.

This does not mean that the study has no value outside itself, that there are not insights here that can help others understand a small part of educational life. It was written to communicate with others with "others" in mind, with the belief that certain insights had been gained and could be shared. However the researcher cannot take that communication for granted, cannot predict the certainty with which it will occur. It requires the participation of the reader. In other words, the reader must ultimately decide whether the insights obtain to his or her particular situation, whether or not they "ring true" given what is known and believed by the reader at a particular place at a particular time. These are empirical questions and unless the researcher abandons his approach, that is, his respect for others by imposing his own "definition of the situation" on them, then they must remain open to discussion and deliberation.

Clark and Peterson (1986) comment that "at the very least we can say that teachers do hold implicit theories about their work and that these conceptual systems can be made more explicit through a variety of direct and indirect inquiry techniques" (p. 291).

CHAPTER FOUR

The broad purpose of this study is to better understand the phenomenon of reading assessment as it occurs in the nested contexts of the public education system. To accomplish this it focuses primarily on the reflective accounts of the participants in this study, and more specifically on the perspectives or orientations towards assessment that can be gleaned from these accounts. However, perspectives do not occur as isolated entities, that is, they are historically as well as situationally grounded (Becker, et. al., 1961; Mead, 1934; Shibutani, 1967). Therefore this chapter will be concerned with a brief examination of the "sediments of the past" (Hall, 1987) that continue to find a place in our thinking and conversations about assessment. The purposes for this are threefold: (1) to gain an appreciation of the persistence, difficulty and complexity of the issues we currently face; (2) to examine the roots of our thinking, those assumptions and beliefs that have up until recently enjoyed an "uncritical privileging" in assessment and that continue to shape our thinking in insidious ways; and (3) to provide a context within which the themes that run through the participants' accounts can be "placed". The historical treatment that follows is not meant to be an exhaustive, detailed account of the development of thought in Western Society, but rather is offered as a way to further illustrate and gain insight into the "here-and-now" perceptions of the participants in this study.

Generally, historical accounts of assessment begin in the mid nineteenth century with the development and institutionalization of formal assessment procedures in the school systems of Britain and North America. (See for example Broadfoot, 1979; Eggleston, 1984; Johnston, 1984; Resnick, 1983).

However, the "scientific ethos" that spawned the development of formal assessment procedures, and supported their rapid adoption into the education systems at the beginning of this century, was constructed almost two centuries previously in the seventeenth century (Berman, 1984).

Viewed strictly from the twentieth century, the framework that emerges from this era seems to be mechanical, narrow, overly-obsessed with absolutes and repressively "masculine" in its formulation. Bacon and Hume's empiricism, Descartes mechanism, Kant's transcendental structuralism have been explored elsewhere as artifacts of white, male, European thought. Hence, I have developed interpretations that emphasize these men's anxiety over separation from the "female organic universe" (Bordo, 1987), their obsession with certainty and clarity (Jardine, 1990; Hillman, 1989) and with the vicious exorcism and deliberate suppression of intuitive, empathic (i.e., "feminine") epistemology (Daley, 1978).

No attempt will be made here to deny the vitality of these interpretations, or to downplay the excesses and serious repercussions that have resulted from the way this thinking has worked its way out over three centuries. However, the view that these men were bizarre,

paranoid or psychotic, will not be taken. Instead an attempt will be made to understand their thinking as an outcome or perspective negotiated within a particular set of circumstances not unlike those of today. It is against the backdrop of the social and philosophical upheaval of the seventeenth century that the framework these men construct and the solution they embrace make their fullest sense.

The Medieval mind

It had never occurred to the Greeks and Medieval thinkers that people existed independently of the world, that thinking was individual as opposed to communal, or that the world "out here" was different from the world "in here" (Kostler, 1982). Barfield (1978) maintains that

The background picture then was of a man as a microcosm within the macrocosm. It is clear that he did not feel himself isolated by his skin from the world outside to quite the same extent that we do. He was integrated or mortised into it, each different part of him united to a different part of it by some invisible thread. In his relation to his environment, the man of the middle ages was rather less like an island, rather more like an embryo... (p. 78).

The Medieval imagination assumed that knowledge arose from the interpenetration of mind and nature, that is, mind in nature (Berman, 1984). Nature was to be dwelled in, contemplated rather than "vexed"

as Bacon would propose or "ordered" as Kant maintained. There was not this sense of distance or separation from "others" that we experience today with out modern scientific consciousness. Berman (1984) calls the then existing frame of mind a "participating consciousness". Coming to know something involved the full play of intuition and emotion, a "sensuous" act, such that "real knowledge occurred only via the union of subject and object in a psychic-emotional identification with images rather than a purely intellectual examination of concepts " (p. 65). But as we shall see, this kind of knowing has not been extinguished, but exists now underneath the surface of technology and "scientific method" in reading assessment. Many of the participants in this study relied heavily on this mode of cognition to "find out where the kids are at" (5:1, p. 12) in reading.

Back in the seventeenth century this way of knowing was sheltered within the medieval-Christian view, the universe "had hard, firm limits in space, time and knowledge...since there was only one answer to every question and the ancients had filled in all the answers, the edifice of knowledge was completed" (Koestler, 1959, p. 219). As C.S. Lewis maintains, there was "a place for everything and everything in its right place" (Lewis, 1964, p. 206). However limited and limiting this view was, there was little question of man's "sense of fit" in the cosmic order.

However, two hundred years of turmoil, upheaval, and cataclismic disaster, what Ortega (1968) maintains was "the greatest crisis through which the European destiny has ever passed" (p. 186), had undercut the

absolute "truths" upon which this imagination was founded. Food crisis, plague, devastating poverty, violent crusades--all had created severe doubts about "the sweet lore that nature brings" among a vastly decimated population. The view that one simply had to wait in his or her place for the "intelligible order of the universe" to unfold had been severely tested by the growing realization that the world could be indifferent, even cruel and life-threatening (Bordo, 1987).

But it wasn't just the ravages of war, disease and poverty that precipitated the philosophical and scientific revolutions that occurred in the seventeenth century (Koestler, 1982). Rapidly increased levels of trade and exploration with other cultures--some of them, like China, having literate and intellectual histories that predated Europe's, upset the view that there was "one true culture" (Bordo, 1987). The invention of the printing press and the subsequent translation of the Bible into the common everyday languages of Europe undercut the notion of "one true language" of God. The concomitant availability in print of differing interpretations of the Bible along with the Protestant Reformation brought an end to Catholicism's reign as the "one true church". The absolutes of "eurocentrism" were falling by the wayside.

More disconcerting, Arthur Koestler (1959) claims, were the other "worlds", both micro and macro, being brought into view by the invention of the telescope. Copernicus' proof that the sun, and not the earth, was the center of our solar system, and that there was much more "out there" meant that "infinity had opened its jaws" (Koestler, 1959, p. 12). An infinite universe is a universe without a center, a universe

that is "decentralized, perplexing and anarchic" (Koestler, 1959, p. 217). Without a center there is "no place in nature where man specifically belongs " (Gillespie, 1960, p. 84).

Along with this loss of a sense of place, there seemed to be incontrovertible evidence that the senses could be fooled, that they weren't to be trusted. Under the weight of all the adversity, doubt and hardship, "the snug finite universe of the medieval imagination burst asunder" (Bordo, 1987, p. 13).

It is from this milieu of insecurity, uncertainty and instability that Descartes confronts the epistemological chaos that had been wrought, and constructs a new world view. His desire "to provide himself with good ground for assurance and to reject the quicksand and mud in order to find the rock and clay" (Descartes, 1627/1955, p. 12) can be seen, not simply as a logical and methodical set of moves, but also as an effort to deal with the anxiety that permeated the age. What Descartes proposes therefore will be viewed not just as a set of philosophical assumptions, but as a perspective to a "situationally specific pattern of thought..." which grew in response to a set of pressures and was related directly to dilemmas faced by the persons who hold them" (Becker et al, 1961, p. 37).

The untrustworthy inner space

In his Meditations Descartes backs into an inner space that he finds, to his dismay, full of untrustworthy ideas. Relying on common sense and previous opinion has led, in some cases (as Copernicus and the

telescope have demonstrated) to false notions about the world "out there". In what is to become typical Cartesian, i.e., absolutist fashion, he begins his quest for the "rock and clay" by making everything circumspect: "I resolved to assume that everything that entered my mind was not more true than the illusion of my dreams" (1627/1980, p. 29).

The fact that Descartes could be deceived sometimes by his senses lead him to believe that he was deceived at all times. It is not just the untrustworthiness of particular ideas that is at stake here, but the ability of the mind to sort through the "apples", to use Descartes own metaphor, and separate the "good" ones (truth) from those that are "rotton" (false). Thus he upsets "the whole basket", for not only does he want to purify his thoughts, he also wants to make his mind a "reliable mirror of nature" (Rorty, 1979). He begins the sorting process by saying, "I must once and for all seriously undertake to rid myself of all opinions which I had formerly accepted" (p. 89).

In his desire to purify his thoughts, to make a fresh, clean start and not to be hampered by the community of ideas stretching back to the Greeks, Descartes "breaks free" from the legacy of thought he was "mortised into" and he quickly clears away the debris of ambiguity by "deciding to withhold my assent from matters which are not entirely certain and indubitable...if I am able to find in each one some reason to doubt, this will suffice to my rejecting the whole" (Descartes, 1627/1980, p. 89). Having swept aside the "false" clutter of obscurity, confusion and mystery, Descartes (1627/1980) arrives at a single,

unshakeable truth, i.e., "I think therefore I am" (p. 29). This proposition cannot be doubted away: "...let him [the Evil Genius] deceive me as much as he will, he can never cause me to be nothing as long as I think I am something...I am, I exist is necessarily true each time I pronounce it or that I mentally conceive it" (Descartes 1627/1980, p. 159). He has reached the ultimate foundation for knowledge, and perhaps more importantly established the mind's ability to sort through ideas and separate those texts that are clear, distinct and certain ("true") from those that are ambiguous, muddled and tenuous ("false"). From this he derives his criteria for truth: "I see very clearly that to think it is necessary to be. I came to the conclusion that I might assume, as a general rule, that the things which we conceive very clearly and distinctly are all true" (Descartes, 1627/1980, p. 102).

To support the criterion of "distinctness", Descartes formulated what has come to be known as the substantive, atomistic view of nature. To be clear and distinct, all phenomena had to have a material base. The world, for Descartes, consisted of independently existing "substances" that obeyed mechanical laws. Later, Galileo and Newton would "canonize" the particulars of this view that reduced the universe to two basic entities, matter and motion, but it was Descartes (1627/1980) that first created the image that "when we conceive of a substance, we merely conceive an existent thing which requires nothing but itself to exist" (p. 275).

Clarity, certitude, distinctness--Descartes (1641/1980) had quickly replaced the mysterious, sensual Medieval universe he doubted away with a cosmos of clear boundaries and singular truths. The exercise left him with an insight that modern day science still embraces: "Those long chains of reasoning, so simple and easy which enabled the geometricians to reach the most difficult demonstrations had made me wonder whether all things knowable to men might not fall into a similar logical sequence" (p. 12). Later, his wonder would change to certitude, and he would say "there is absolutely no other way of discovering truth than by methods of mathematics" (Descartes, 1641/1980, p. vi).

For Descartes, if truth is clear, distinct and univocal, then the way to find it had to be clear, distinct and univocal as well. That is to say, one's relationship with the world is nothing more than a mathematical procedure.

From the "swamp" of ambiguity, Descartes had reconstructed the high hard ground for science. As well he proposed a "mode of transportation" and a "route" out of the epistemological chaos that existed in seventeenth century Europe due to the "flooding in" of new knowledge and other points of view.

If Descartes' thinking had come to exist only as some philosophical or programmatic description of the way things are, then the colonization of education by this way of thought for professionals and children alike would never have taken place. But it has become "embedded in the institutional context of professional life" (Schon, 1983, p. 26), and education is no exception. It is there in the way we organize learning

in schools to give our curriculums "substance": separate subjects (with prescribed amounts of separate times), conceived separately from, and imposed upon children and teachers alike, from on high. It is there, implicitly in the way we "order" growth and ability to give clarity, distinctness and individuality to progress: separate grades, and separate groups within grades, participating in separate ("pull out") programs. (Notable here is the way we characterize multi-age groupings in schools--as "splits" rather than "combinations" and how we use assessment to "objectively" sort children into these categories.) It is echoed today in the way we assess (and reward) individual accomplishment and how these rewards have come to be regarded as individual possessions--accrued wealth that the privileged use to buy their way into highly desired slots in society (Durkheim, 1964). Note what Goodlad (1984) has to say.

Students, like 30 berry pickers proceeding side-by-side down the rows, working individually side by side on the same tasks. From time to time they turn in their buckets and are rewarded on the basis of the teacher's perception of the quality and quantity of what the baskets contain. The evaluative scales used however are more vulnerable to subjectivity than are the scales to weigh the berries (p. 266).

The role of assessment in reaffirming and recreating these notions of separateness, individuality, in imposing order, clarity and stating

"thingness" on a difficult, complex, constantly emerging phenomenon like teaching should not be underestimated. For when the assessment really counts, that is, when we are called to "account for" the value of education, "Policy makers still require statistical proof that children are learning, as is evident by NAEP's preparation for the 1992 nation-wide testing of 'fourth grade reading'" (Taylor, 1990, p. 63). The privileging of this way of knowing is part of the Cartesian legacy that we must live with today in reading assessment.

In "thingifying" (Birch, 1988) all phenomena, Descartes has made them easier to sort, conceptually, but he has destroyed their interdependencies and "living" character. "As the sixteenth century organic cosmos was transformed," Merchant (1980) asserts, "into the seventeenth century mechanistic universe, its life and vitality were sacrificed for a world filled with dead and passive matter" (p. 195). The way was now clear for the endless subdivision of all "things", including knowledge, for under this framework it could be "disciplined", that is, selected, sorted, and certified. Assessment would come, three hundred years later, to play a powerful role in rationalizing and legitimating this process (Broadfoot, 1984).

The rise of subjectivity

By separating the knower from the world, creating an "inner-outer" image, and locating the construction of thought "inside", Descartes creates a new philosophical problem: subjectivity, "the capacity of the knower to bestow false inner projections on the outer world of things"

(Bordo, 1987, p. 31). The subject/object split works itself out as a series of epistemological dichotomies--bias/neutral, value/fact, to name just two. It also creates a new canon: a reliable mediator for truth must stand "outside" the subject, for that which is "within", is subject to contamination, distortion and error. For this function, Descartes invoked God as the benevolent guarantor of his ideas; that they mirrored nature he could be sure, because God would hold the "evil genius" in obedience. For us, in reading education today the "external examiner" has taken on quite a different form--the standardized test.

Other seventeenth century thinkers, like Bacon, Hume and Kant, although they quibbled about the best route to take, never questioned the ultimate ground, clear distinct, univocal truth, to be reached, or the method for reaching that unshakeable vista, logico-mathematical thinking.

We turn now to these men who helped solidify Descartes' vision into a perspective the Western world would come to embrace.

Bacon and Hume revisited

Francis Bacon, along with David Hume, shared Descartes' belief in the clarity and distinctness of ideas, and his assumption about the independent existence of things and his love of mathematics. But unlike Descartes, who began with self consciousness, this group of empiricists, representing a line of thought traceable to Aristotle, realized that thinking could also be "imaginative", and so argued that knowledge was lawfully grounded in the irreducible elements of sensory experience. As

Hume (1787/1880) states "And as the science of man is the only foundation for the other sciences, so the only solid foundation we can give to this science must be laid on experience and observation" (p. xx). From this perspective, ideas were collected by the intellect from isolated bits of sensory data, such that

every idea is deriv'd from some impression which is exactly similar to it, the impressions similar to this idea of extension must either be some sensations deriv'd from the sight, or some internal impressions arising from these sensations (Hume, 1787/1880, p. 33).

These "internal impressions" were possible according to Hume because the mind was equipped with three structural principles: resemblance, contiguity and cause and effect. According to these "laws of association", we are able to collect and group things together that look alike, co-occur and are causes and effects of each other. Provided that complex ideas could be traced back to sense impressions in the right sort of way (i.e., through formal logic and mathematics), they were assumed to correctly represent the world. Unlike Descartes, Hume remained skeptical about the certainty of existence of things. While he admitted that "Whatever can be conceived by a clear and distinct idea necessarily implies the possibility of existence" (Hume, 1787/1880, p. 43), he quickly added, "that appearance can never afford any security" (p. 54). As far as he was concerned, one could return repeatedly to experience to gather more sense data, and thereby increase

the probability that the representations were correct, but Descartes' absolute certainty, although deeply desired, was never possible.

Francis Bacon, on the other hand, was the first to propose that, while gathering data was necessary, by itself, simply consulting nature wasn't the best course of action. For Bacon, to be understood nature had to be acted upon, that is, manipulated and controlled. Natura vexata Bacon called it, "nature annoyed", and he maintained that "the secrets of nature reveal themselves more readily under the vexations of art (i.e., artisanry, technology) than when they go their own way" (quoted in Dick, 1955, p. 15). This notion, alluded to throughout Bacon's writing about nature, that knowledge is best derived through artificial conditions, by "throwing nature on the wrack" and "wresting answers from her" is radically different from the Greek or Medieval notion that knowledge arises through contemplation, by intuitive, empathic and associational means. Berman (1984) maintains that Francis Bacon was the first to elevate technological control and manipulation to a philosophical level, that is, to make it the explicit goal of science, and that this step "had its concrete embodiment in the concept of the experiment, an artificial situation in which nature's secrets are extracted, as it were, under duress" (p. 17).

For Bacon, the ultimate goal of science was social control. His book Novum Organon--"new instrument"--openly promoted a "better-living-through-science" viewpoint. As Schwandt (1989) maintains, Bacon's notion of "scientifically informed (if not scientifically managed) social control became an ideal to which society aspired" (p. 14). Under

this assumption the primary concern for science is "how to devise and implement a set of procedures that will best serve the administration of social affairs" (Schwandt, 1989, p. 17). Knowledge becomes what Weber called zweckrational--instrumental or utilitarian--and the question that is important is no longer "Is this right and good?", but instead, "Does this work?" The emphasis shifts to producing effects that can be measured and predicted. "Right" and "good" become "what works", science becomes method, and what started out as inquiry (why), is transformed into technology (how). The predominant concern in this day and age in reading assessment is How?.. As Broadfoot (1979) notes.

the significance of this question [how] lies not so much in the particular ways found to answer it but in the dominance of the question itself over other questions concerning assessment in contemporary debates. Even a cursory glance at the literature on assessment reveals the predominance of concern about techniques... The debate - and there is currently a good deal of it - is conducted almost entirely in this arena, the arena of efficiency (pp. 17-18).

According to many philosophers of science (Birch, 1988; Koestler, 1982; Merchant, 1980; Whitehead, 1933) the solidifying of a utilitarian view of knowledge was the most important change to come out of the seventeenth century. It remained for Immanuel Kant to provide the epistemological teeth for this technical-rational program of social control.

Kant revisited

Kant entered the conversation sharing Hume's and Descartes' assumption about the clarity of ideas and the independent existence of things and he agreed with Bacon that order had to be imposed on nature for her to be known, but he began, not with self-consciousness, experience or "the experiment", but with a priori structure.

This truly was a revolutionary idea, as Kant himself observed. But revolutionary ideas in themselves do not change the world, they can die with their creators unless they are taken up by others. This is precisely what happened with Immanuel Kant. As Owen Flanagan (1984) maintains, "When cognitive psychologists discuss their philosophical forebears one hears the name of Immanuel Kant more than any other...Kant laid both the substantive and methodological foundations for modern cognitive psychology" (p. 180).

The "substantive base" Flanagan (1984) talks about involves three key notions, based on the supposition that the mind contains pre-existing inner structures or "schema", to use the now familiar term coined by Kant. First, that due to rich inner structures, the organism is "expectant" of experience and not simply "reactant" to it, as Descartes, Bacon and Hume had supposed. Second, that these structures allowed for sensory impressions to be "caught" and "held", that without them experience would simply go in one ear and out the other, and third, that the organism actively built new structures by combining a priori frameworks with sensory data. These are well known to any student of cognitive psychology and need not be dwelled on here. What has not been

openly discussed, or is only beginning to be discussed is the "destructive" underside to the constructivist view (see, for example, Jardine, 1990). Simply stated, Jardine (1990) sees Kant taking the "final turn" in "totalizing reason" and rationality and subjugating all else (nature, man and knowledge) to its sway (pp. 17-20).

Colonizing experience with reason

From Kant's perspective the only way to know something is to first separate it from the world-as-it-is and "make" it part of a phenomenal world-in-relation to the perceiver. Kant (1787/1964) puts the world-as-it-is out of play by saying "appearances are only representations of things that are unknown as regards what they may be in themselves. As mere representations they are subject to no law of connection save that which the connecting faculty prescribes" (p. 178). The real world for Kant is out of reach, the "knowable" world is thus completely self-enclosed and by extension, self-referential, subject only to laws imposed by the intellect. Bacon's intimation that nature is best understood when she is dominated becomes totalized in Kant's view--colonization precedes understanding.

...the order and regularity in [what] we call nature we ourselves introduce. We could never find them had not we ourselves, or the nature of our mind originally get them there (p. 147)...understanding is itself the lawgiver of nature. Save through it, nature, that is, synthetic unity of the manifold of

appearance according to rules [imposed by Reason, itself] should not exist at all (Kant, 1787/1964, p. 148).

Kant took up Hume's notion that certain things are super-added to experience and he reasoned that since we talk about the world logically as if it were made up of "substances" that occupied time and space, and interacted in cause and effect fashion, this was reason enough to assume that we supplied these forms, concepts and categories to nature before we experienced anything, i.e., "the mind has rules which I must presuppose as being in me prior to objects being given me and therefore as being a priori. They find expression in a priori concepts to which all objects of experience conform" (Kant, 1787/1964, p. 23).

It is this last statement that is most disconcerting for it totalizes human control over experience and nature as we could know it. As Phillip Windsor (1990) has put it, "we are doomed to a kind of ever advancing frontier of reason with which we can never catch up" (p. 26). Kant elevated Bacon's practical program of control to an epistemological level, extricating it from some sticky, ethical and philosophical questions, revolving around how "right" and "good" it is to dominate, control and colonize the world. Essentially Kant said that it could be not any other way, i.e., "nature gives answers to questions of reason's own determining" (Kant, 1787/1964, p. 147).

Under Kant, the implicate order of nature and the novelty and generativity of experience had been rationalized out of existence. In all fairness to him, this does not appear to be what he intended. He

began his Critique of Pure Reason by saying that he wished to "save God, freedom and immortality...to make room for truth" (Kant, 1787/1964, p. 64), that is, to recover what Descartes had lost. In the end, however, he becomes part of "the grand evacuation of the Earth as a living place with any organization, order [and] authority of its own..." (Jardine, 1990, p. 26).

With Kant's contribution, the hybrid of technical-rational thinking took on a beguiling clarity. Truth existed in two forms: either in propositions of logic and mathematics (given a priori), or in empirical propositions grounded in irreducible sensory experiences. The residues of mysticism, metaphysics and religion that has so perplexed the Greeks and Medieval thinkers, had been purged. Gone, or at least suppressed for the time being, was the "non-sense" that had prevented scientific thought, and understanding from advancing. For now

the only significant statements about the world were those based on empirical observation and all disagreements about the world could be resolved in principle by reference to observable traits. Propositions which were neither analytically or empirically testable were held to have no meaning at all. They were dismissed as emotive utterance, poetry or mere nonsense (Schon, 1983, p. 33).

The effect on education may not have been so profound had it not been for the fact that, at the same time that this epistemology was being "built into the very tissue of the universities" (Schon, 1983,

p. 36), the professions were also seeking shelter in the academic world (Fleming, 1988). Coming in out of the storm of public criticism meant buying into the paradigm. As a result, it wasn't too long before the notion that practice was essentially science-based technique supplanted the older, more mysterious and certainly less "rigorous" notions of practice as craft and artistry. When this happened, the problem of how to act became a problem that could be solved universally, in advance of the situation. Because practice was now scientific, it was essentially a process of Kantian transcendental deductive logic, or Cartesian geometry, that is, of translating an objective, context free body of knowledge (theory) into a set of universally applicable techniques (practice). The moral, ethical and situational "fog" that had also shrouded doing what was "right" and "good" had been blown away by the breeze from the Age of Enlightenment, and the stage was now set for the "great analytic engine" (Madaus, 1986) the scientific mind to usher in the technology of reading assessment in the "age of modernization" (Tomkins, 1986).

Viewed from our place in history, Descartes, Bacon and Kant's obsession for clarity, demarcation, separation and control may seem excessive and wrong headed. There can be no denying that in the way it has been taken up, it has produced and continues to produce its share of suppression, destruction and pain, that is, as Berman maintains (1984), "it has destroyed the continuity of human experience and damn near wrecked the planet" (p. 29). But, if we consider the cultural and historical context, the ideas of these men emerge as "inventive,

ingenious, and often beautifully concise expressions of and strategies for dealing with cultural crisis and the need for intellectual 're-visioning'" (Bordo, 1987, p. 2).

In another fashion, if we see these ideas also as human response to a loss of a sense of place, an intelligible order, to epistemological chaos created by "the sensationally rapid opening of the aperture through which Europeans looked at their world" (Hale, 1968, p. 7), then it is also possible to understand the absoluteness of this response, and its repeated appearance and re-invocation in times of uncertainty and rapid change.

In spite of the power and beauty of this way of thinking, it wasn't until the Industrial Revolution, that is, until the combination of science, technology and industry began to produce material wealth on an unprecedented scale that these convictions strengthened and became the "mode of cognition of an industrial society" (Gellner, 1964, p. 72).

The pre-industrial social order

At the beginning of the nineteenth century social orders in Canada, United States and Britain were relatively static and fixed, Canada was still an agrarian society with informal political, social and occupational arrangements (Broadfoot, 1979; Tomkins, 1986; Wigdor and Garner, 1982). Centralized administrative structures and large scale social institutions like health, welfare and education had not yet emerged, nor was there an "army" of publicly employed specialists and professional managers like there is today. Public services, if they

existed, were governed by what Katz (1975) calls "voluntary localism". Prentice (1977) paints a clear picture of a different way of life.

...artisans, farmers, merchants and professional men were frequently self-employed...the work place was often the household; sons frequently followed the occupation of their fathers; wives and daughters could and did participate in the remunerative work of the household; and apprenticeship or service was the usual introduction to an occupation. Each small village or regional society was perceived as a relatively fixed hierarchy of ranks and orders based on the local structure of occupations (p. 88).

As Prentice (1977) maintains, these communities were "ideally bound together by attitudes of deference" (p. 180).

Early schooling and assessment in Canada

Accounts of early schooling in pre-industrial Canada are thin and records scarce. In New Caledonia, later known as British Columbia, the only white population were Scots traders and French-Canadian canoemen. If they married, they took Indian wives and fathered metis children (Johnston, 1964). As Henry Johnson (1964) notes:

the earliest indication of any official concern for the education of these children of white fathers in the wilderness of the west is to be found in the standing rules and regulations of the Hudson Bay

Company adopted in 1836. Here Resolution Third declared that the father "be encouraged to devote part of his leisure hours to teach the children their ABC's and Catechism together with such further elementary instruction as time and circumstances may permit" (p. 15).

In Upper Canada the images created by historians are sharply divided. Some paint pictures of a general populace wallowing in ignorance, filth and vice, while others claim that literacy, intelligence and common sense abounded in early communities. However, there is agreement that, consistent with the social order described above, education appeared to be embedded in community life. The Common School Act of 1816, that established state support for elementary schools, acknowledged this: "the primary responsibility of the school board was owed to the local community...the territorial extent of the unit of local educational government was to be the attendance area of a single school" (Tomkins, 1986, p. 19).

Except for the well-to-do, education was largely informal, and for everyone it was voluntary, partially because the way of life necessitated it. In a "cash-starved" free-market society, all able members of the family were likely to be employed both inside and outside the household in the generation of capital for much needed supplies (Fowke, 1962). Thus, as Prentice and Houston (1988) maintain, it was rare that children were subjected to

sustained bouts in institutions called schools... Aside from reading and writing which were frequently taught by mothers and fathers to their own offspring or by mistresses and masters to their apprentices and servants [there was] all the vital social and household skills, the agricultural, hunting craft and even professional skills that were passed on to young people in the family or household setting...there was much more to education than the three R's of reading, (w)riting and (a)rithmetic. Equally, for most of them, there was much more to schooling than school books or schools (p. 7).

Assessment in community life

In these circumstances, when education and socialization are essentially synonymous, assessment has an entirely different character. The questions that are problematic in our society--who to assess, what to assess, when, where, how and why--are relatively straightforward and easy to answer. Knowledge about the task has not been abstracted and formalized, so it is not assessed separately from the "doing". The assessment consists of practical demonstrations of the skill in context: it is continuous and embedded in the flow of real life. The boundaries between passing and failing are not sharply drawn. The scoring is intuitive, criteria for success are tacit. The "items" on the "test" were not selected for their "discriminatory power", that is chosen

deliberately to produce failure among some and success among others, but rather to elicit demonstrations of competence from all. The "results" were concrete, made immediately available to assessee and assessor alike. Decisions made were mortised into and inseparable from the raft of other decisions relating to the particular demands on the family. Competence is marked by the withdrawal of assistance, incompetence by increased support rather than segregation into separate "programs".

Under these circumstances, assessment is still imbued with a "participating consciousness". The "mind" of the examiner penetrates the examination, the examination is embedded in flux of community life. The passion for separation, demarcation and purification, present in the seventeenth and eighteenth century thinking of Descartes, Bacon and Kant had yet to take hold in the pre-industrial society. The categorical hierarchies of that frame of mind had not yet been built into the education system or the society at large--pupils were not yet segregated by age, sex, grade, program or ability, nor were there the divisions of labour characteristic of advanced industrial societies. As Broadfoot (1979) notes "schooling was irrelevant to the process of occupational selection" (p. 29). Assessment was not a means of selecting and certifying people for highly specialized slots in an occupational hierarchy. Selection into professions and occupations outside the home was carried out through nomination, patronage and association (Wigdor and Garner, 1982). This simple pattern of selection and qualification under local control would soon be replaced as Canada came into the age of modernization.

Around the mid 1800s, the relatively stable social orders of Britain, United States and Canada began to change. All of them were entering the "age of modernization", an era characterized by incessant, often unanticipated change "due to the application of industrial technology to extend an individual's control over the environment" (Tomkins, 1986, p. 27). It was at this time that Descartes' belief (1627/1980) that "it is possible to reach knowledge that will be of much utility in this life...and so make ourselves masters and possessors of nature" (p. 212) was being realized in the creation of wealth, credit and individual success on scale unimaginable in earlier times. Canada was in the process of rapidly evolving from the British North America Colonies to a self-governing dominion (Johnson, 1964). As well, along with Britain and the United States, she was experiencing a burgeoning industrial economy, remarkable growth in her population and a rush of people into her cities (Rutherford, 1977). But these rapid changes were not all for the better.

The passing of an "old" order, the construction of a "new" view

Pre-industrial village communities were disappearing along with apprenticeships, and the locally based "stations" and "orders" of society began to dissolve (Prentice, 1977). The public squalor that this private, i.e., Cartesian, imposition of technological "order" produced was a cause for serious concern among the social reformers of the day. In Britain, according to Broadfoot (1979), the conditions were

serious enough to unite political, religious and educational reformers into a common voice, expressed in rising moral and political concern for social order and justice ...to find a means of stemming the lawlessness and debauchery which had become characteristic of the new industrial cities (p. 30).

In the United States, Wigdor and Garner's (1982) account of the times has a hauntingly modern ring, for they contend that there was corruption at all levels of government, unrestrained competition in business, the plundering of the nation's resources, the growth and increasing radicalism of labor unions, the political threat of Populism and high rates of crime and delinquency. All suggested that society had grown too fast for traditional bonds to hold it together (p. 82).

In addition, the urban and industrial society that replaced the communal one began to coalesce "into two increasingly alien camps: the respectable proprietary or middle classes on the one hand, and on the other, the propertyless, lower classes or labouring poor" (Prentice, 1977, p. 67). The emerging middle class consciousness, had, as its counterpart, a growing awareness on the part of the poor that they were being isolated and degraded (Tompkins, 1986). The "propertied classes" feared that open and violent conflict would result from the ever widening rift between rich and poor (Houston, 1975).

The destruction of tradition and an intelligible order had much the same effect on Canadian society. The school reformers of the day feared social anarchy as they contemplated the destitution in Canada's growing cities and the decline of old virtues...Street drunkenness was common and often served as a catalyst for boisterous behaviour...Deep moral concern, arising from fears of urban growth, focussed largely on children who were numerous and highly visible on the streets...increasingly they were seen as threats to the well-being of society" (Tomkins, 1986, pp. 29-30).

The movement for free, compulsory, universal elementary schooling that arose in the mid-nineteenth century, and enjoyed wide support from both liberal and conservative reformers alike, can be seen as a response to the social and physical upheaval that was occurring. As Prentice (1977) maintains, it was "a movement to bring sanctity and order to human affairs" (p. 25).

Universal, compulsory, free, elementary schooling was seen, by the men whose thinking carried the day, as the panacea that would cure a host of ills: produce in people the "kinds of inner controls needed in an age of few restraints" (Tomkins, 1986, p. 43); sweep children off the streets and protect them from the excesses of society, and conversely, protect society from the excesses of children; protect children from their parents, or as Ryerson (1848) stated, "from the mendacity and vice

of their forefathers" (p. 300); produce social harmony by changing the attitudes of the rich and poor alike, so that "the poor would lose their envy and the rich their exclusiveness" (Prentice, 1977, p. 127); prepare children for the diverse occupational roles that were being created at an astonishing pace, and maximize society's ability to "mobilize their labour power efficiently" (Goyder, 1990, p. 29); and not in the least, ensure a cultural identity "based on Christian morality, British patriotism and resistance to American hegemony" (Tomkins, 1986, p. 16).

The school system that emerged reflected the contradictions inherent in the school promoters perspective: they were both fascinated and repelled by rapid change, indeed they promoted it by calling for the total reformation of the education system; they promoted universality but maintained "the essential economic relationships, the orders and ranks of society were not to be disturbed; they were providential" (Prentice, 1977, p. 27), and they wanted a non-secular school system but insisted that it be founded on Protestant ethics.

Their response, like the response of the men of the seventeenth century, was based on fear and the concomitant anxiety it produced. They saw a world verging on chaos, where man's sense of place and community had been destroyed by rapid change. And like Descartes, Kant and Bacon, the nature of their response was to impose order from on high, transcendently: "the question uppermost in their minds often seems to have been how to tame rampant nature and the devil in man, and their real quest is a quest for control" (Prentice, 1977, p. 17).

These men were not alone, but part of a general movement throughout the Western world, a movement Robert Wiebe (1967) has called a vast "search for order". The widely agreed upon solution to the disintegration of society was to replace the ad hoc, locally controlled social arrangements of the past with carefully planned, centrally administered systems of organization. Efficiency was seen as a key to progress. Thus, "to overcome civic apathy and political corruption, and to promote economy and efficiency reformers created bureaucracies of expert professional managers to administer police, public health, utility, recreational and public welfare services" (Tomkins, 1986, p. 30).

Egerton Ryerson, through the crafting of a series of acts from 1846 to 1871, was able to establish compulsory, universal education in Ontario (Stamp, 1970). One year later, British Columbia joined Confederation, and the Public School Act of 1872 "established the basic structure of a provincial system, which despite modification by frequent amendments, remains in principle to this day...the new Act made the office of Superintendent a one-man department, the central official in a highly centralized system" (Johnson, 1964, p. 44-45). British Columbia had entered Confederation with the most centralized school system on record, and the weakest local authorities. It's no wonder the Jessop complained of local trustees "deplorable lack of interest" (Jessop, 1873-74, p. 8)--their authority was limited to seeing that the regulations were carried out and that school property was maintained.

The hardening categories of formalism

With the establishment of common schools, a profound change in the nature of schooling took place, "in contrast to the familial ambience of earlier colonial instruction, public schooling was deliberately formal in structure as well as content...best exemplified by developments centred on the teacher, a prescribed curriculum and the rational organization of children,...series of school readers, blackboards and proficiency prizes quickly became the stock-in-trade of progressive school administrators around the world" (Prentice and Houston, 1988, p. 235).

Assessment quickly followed suite: by mid century it consisted almost entirely of recitation and oral reading (Tomkins, 1986). As well, a new "character" and "ritual" appear on the scene--an outside arbiter of quality. School examinations were conducted by "visitors" from the community "in the presence of trustees and parents. Children gave previously memorized recitations, chanted multiplication tables or read aloud. Work and department were evaluated and criticism or praise was offered the trustees as well" (Tomkins, 1986, p. 69-70). Here we see "accountability" in its early form. Although its modern counterpart --the provincial examination--takes an entirely different form today, the impulse for the community to ensure some kind of "quality control" over education has been with us since the beginning of formal public schooling.

When schooling came under the control of the provincial body, inspectors replaced the visitory from the local community. By the 1890s

"they were professionally qualified agents of the central authority" (Phillips, 1957, p. 145). By 1925, in British Columbia, they were administering standardized tests in elementary classrooms and found "a real interest was aroused in their study and use" (Willis, 1925, p. M24).

The rise of meritocracy

The professionalization of the inspectorate and their functioning as external mediators of quality is an illustration of a larger trend towards the "bureaucratization of all public administration in an age when centralization and a cult of uniformity developed that stressed selection by merit and evaluation by purportedly objective means" (Tomkins, 1986, p. 70). The reformers of the day were caught up on the process of "brushing away the pre-industrial debris of favouritism, patronage and rule by aristocratic elites, creating a state nearer the ideal whereby every person rises or falls by merit alone" (Goyder, 1990, p. 29).

In early Canada meritocracy was founded on what Alan Smith (1974) claims were the myths that early settlers used to make sense of their experiences. Myths about land, opportunity, rugged individualism, hard work and freedom were built into what Smith (1974) calls a "national frame of mind" (p. 197). Both Canada and the United States were perceived as

lands of opportunity by the successive waves of
immigrants who came here to make a new life...they

came with the expectation that the future could be made--anybody could succeed who tried hard enough and had ability and nobody could be prevented from trying (Wigdor and Garner, 1982, p. 9).

Egerton Ryerson the founding father of Canada's education system (Stamp, 1960) reflected a meritocratic view when he said that each child should be educated "they they may grow up in the industry and intelligence of the country and not in...idleness and pauperism (Ryerson, 1848, p. 300).

Meritocracy was also supported by those ascribing to the belief espoused by Francis Bacon that social efficiency was the key to a better life. Science and scientific expertise were to be enlisted to organize human and natural resources and promote economic growth and progress (Wigdor and Garner, 1982). Identifying and promoting people on the basis of merit was and is thought to be the most efficient means to this end.

Merit is defined as a combination of talent and ability and effort or hard work. Central to meritocracy are the twin, conflicting democratic ideals of individual competition and equal opportunity. In a free market society, ostensibly at least, competition for "life-chances" is open, that is, it is based on objectively measured merit, or ability to perform the tasks required, rather than sponsorship or membership in "the old boys club".

Translated into educational terms, this means that under this view those students who have through their own efforts made the most progress towards the rationally defined goals of education, deserve to reap the

ultimate rewards. Marks or grades function as interim benchmarks of success, against which pupils can be ranked in comparison with their fellow competitors. Along with certificates and diplomas, they function as the "hard currency" of the system. Students use the "wealth" they have accumulated to purchase the desirable places in the occupational world. Like hard currency in the real world, grades and certificates are subject to deflation, inflation and declining "purchasing power", as Dore (1976) has noted in his book The Diploma Disease. And, like the real world, the school promotes competition and the unequal distribution of rewards.

Assessment is a touchstone for meritocracy--not only to identify talent and measure success, but also to legitimize the entire process, to give credence to the allocation of rewards be they grades, scholarships, certificates and diplomas or high status occupations. As Broadfoot (1979) notes:

If the examination is of crucial importance for selection it must be invested with as much apparent objectivity, ritual and formality as possible, so that, almost after the manner of a divine utterance and certainly in the same way as an intelligent test, the results and the failure they imply for many candidates are accepted (p. 67).

The consequences of this point of view are becoming increasingly hard to live with in education today, both legally and philosophically. The implications and contemporary attempts to reconcile the

contradictions inherent in this perspective will be discussed further in the next chapter.

The creation of new problems, the invoking of a familiar response

As the school promoters quickly found out, at least in the urban centres, segregating children from society in the hopes of exerting control brought with it a new set of urgent demands. As the school populations grew, the need to classify, define and separate children so that they could be managed and controlled became tantamount to maintaining order (Tomkins, 1986). At the same time, the principle of division of labour was enjoying widespread application in industry, separation and demarcation into hierarchies along with specialization became associated with growth and efficiency as Frederick Taylor's notions of "scientific management" were adopted across North America (Fleming, 1988; Callahan, 1962). The movement came full circle "when reformers began to seek consolidation as a means to these ends" (Prentice, 1977, p. 146). That is, large schools permitted distinctions to be made by age, sex and achievement. This was necessary because separation, classification and specialization meant order and efficiency. The logic was circular and self-defeating--the more one tried to "purify the categories" (as Descartes had done), the more categories were created that needed ordering. Thus, it was that "early-twentieth superintendents sorely needed whatever efficiency measures they could find to deal with burgeoning school populations,

increasingly complex administrations systems, and rapidly-rising school costs" (Fleming, 1987, p. 25).

The solutions to this dilemma were to come from a new breed, the "pedagogical scientists" like William James, John Dewey and Edward Thorndike--of these Thorndike was "more influential in Canada than either Dewey or James" (Tomkins, 1986, p. 106). These men were experimentalists who saw education as a scientific means of social improvement. In this regard, they were re-stating Francis Bacon's views with remarkable congruence.

Thorndike believed that human behaviour, including phenomenon like reading and intelligence, could be measured objectively, as his oft quoted statement "whatever exists, exists in some amount" (cited in Cremin, 1961, p. 185) illustrates. His was a "essentialist view" of the universe--when Thorndike (1904) stated that "the facts of human nature be made the material for quantitative science" (p. vi), he was re-invoking the views set out by Descartes two and one half centuries earlier.

However, the legacy of this thought was not apparent to educators at the beginning of the twentieth century: "To the scholars and men of science of the Victorian era, imbued as this era was with the spirit of the physical sciences, the thought that qualities could be accurately measured was revolutionary indeed" (Williams, 1974, p. 44).

Given this socio-psychological context, i.e., the presence of the cult of "efficiency" and "uniformity", wholesale ascription to the "ethos of meritocracy", a dominant view, in the science of education, of

a substantive universe that needed controlling through separation, demarcation and purification, and the urgent need in the schools for "social bookkeeping", it is not difficult to explain the rapid establishment of testing as the primary, in some cases, exclusive means of assessing students in the elementary school.

By the 1920s, inspectors in British Columbia were spending most of their time "giving the educational survey tests", complimenting staff on the "real interest aroused in their study and use" (Willis, 1925, p. M25), and at the same time complaining bitterly that "there are too many written tests and examinations" (Stewart, 1922, p. C24). These men were powerful figures, and administrators and teachers alike would not be slow to notice that one of the major sources of their authority was the instruments they were using to set standards of achievement. The irony of their actions, apparently went unnoticed, as it does often times today when researchers, attempting to prove the efficacy of an approach that is diametrically opposed to standardized testing, use standardized tests to prove their results (Gunderson and Shapiro, 1986; Hagerty and Hiebert, 1988).

Perhaps Putman and Weir (1925) in their Survey of the School System of British Columbia were simply stating the obvious when they said that objective tests "free from ambiguity" were necessary so that results "more authentic than the mere opinion of schoolmen and administrators" would finally be possible (Putman and Weir, 1925, p. 261). It is evident, though, from these remarks that the notion of an "unreliable inner space" that produced "mere opinions" was firmly ingrained.

Subsequently, Putman and Weir retained Dr. Peter Sandiford to "conduct an extensive testing programme" [by employing] a comprehensive selection of standardized tests on pupils of all grades. The results "...constituted our first thorough study of school standards in the province and gave us our first provincial norms" (Johnston, 1964, p. 158). Apparently the means to establish the "rock and clay" of external "objective" benchmarks--mathematical method--had been embraced by policy makers by this time as well.

Evidence that this was the case comes from a bulletin from the Programme of Studies (Curricular) Department in 1939:

A frequent demand for tests of skills, and for achievement tests in the subject matter of units, reveals preoccupation with testing of this kind rather than with the development of understanding interpretation and appreciation. While tests are necessary...it is not advisable that tests be furnished by the Department to measure pupil's retention of subject matter or content...If tests were issued by the Department of Education almost certainly regimentation would result and the stated objectives of the curriculum would not be realized. It is, however, the practice of the Department of Education to supply inspectors with intelligence and other tests for use in rural schools. Teachers should understand that this testing is planned to

help them and give them guidance (Department of Education, 1939, p. 3-4).

In the end, progressive stance aside, when it really "counted", the Department relied on standardized tests as the external arbiter of what knowledge was of most worth. They failed to see the tyranny and regimentation they were invoking with their "speak softly and carry a big stick" approach to "help" and "guidance". Their choice of instruments a priori determined the nature of the "advice" that really counted. As well, unless they were deeply cynical, the Education Department did not realize that they were investing these same instruments with power and authority, creating or reifying the mystique surrounding "scientific method" and "scientific instruments". All else shrivelled into "mereness", the experience of the practitioners, the concrete demonstrations of skills in context by the students, even the vaunted opinions of the inspectors, in the face of mathematical methodology. The Department found itself responding to demands that, in their eyes, would be detrimental to the curriculum, demands that they helped create and sustain. The purpose of the tests was to provide inspectors with the means to reform outdated pedagogy (Putman and Weir, 1925), yet somehow the Department found the outcome of that intent distasteful. The effect was opposite to the one intended and "child-centered instruction which attended to individual differences was more often a theoretical rationale rather than a practical reality" (de Castell and de Castell, 1979, p. 376).

The Department had built their base on the shifting sands of "norm", confused mathematical comparison with standards and quality. The tests were self-referential and self-enclosed--the mathematical "surface map" skittered over the top of territory--how these children read, what they read, the reasoning behind their answers and the changes that occurred in their thinking and lives due to reading, i.e., the quality and standard of their reading, was put out of play. In this respect, Kant was right--the real world "out there" was unavailable for knowing, only the noumenal world, the world in relation to the instrument. For the Department, the notion of "standards" had become pure contingency, removed from the inherent "ends" of the phenomena to float endlessly on the tide of numbers--more is better, less is worse, half will pass, half will fail.

The essential character of a common perspective in education had been established by this time--what Sutherland (1986) has called the "triumph of formalism". The structural context and prevalent frame of mind left little room for alternative approaches to or conceptions of assessment to develop.

From the classroom of the mid-eighteenth century, to the progressivism of the early and mid-nineteenth century, to "the neo-classical revival of the 50's" (de Castell and de Castell, 1979), the "open education" of the 60's and now the emergence, beginning in the 70's of "the technocratic paradigm, with its bias towards "functional skills and the universal attainment of minimum competence" (de Castell and de Castell, 1979, p. 376), there has been remarkable stability in

the collective response to rapid change and uncertainty. The quest for clarity, certainty and univocal truth, has been pursued unflaggingly, even aggressively, throughout.

All of these movements have relied on assessment to legitimize their particular brand of objective truth, for ultimately the question asked was "How do you know?" The unquestioned response until recently has been to appeal to an objective "outside arbiter", or to a canonized method. They are often seen as one and the ultimate ground upon which all decisions can be justified.

However, strict adherence to this Cartesian paradigm has allowed only the simplest solutions to be implemented, walling off from consideration the more complex "predicaments of assessment", stunting or suppressing altogether more effective, intelligent ways of knowing. Thus as Broadfoot (1979) notes "Educational assessment, perhaps more than any other aspect of education, has suffered the thralldom of methodological empiricism" (p. 118). Perhaps that is why McLean (1985), in his exploratory study, found "the craft of student evaluation [in Canada] to be largely undeveloped" (p. 17).

Summary

This has inevitably been a whirlwind tour in the development of the thinking that has come to undergird the problems and practices of assessment in reading/language arts. Like all whirlwind tours, many of the interesting diversions along the way have been left out. For example, the movement of technical-rational thinking into the

universities has not been explored, nor the subsequent separation, demarcation and purification of theory and practice, of subjects into disciplines, of languages into a multitude of discourses, or as Berry (1987) would say, the growth of universities, "not according to any unifying principle, like an expanding universe, but according to the principle of miscellaneous accretion, like a furniture storage business" (p. 76). Nor has the development and fragmentation of curriculum into isolated subjects and their internal subdivision into a multitude of objectives (830 in the latest draft of the Language Arts guide to British Columbia), or in a more "progressive" fashion into developmental continua (101 in the latest draft of Alberta's Language Arts guide) been documented. We have also passed over the "high incidence-low status", micro-level assessment: the subtle, pervasive processes of passing judgement on educational experience that continually take place as part of the interactions between pupils and teachers. The next chapter will delve more deeply into this kind of assessment.

The dominant theme of the chapter is that questions of assessment are historical questions, questions that must take into consideration the practices, assumptions and context of the larger community, for the "reason" of the community (the "other") will be "our" reason in some sense. As Mead (1934) would say, the individual perspective arises from the collective or communal one--history invades the very nature of the character of thought and activity (and their products) with which this study is concerned.

Thus, we have looked briefly at the conditions that spawned the strands of thinking that coalesced into a framework of logical, rational thought. The processes of separation, demarcation, purification and colonization (control and manipulation) have been identified as part of a perspectival response to uncertainty, ambiguity and the disintegration of a social order at two critical points in history. A brief description of the restructuring of a "new order" at both these "gaps" has been offered as well.

There can be little doubt that we are, as in the seventeenth and nineteenth century, immersed in another "age of uncertainty". We appear to be faced with the same "signs" of disintegration and change, currently, that the societies in those past epochs faced. "As in the seventeenth century," Berman (1984) notes, "we are again destabilized, cast adrift, floating. We have, as Dante wrote in the Divine Comedy, awoken to find ourselves in a dark woods" (p. 9).

It is to this "disorder" that we now turn: to the responses of the participants in this study, and to the conditions they face in carrying out their responsibilities, to construct, administer, interpret and communicate assessments in reading/language arts in times of rapid change and uncertainty.

CHAPTER FIVE

This chapter moves from the macro-order trends of the past and the development of modern day consciousness, to the present-day accounts of the participants in this study. The data exemplify a number of themes uncovered in the last chapter. Selected quotes by the participants, as well as other theoretical accounts and research will be presented as signs that point to the interpretation offered throughout this chapter.

The first section will describe those themes that arise out of the lived experience of the participants. Two pairs of metaphors will be used here to illustrate the "ways of knowing" in assessment--a major theme throughout the accounts. The first pair, "sitting beside to assist" and "sitting above to judge", represent two fundamental roles or perspectives that teachers take up in their relationships with children. The second pair, "exploring the territory" and "making a map", represent symbolic activities that practitioners engage in to make sense of their experience in assessing students in reading/language arts. These metaphors are used in an attempt to capture the essence of assessment without separating procedures from human relationships and context, that is, they are used to illustrate ways of knowing that implicate "others" and a "sense of place".

The second section will describe those themes related more to the macro-order, the signs in the participants' accounts that point to the pushes and pulls of the "negotiated order" (Strauss, 1978) and the "sediments of the past" (Hall, 1987). It is within this section that

the problematic nature of assessing a developing "mind in society" (Vygotsky, 1978) comes to the fore and some of the dilemmas inherent in assessment are illustrated. The theme throughout is, as the section is titled, "sources of uncertainty".

The third section deals with the various responses of the participants to the imperatives in the situation, their duties and responsibilities, the expectations of the various stakeholders, and the "working out of a logic that is three centuries old" (Berman, 1984, p. 29). It is within this section that the Cartesian legacy comes to the fore as the dominant perspective that participants both recreate and work against. Throughout all the sections, the broad general theme is the underlying tension that exists between "knowing" and "not knowing", and the constant unfolding of one state and the enfolding of the other. In this section Spencer's (1882) famous question, "What knowledge is of most worth?" is answered by the participants in a variety of ways.

Before we begin to examine the data two things need to be stated. First, that all possible interpretations of the data have not been considered in this study. Stone and Faberman's (1981) statement that "concrete reality is virtually inexhaustible" (p. 71) applies here. The purpose of this study is not to attempt to exhaust all the possibilities, or as in the case of empiricism, to uncover all the connections and sever them so that claims could be made that all the "significant factors" were either "identified", "controlled" or "manipulated" and "100% of the variance accounted for". Rather, the purpose of this study is to be illustrative of some of the aspects of a

social, i.e., living phenomena that heretofore have largely been ignored.

Second, and this is related to the first point, in many cases the themes exist in the data "all at once", that is, they do not cleave neatly into three separate constructs, but have been "teased out" that way for purposes of orderly discussion and understanding. It is hoped that the connections have not been severed, or if they have, that they can be "knit back into the warp and woof" by close reading.

Ways of Knowing, Ways of Doing

Sitting beside to assist and sitting above to judge

The quotes presented in this section help illustrate the grounding of assessment in a set of conversational relationships between teachers, parents and students. The metaphors "sitting beside to assist" and "sitting above to judge" help characterize the nature of these relationships, that is, they help us see assessment not so much in terms of form, procedure or technique, but in terms of orientations or perspectives.

The signs in the participants' accounts point to, as Berry (1987) notes, "ways of knowing and ways of doing that cannot be divided from each other or within themselves, and that speak the common language of the communities where they are practiced" (p. 87).

"Sitting beside to assist" has to do with helping someone, both self and others. It has to do with intimacy, equality and empathy.

"Sitting above to judge" has to do with distancing, authority and control. As a way of knowing, "sitting beside" seems to produce intuitive understanding, while "sitting above" gives rise to abstract knowledge about the object. The first relationship helps teachers to proceed appropriately, the second to make accurate judgements about "where the kids are" in reading (3:3, p. 12). Both of these roles exist in a dialectic relationship.

Sitting beside and assisting allows the teacher to begin to proceed from ignorance and mystery, that is from not knowing in advance. It is akin to what Easley and Zwyer (1975) call "assessment by listening". Sitting above and judging allows the teacher to proceed from a knowledge base, established either from knowing the children or from knowing a "scheme" of child development. In one way, one precludes the other-- understanding and assistance require intimacy not distance, they require forbearance not judgement, they require that preconceived (Kantian) notions be held in obedience so that true listening can take place and the interior life of the subject can emerge. That is, that things can be known as they are in nature. Sitting above and judging requires distancing, separation and the imposition of order or categories, so that things can be isolated and known as objects. Admittedly, in any act of knowing, judgements are being made all the time, but in sitting beside to assist, the focus is on relating to the child, while in sitting above to judge, the focus is on qualifying or quantifying the child's response. They do not exist separately but as "conjoint adjustive responses" (Mead, 1936), that is to say they are in a

conversational relationship, and there is tension between them. They are not distinct, isolated ways of knowing like Ryle's "knowing that" and "knowing how". Rather, they exist together in a living, symbiotic relationship, therefore the distinctions between these two ways of knowing are not sharp, and the boundaries are fuzzy, but they are different. As Wittgenstein (1955) would say, they are "akin to one another" and "the kinships bear both resemblances and differences" (p. 85e).

Mark, a beginning teacher, talks about the role of sitting beside and assisting:

I find that I am assessing what I am doing all the time. I find that as I am teaching a part of mind is going, "This is going all right or change to this," and I'm changing lessons in midstream now which was something that I wouldn't have attempted earlier...now I can change gears or change the direction of the lesson dramatically...sometimes you know you take that teachable moment and change to it and it really pays off. (5:2, p. 36)

He speaks of "changing to" something--a "moment", of adapting "self" to an "other", accommodating his own behavior, rather than making the events assimilate to his way of proceeding. He is disciplined by the moment, he waits to "see" the implicate order unfold instead of imposing discipline on what is there. This is something that he had to learn to "tune in to". He talks about changing from a "shotgun

approach" (5:1, p. 3) to a mode of teaching that incorporated "waiting" and proceeding from intuitive knowing.

...as the year progressed, I...I was able to say, now these kids are interested in this, and I know that they need this, [in reading] break the class in half, and go at least two ways, and uh...that will be different at the start of next year because I'll be able to be thinking that way right from the beginning. Not necessarily have enough information to...right at the start to get...but "ill know, I'll be able to...to watch...I seem to be acquiring a sense of...of uh, you know, it's not something that ...that I...I write...here's my standard, and here are my goals and objectives, and here's my standard that they're going to work to. Uh, they...their...their standard is almost...uh...internalized. (5:1, p. 17)

His focus is not on generating information or objective knowledge but of acquiring a sense of propriety, a tacit understanding of how best to conduct himself.

Yvonne, a classroom teacher for 20 years, proceeds in a sure-footed manner from what "seems to be". Again note that she is not overly concerned with "making proper judgments". She does, however, make them resolutely, without stopping to "doubt" each one.

Oh, if they don't seem to be getting along too well [in reading] and I think there is something the matter, I will take them aside. If when I have a student teacher I take them all aside individually. Because that is what I do when a student teacher is here, is work with the children individually, all day long, every day...And so I often find out very surprising things about children. I find that some of them I hadn't thought were very good readers, are excellent readers, but they have just been sort of shuffling [quietly] along and...so that's a real plus. And you can help the children that need it.

(1:1, p. 27)

Diane, an experienced (20 years) grade 2 teacher, uses this way of knowing (sitting beside) to work her way "underneath" the surface structure (scores) of a standardized test. She uses the instrument to move from an "outside arbiter" to an "inside knower".

...so what I am going to do with those two kids [who failed the Ginn level 7 mastery test] plus the little new one, I am going to get some tests up and we are going to read them together, the whole test. And then we are going to go over the questions [together] and see if they, you know, I am going to have them right in front of me to pick them. I will

be able to tell easily what they know and what they
don't know. (1:3, p. 24)

She is confident that she will be able to break through the hard "reflective" mathematical surface of the results and come to know the children's ability in a different way. It is interesting to note that this approach is precisely what standardized test constructors try to control through canonical procedure. The kind of variance that Diane will introduce in procedure will, ostensibly at least, destroy the validity of the results, and contaminate the "true score". But Diane is convinced that she can find the truth by proceeding intuitively rather than mathematically. She has collapsed the distance between the children, the instrument and herself in this instance. She descends from above "down into" the relationship of sitting beside the children and leaves behind the "numbers" or "standards" that are "out there".

Kathy, a grade 1 teacher, more traditional in her approach, talks about this kind of "just knowing" as well.

I try to get some sort of...sort of, you know, to get a feel for exactly what they are doing on a daily basis. Later on I can let some of my more advanced students go, I don't quite need as much feedback constantly, but with my slower students, yes, I read [with them] daily [that] type of thing. So I know exactly where I am going to go with each one. That's nothing you can really validate besides, you know, on paper for the judgment, but it

is a very important judgment because it really determines as to how far they will go in reading.

(1:5, p. 26)

She too is concerned with developing a "sense" of where she will "go" with each child. She acknowledges both the power and significance of "getting a feel" for what her students are doing and the inscrutable nature of this way of knowing. Herein lies the "modern tragedy" of this way of assessing: it cannot be validated by an outside arbiter.

Much of the knowing remains, as Polanyi (1989) maintains, in the "doing". Practitioners have to rely on their experience, their ability to see and hear, their sense of propriety and their deep-seated feelings of care and empathy. Most importantly, they must rely on those abilities in their colleagues as well. At times, as we shall see in the section on "sources of uncertainty", that trust is neither earned nor warranted.

As well, this way of knowing, akin to what Berman (1984) has called a "participating consciousness", works against the dominant mode of thinking in this society, what Bruner (1986) calls "verificationism gone wild". Although "sitting beside to assist" allows teachers to capitalize on the "teachable moment", that is, it makes focused, relevant teaching possible, epistemologically, in this day and age it is often regarded as a "second class citizen". This apparent anomaly is discussed more fully in the section on "Response".

Sitting above and judging involves "climbing up" into the evaluator's chair. It involves distancing, shifting the focus of

attention, making the child's performance in reading a separate object of attention. As we shall see, there was a certain discomfort in the accounts with assuming this role because the connections in the relationship could not always be severed, and because of the fact that it is from this orientation that judgements come out "into the open", that is, for all involved, they become inescapable.

John, a principal for six years, points to the transformation that takes place in shifting into this role: "If you're building a house, right?--you put up a wall, you stand back and look at it" (2:1, p. 4). He has noted the change from participant to observer that occurs, as well as the distancing required to pass judgement.

In the following example, Mark becomes more analytical and more abstract when he employs this way of knowing. It re-orientes him so that he is ready to take up the role of sitting beside to assist once again. Thus the role functions not just to give the teacher conceptual leverage on the child's ability, but also to turn them back into "assessment on the run".

I wanted to get in as much as I could [in reading]
 ...as many things as I could, so I could run through
 and say, okay, that's just a blip...that's just a
 blip...but here's the overall picture, you know,
 and...and so there's...here and there [they] are up
 or down...generally speaking, I feel that this child
 is...is doing...fairly well, or needs help, and this
 ...this narrowed it also down to the specific areas.

That's what I particularly like about that. That's ...and that's ...where that...that, uh, program fit in, I mean that...it...it says, okay, if you're...on each one of these, you can look at, uh, where...what ...which cluster of skills or...which area whether it's analysis, or synthesis, or whatever it happens to be...which area that their errors are occurring at. And I found that quite useful in...in focussing in...with two children in particular, I found a very dramatic drop. This is...they were getting [things] all wrong in one area. And it...it helped me give them some...some help in that area. (5:1, p. 12)

Sitting above to judge involved "looking down" from a number of vantage points: viewing the child's work for an entire term, viewing the child's work in relation to the entire class, and viewing the child's work in relation to a reformulated, decontextualized "map" of child development (like a scope and sequence chart). It is at this juncture, where the developmental profile of the child joins the confluence of other children's growth, curricular goals and so on, that an old and extremely troublesome construct emerges: the notion of a standard. Note what Sandy, a grade 4 teacher for more than twenty-five years, says about connecting these "streams":

I have to be able to relate my evaluations [in reading] to my planning, and my objectives, and my goals. Uh, this allows me to look at something that

she's done, and it, uh, it comes back to a standard. Because I look at hers [a student's work], and I say, uh, because I was looking for 1, 2, 3, 4, 5 objectives...this is what I was looking for, say, 5 or 2 or whatever it was, and she's got 4 of them, and...and...she gets 8 out of 10. Now that's so that I can compare her to someone else in the class...I took all the work and I turned out what the average child is doing, and... and...set that up in my mind, as...as...this is about what a Grade 4 should do, and there's some kids who are much higher, kids who are much lower, I'm setting the standard, and, uh, I related what my objectives were. Here are my objectives...this is what I want the kids to achieve... I want them to...want them to be able to do do these, here are my goals. (2:2, p. 12)

Sandy's notion of standard is grounded in her considerable experience of "what a grade 4 should be able to do". It appears to result from combining a complex set of interrelated elements that appear to be somewhat fluid in nature: her aggregated sense of children's ability, her current expectations (in the form of objectives), the children's work in front of her and the circumstances that gave rise to that work. The process of "sitting above to judge" and the sense of "standard" that arises from it, is like Kathy says "nothing you can

really validate on paper". Rather these things were reported as being "sensed", "felt", "acquired" or "just known". As Sandy says,

...I've taught children to read for many, many years... I won't tell you how many (laughs)...and I've been quite successful at it...I know when kids are in trouble and I know when they're way ahead of the game and I know when they're about where they should be... that's a tough question ["How do you know if students are in trouble?"]...I don't know exactly how I know (laughs)...I use tests sometimes but usually I have a pretty good idea before I even give the test...(2:2, p. 12)

"Sitting above to judge" appears to have an ineffable base, the wherewithal appears to come from being immersed in the experience of working with children, from being "in touch" with them over an extended period of time, that is, from sitting beside to assist them. It does not appear to be a process that is rational, that is, the participants did not hold to any particular logic or "scientific method" for making judgements. All appeared to shuttle rapidly between their recalled experiences with the children, both past and present, the evidence they had collected (and for all, that included standardized tests) and their acquired sense of standards to generate their judgements.

Herein lies part of the problematic nature of assessment. Both "sitting beside to assist" and "sitting above to judge" seem largely to be, as Polanyi (1958) notes "the pervasive participation of the knowing

person in the act of knowing by virtue of an art which is essentially inarticulate" (p. 123). Shaped and bounded by "unscientific ways", teachers' judgements must enter a world dominated by "scientific consciousness" that demands things be ac-counted for, justified and verified. This begs the question: How is it possible to be accountable for something that is artful, unconscious, largely inarticulate and, even, mysterious? That is, which one of us can read and fully explicate the workings of his or her own mind?

In addition, there are obvious risks in approaching assessment in reading by a way that is frankly intuitive. These will be discussed more fully in the next section--"sources of uncertainty"--but for now Broadfoot's (1984) remarks point to some very real concerns.

...the replacement of formal selective tests and examinations with progressive orientations based on teacher's continuous assessment...may in practice be a more insidious basis for social control...thus pupils who for reasons of family background or personality cannot or will not conform to the desired stereotype risk, under such an orientation process being cooled out long before their potential warrants (p. 11).

Not all participants felt these risks worth taking. Their decisions and courses of action will be discussed in the final section of this chapter--"Response to the uncertainty and the legacy".

While practitioners in this study used the processes of sitting beside to assist and sitting above to judge to come to understand their children and scrutinize their ability and growth in reading, they relied on two other complimentary processes to develop a "sense of place" and where their children "fit" in the larger scheme of things. It is to these symbolic activities that we now turn.

A sense of place: Map-making and exploring the territory

In this section a metaphor, tied to the notion of "a sense of place" and a "sense of direction", will be used to characterize how the participants contextualized their knowledge and judgements. The two phrases "making and using an assessment map" and "exploring and getting lost in the territory", are fashioned after Korzybski's (1933) famous phrase "The map is not the territory". Like "sitting beside" and "sitting above", they exist in a conversational relationship. Making and using an assessment map is a kind of "meta-assessment" if you like, that involves such things as deciding which aspects of growth and ability in reading will be assessed or foregrounded for reporting, deciding which criteria will be used to judge those selected aspects, planning assessment opportunities, forging consistency between curricular intents and "what really counts", and so on. When students ask, "Does this count?", and, "How much?" they are asking after the nature of the assessment map. If the assessment map is entirely mathematical in character, the records and files "will look like scoreboards rather than logbooks" (Stibbs, 1979, p. 47). The assessment

map helps the teacher determine their "sense of fit" in the larger order--it defines, explicitly or implicitly the "universe" of assessment for reading.

The other partner to this process is "exploring the territory". It involves forgetting about the existing map, largely so that a new one can be created. Exploring the territory is the creative, open-ended part of assessment that allows for "new" criteria to emerge from the unfolding order of children's growth and ability. It is the transformational process that constantly destroys the existing assessment map and requires a new one to be made and, inevitably, re-made. The process is manifested in such things as "report card revisions" and makes all "criterial lists" in reading incessantly inadequate. Whenever we seek certainty and clarity, we shut this process down--the fixing of "skill lists" in curriculum guides or questions on a reading test being two examples of the closing off of "exploring new territory".

This is the process that builds hope and possibility into assessment, that opens it out to the future, orients it towards surprise and mystery. In this way, it is like sitting beside and assisting only it has the larger character of "movement" over (curricular) "terrain".

However, without the constraints of map-making, "exploring the territory" quickly becomes "working out in the open", and "getting lost" in the territory. When this happens, "sense of place" disappears and in Pascal's words "the silences of the infinite spaces" create deep-seated anxiety, as they did in Descartes' day.

John's account illustrates this phenomena. He talks of the conditions that existed in the early and mid 1970s, before Ginn 720 was adopted.

We were back to nothing again, we had those [old] basal readers--in terms of story value...they seemed to be a little more creative [than Ginn 720], and guides [teacher's guides] were not encouraged, workbooks were not encouraged, testing was not encouraged. And it seemed like all of it came down to preparing your [teacher's] own lesson from the story and it seemed like the responsibility was in each classroom to come up with the skill areas that you wanted to cover...Comparing people was starting to lose favour, testing was, I think, down throughout [the system], particularly at the university...I think the attitude at the time was that the teacher is the professional, you work with the child the bulk of the time, you make daily observations and, therefore, you should assess them...the sad thing about it was that what I was doing was not necessarily what...there was disagreement. I might be wanting to spend more time on structural analysis or I might want to do more in judgement and evaluation. The guy next door wanted to do something else, maybe phonics was his or her

thing. And in the end there was a lot of responsibility on individuals and all the evaluation seemed to be on what was "apparent personal ability"...we sat down and everybody judged the student's apparent personal ability. And somehow out of all this we tried to make some sense...there wasn't that coming back to a [common] yardstick. I'd be willing to guess that there is probably a lot of people feeling that sense of confusion now... (2:1, p.1)

The "back to nothing again" is interesting here as is the "sense of confusion" - both signal a kind of fear of the open spaces ~ a "pedagogical agoraphobia" if you like, that is generated where traditional "supports", like teacher's guides, workbooks and tests, are discarded or fall into disfavour and people work for an extended period of time out "in the open". They "get lost", and given the social and geographic mobility of their students, students get lost. As John notes, when a "map" for the territory came along (Ginn 720) a lot of people seized it to "get their bearings".

I was like everybody else, I bought into it [Ginn 720] and I thought, "Yah, it was going to be great" so we had charts...we mapped the whole thing, we had initial reading tests done through the whole school, criterion exercises, we had shelves of this stuff like you wouldn't believe...I mean we were

armed to the teeth with this stuff. Standardized tests went by the wayside...novels seemed to be brushed aside because it looked good to get the kids through the levels right? ...it was so neat and tidy...then the flaws started to show up...the teachers were coming down and (saying) I got my class through level 25, and they would say, "We don't have anymore left, what are we going to do now?" (2:1, p. 2-3)

Sadly enough, in this instance, teachers couldn't put the map down. They could not forget about it periodically and go out and get lost in the territory--examine the "wildlife", follow the divergent paths and become "deliberately disoriented" so to speak. Instead, they stuck to the trail carefully marked out on the map, turned the trek into a competitive run through an obstacle course, and then, after it was "over", when their students began to mill about at the finish line, asked, nervously, "What's next?"

They created expectations that what really counted was "to get the kids through the levels" (2:1, p. 3). Unwittingly, they had fallen into a trap--for now, leaving the beaten path was just too risky, and besides the "spectators" had assembled along the way and at the "finish line". Note what Mary says,

When I've said, "Why don't we just drop the levels by one so you only do up to level 12 in Grade 7? And then people have time to read other things.

That was very frightening, very frightening. One of the very good principals said to me, "I fell sick to my stomach at this suggestion. How am I going to explain to the parents that their kids are not more stupid than the ones in O _____ who are reading to level 13?" His feeling was that if we made it a district-wide decision that the kids wouldn't go beyond level 12, that the parents, some parents would discover that students were on level 13 in V _____ and would therefore assume that the students were dumber, and why were they dumber? or else the teaching was less competent. And it is a very interesting thing that with quite a lot of principals the questions has not been which way are the children learning better, the questions has been, "How do I explain this to the parent?" That became the theme. That is the problem. It becomes...that whole thing that when you've got a lock-step system. The most destructive think ever brought about." (3:3, p. 12)

For some children, this approach destroyed the hope of ever finishing, for others it destroyed the possibility and the desire to go exploring and discovering "new" territory (to add to the map). For everyone it seems the joy of "doing this together" had been pre-empted. The "weigh stations" strung the participants out along the trail, and

they lost "touch" with each other and with their leader. Teachers were forced to rush relentlessly from the front to the back and "herd" everyone along. What begins as a way to bring people together ended up scattering everyone. The same problem that confronted nineteenth century reformers--endless subdivision into unmanageable complexity--confronts those who "bought in". Unfortunately as John says in British Columbia this appeared to be "everybody else".

I had six groups once...I spent all my time giving them busy work, so that I could go and talk to one group. I didn't accomplish anything...you know, I wasn't accomplishing anything, and I needed to pull back and look at that, and say, "Isn't there another way?"... And, you know, maybe I have to give up a certain amount of certainty, of "OK, you're at this level, you're at that, quote, level," whatever it was, and somehow do some consolidation, say, "Never mind about some of this, because I'm not getting anywhere, and you're not getting anywhere. Now, that's where a whole different way of looking at teaching comes into play. (4:1, p. 31)

Barb ends up having to forget about mapping the students, she has to "give up a certain amount" of certainty, and when she does, the territory in front of her opens up--a "whole different way" becomes possible. In doing so she "lets go" of what Descartes struggled so hard to "tie down": absolute certainty.

Mary, a district supervisor, recognizes the value of not being "too tied down", and she resists setting out another "map". She seems to be working at keeping the possibilities open here, by withholding another "set of directions".

The superintendent said to me, "Do we have a policy about what we teach in reading here? I would like to know what that policy is, Bee." And, I'm sort of waltzing my way around it because I don't want to come out and say this is what we will do. I don't want to be too tied down. On the other hand, from the Superintendent's point of view, he said, "I don't remember ever saying no, that Ginn was not the...in fact that Ginn was not the curriculum or that we can take these books and shove them on the back shelf and ignore them. I don't ever remember hearing us say that." But we do have teachers who are doing that, who are teaching trade books or using...are piloting new readers and so on. And they are not using the Ginn at all. (3:3, p. 12)

She acknowledges that some teachers are trying a different way, that they have strayed from the path, and she is loathe to call them back. However, she acknowledges, also, that they are working themselves into unfamiliar territory, and with that comes the sense that they need to stop and "get a fix". Things are no longer "pinned down" and "locked in" as John said, and a "certain discomfort" sets in.

...there is a certain discomfort for elementary teachers with the dropping of the Ginn Criterion Reference Test and Mastery Tests--to know where kids are. So they are kind of looking around from some way of measuring themselves against something, they want reassurance." (3:3, p. 19)

Descartes had God as his guarantor. Kant replaced God with man's own reason, and the age of modernization replaced reason with technology. When that technology is removed, what is it that we have to measure "ourselves against"? As George has said (with apologies to Karl Marx) "Tests are like God, if we didn't have them we'd invent them" (6:2, p. 14). This kind of uncertainty (of working out in the open) was a very strong theme through the accounts, as it was throughout Descartes' writing. The question arises again and again, not just in reading assessment but throughout our daily lives: "Are we going to be O.K.? How do we know?"

John senses the same thing--his fear is that they will get lost and begin to "wander about". Note his use of the metaphor of tribes.

At the risk of sounding like a raving centralist, I think its time someone bit the bullet and said, "This is the way we are going to go" [in reading]... either at the district level or the provincial level...you know...it could get to be like...we are just a bunch of tribes...one guy jumps up and yells, "This way" and everyone charges off in that

direction...someone else says, "No! No!, this way"...off we go in another direction. You know that's my biggest fear. (2:1, p. 23)

Sources of Uncertainty

As we have just mentioned, a strong underlying theme throughout the data, and the theoretical literature on assessment in reading, indeed, throughout the entire post modern world is that of uncertainty, Dante's "dark woods". As we shall see, uncertainty comes in many forms and from a variety of sources, as it did in Descartes' time and at the beginning of the age of modernization. Part of it seems "natural", i.e., inevitable, a part of the mysterious side of life and human behaviour. Part of it seems "artificial", super-added to our lives by the way we think about and act towards others and the world "out there", by the way we have brought our knowledge and technology to bear on nature. This section explores some of the sources that bear most heavily on assessing children's growth and ability in reading. Whether one refers to Schon's (1983) "crisis in confidence" in the profession or McCarthy and Dallmayr's (1977) "crisis of understanding" for society in general, the modern world is certainly typified by the phrase "the age of uncertainty".

The uncertainty produced by geographic and social mobility and the lack of common ground

A good deal of uncertainty is signaled in the accounts of the participants by three existing conditions that appear to work in concert: variance in the criteria used to judge children's ability and progress in reading, variance in the records that are kept, and geographic and social mobility. Note what Kathy, a grade one teacher with 16 years of experience, says about a "struggling child" who has just transferred into the school:

We get a lot of transfers here (in this school).

Some people bring very good records about kids, some people write memos with what they've done. I got nothing. And, in fact, I found out in June that he had repeated and I didn't know that beforehand. So, you know, usually with the type of kid that is having the most trouble you get the most flimsy records with nothing, you know how that goes...It varies very, very much. (A1:5, p. 8)

Porter (1979) confirms that transiency is not just a local phenomenon: "The most striking features of Canadian population are its uneven rate of growth and its geographic mobility... mobility that has made (Canada) a huge demographic railway station" (p. 29-33). Not only do children leave their physical landscapes behind, often the "landscape" of their past growth and development is left behind as well. Children travel "light" with their Permanent Record cards, mathematical

scores in reading are often all that arrive as educational luggage. Building in some continuity, and fostering a sense of place for the child and the child's learning becomes extremely difficult under these conditions. It requires, at the least, that careful, detailed records be kept and moved with the child. When this is not the case, there is a "loss of intelligibility" for the teacher, and a loss of sense of place for both child and parent. The surprise, anger and sorrow that often accompany this loss are expressed by John, an elementary school principal:

...there is a fair amount of movement within our district. And that is when you get caught up in all of this. That is when you pay the price. If a child stays in your school K through 7 it is very routine, but the major problems, and I can tell you that in Grade 1, we have had about half a dozen or so new kids come in and it has been a disaster...a parent should have a right to know that if my child was in grade 1 in Salmon Arm, he has an inside chance to make it in Victoria. You know what I mean? There has to be something. I don't know what form, I don't know the test or the answer, but there has got to be a way now, because it is a very unhappy experience for everybody. (2:1, p. 12-13)

What the child and parent have experienced in this case are variance in the criteria for "what counts" in reading. This variance is

not limited to grade 1, cross-school differences--in the way progress in reading is judged--affect the intermediate grades as well, apparently with a heightened effect since letter grades are involved.

There's no conformity whatsoever, I mean...It's a real problem. Even...even within our district, here...it's a problem...You know, a B, uh, a B at another elementary school in the district is that worth a D here...And...and...and...too many times I see... teachers saying, "Well, it's my professional judgement." Well, you know, I kind of agree with that to a certain extent but...part of that still has to make...be some uniformity, to be able to carry some credibility to it. Otherwise, there's no credibility, and the parents are fooled. And they end up being surprised and angry and not only that, but totally pissed right off. You know, when they go...they say, "My kid was a bright student...but he came to this school, you guys screwed him up. You know, he was getting all...he was an A student at [another elementary school in the district]. I can't understand this...you guys're in the same district. What're you doing?" And I think the parents have a very legitimate complaint.

(1:1, p. 16-17)

It's difficult to imagine exactly what the experience of an "angry parent waving a report card in your face from your colleagues down the road that totally disagrees with the report the kid received from this school " (1:1, p. 37) is like, but we can appreciate the residue of frustration, anger and bad feelings left behind between school and home. Such feelings help create some of the tension and uncertainty that surround and pervade assessment. Considering how vulnerable schools are to attacks by vocal parents, this is not only a difficult moral and ethical dilemma, it is a politically dangerous one as well.

For John (in one school) and Kathy (in another) this situation is confined to inter-school mobility. Because both these schools have pre-specified, formalized criteria for making selection decisions (a point that we will return to later), the social mobility within the school is not as problematic as in the case of Mark, a beginning teacher in a school that does not have a set of commonly agreed upon "standards" in place. Apparently in Mark's school, there were significant differences between staff members about what "working at", "below" or "above grade level" in reading meant, and subsequently what constituted performance that was "good" (G), "satisfactory" (S) and "needing improvement" (I):

At the start of the year, what was...what was concerning me a lot was that uh we had to have a standard...a standard uh...standardized format for each grade. So that, a G or an S on my report card was the same as a G or an S on every other grade 4 report card in the school...and I couldn't handle

that. That was a big problem, for me, because...particularly with people teaching different ways...I mean, their...their goals and objectives were different than mine. And I couldn't see it working. I talked with P. [a district language arts consultant] and she said, "No, if you can justify your evaluation"--I'd worry and say, "What evaluation?...it's not really very...very sound." And uh... but that just kind of withered away...it never...nothing ever came out of it.

(5:1, p. 32-33)

Besides the uncertainty that Mark feels about his own ability to assess, there is an added uncertainty here. Under these conditions, there is no "safe place" for these practitioners to come to a collective sense of the differences between them. Nor is there a forum for forging a common set of integrated standards in reading. In this situation, the differences emerge full blown in the rough and tumble of the public arena, where the stakes are high because the judgements are official, committed to paper, and fixed "forever". The negative impact on both sides is forceful.:

Parents coming in and saying, "Last year my boy got all G's and now he's only got four and he had all the rest S's and he had one I," and then floods of tears and I thought the kid had got a damn good report card. And I said, "Look he's doing

okay...this is what it means...it means this, this and this," and I couldn't do a, I didn't do a good prep job on the kids or the, uh, or the parents.

(5:1, p. 27-28)

The problem is not one of internal consistency or theoretical congruence (an issue that is often raised in the literature) but of variance in criteria for what counts between contexts within the school. The situation is worsened because the variance is unknown and, given the situation, unknowable. It produces surprise, frustration, anger and sorrow on all sides.

This condition is fostered by the isolation and schisms between individuals and individual schools. Part of this, no doubt could be attributed to the physical or structural isolation of "separate, self-contained classrooms". But the division here does not come just from physical separation. It is deeper than that. Part of it also springs from the separation and isolation of the individual psyche from the "community of mind" or common ground in the social order, a separation that began at least as far back as three centuries ago.

C.B. McPherson (1962) identified pervasive notions of "individualism" and "private ownership" buried in the consciousness of Western societies. He called this perspective "possessive individualism" and the signs of its existence permeate the accounts of the participants in this study. Mark comments about "doing his own thing":

Uh...now, from my experiences in the school is that there's uh people teaching really different style and philosophy and belief with different belief than I do, and they do...they do their own thing, you know, they don't try and impose it, it's not something that's imposed by the principal or by anybody else...it's just people doing their own thing, their own time, their own way...and that is what the District uh has decided to make policy now.

(5:1, p. 26-27)

"Own" things, "own" ways, "own" time--these are things that are individually possessed, and private. In this instance, the "fences" have been erected and "trespassing" is officially discouraged. In Mark's case, "others" have disappeared, true discussion has "withered away". Common sense can no longer be forged, nor can differences be enumerated in advance, because common ground has been forfeited. It's no wonder Lortie (1975) characterizes teachers' professional lives as "lonely vigils". This "private loneliness" is accompanied, as Berry (1982) notes by "public confusion". The loss of community and common ground leads to a loss of intelligibility. The rift between professionals is mirrored by the rift between language and common referents. In this instance, meaning disintegrates, and we are left with symbols that are common, i.e., "A", "B", or "C", or "above", "below", or "within standard", but hollow.

These conditions produce a different kind of uncertainty, deeply felt, the uncertainty of "professional (possessive) autonomy".

The uncertainty and terror of rapid, unrestrained change

The term "knowledge explosion" is now so common, the condition so widely accepted, that it has become part of the "background noise" of our lives. When this condition is combined with "one-shot" inservice in education, it produces deep-seated anxiety over curricular reform that "wells up" in educators in instances like the one below. Robert comments on this condition that, at this particular time, seems to have overwhelmed him.

You know when I think about...all the goddamn changes...we can't...how...I mean first it was Ginn (720) and that was just handed to us...uh, I think there was a half day...uh...the whole bloody package in half day...readers, workbooks, mastery tests...those bloody things ...then we find that Ginn is lousy--too mechanical, too restricted, lousy tests ...you know, on and on...In between there's the writing process...throw out grammar, never mind spelling, let them invent the goddamn stuff...and...we just get...some teachers jumped on the wagon, some didn't at all, some just took parts...everyone all over the bloody map...then there's whole language...what the hell is whole language? Ask six

people get ten goddamn definitions ...again some became gurus, others clung to Ginn, others are half in and half out...What's next? And you know who suffers--the kids, the kids and their parents get shafted. I don't blame them one bloody bit for being mad. We don't know what the hell's coming next...we're getting broadsided...where's the bloody sense to all of that?...I don't know...I get...sometimes it seems...Do I sound frustrated?

(laughs) (1:1, p. 1)

Robert feels the vortex that all of us are drawn into in this day and age--teachers, children, parents, administrators, researchers alike--the relentless "unnatural uncertainty" produced by the explosion of scientific and technical knowledge. Ironically, the deep desire to "be current", to "stay on top of things" and to be "right" ends up re-fueling what Madaus (1985) calls "the great analytic engine". The frightening array of criterial lists, assessment kits, and standardized tests being produced every year is testament enough to this phenomena. The university is as much to blame here as anyone else. Like the nineteenth century school reformers, we are both repulsed and fascinated by change: we decry its effects and contribute to its causes. "The academic machinery," Sledd (1988) maintains, "spews out speeches, papers, project proposals, books and dissertations, while sucking in grants, doctorates, trips, raises and promotions" (p. 497).

Robert feels the "weight of change" here that is produced in the vast array of separate, distinct disciplines of science and education. He expresses, amid the anger and frustration, a deep concern over the way knowledge is being brought to bear relentlessly on his school. This is knowledge production unconstrained by wisdom, and it has its own kind of tyranny, the weight of which we all must bear. Koestler (1959) talks about this and why we continue to search the horizon for even more change.

Each advance in theory, with its rich technological harvest was bought by a loss of intelligibility. These losses on the intellectual balance sheet were much less in evidence than the spectacular gains, they were light-heartedly accepted as passing clouds which the next advance would solve. (p. 540)

But the solution doesn't arrive on the next wave, the latest advance only serves to deepen the disorder, or as Robert says, "some become gurus, others cling to Ginn, others are half in and half out", and scatter the teachers or schools "all over the bloody map".

The uncertainty of "bad assessment"

Anecdotes in participants' accounts of sloppy, careless assessment, shirked responsibility, and general incompetence are frequent enough to suggest that some of the suspicion and lack of confidence in professional judgment, noted by Schon (1983), is warranted. It is a painful reality we must one day face, all of us, including education

departments in the university, where students are often schooled in statistics, but left up to their own devices to develop the craft of student evaluation in the classroom (McLean, 1985). Badly done, "sitting beside and assisting" and "sitting above and judging" degenerate into what Dallmayr and McCarthy (1977) call "cup-of-coffee science".

Three excerpts will be presented here so that the reader gets a feel for the embarrassment, anger and contempt that assessment-gone-wrong generates. The first two excerpts are taken from accounts of participants who are principals.

I have seen some bad assessments, alright? and they are usually like, one test. One teacher made test...The teacher prepared test is like this (makes "ball" sign with hands), like a hard balloon. What does it mean? Nothing, just full of hot air...Okay, and everything rides on one test. You pass it or you fail it, or you give them, for example, teachers give them one or two tests that are 10 marks, and then they say, "Well, in class he's a pretty good so I'm going to, he's a pretty hard worker in his notebook so I'm going to give him a pretty good mark, a B or something." It's just their opinion, it doesn't carry any weight, and there's some very bad assessments done. (1:1, p. 10)

Perhaps this is the "mere opinion" that Putnam and Weir (1925) were so determined to replace in the British Columbia schools.

Barb talks about the ethical dilemma of being "caught in a lie".

I had one conference with a parent, the end of the year, god, she was wonderful. She was really wonderful. She came in with all the right questions, it was a very straightforward case where the teacher really hadn't done what they should have done, and I felt really embarrassed....The teacher was aware of the problems this child was having [in reading]...but had, and I thought, was enough aware that, that would have addressed some of them, but hadn't actually done anything about it. And, uh, the comments made to the parent were, in fact, contradictory. They were just contradictory left, right, and center. And had sent a note home with the report card with this long, long, long list of, uh, statements about the child which I couldn't make heads or tails of it, and, you know, they didn't make sense in, in light of the [child's] written material. So the parent, in a wonderful manner, came in saying how frustrated she was because we had, I had talked to her about different problems the child was having, didn't know where to go anymore, and the, and the note didn't make sense.

But she didn't address it like that, "This doesn't make sense," but "I'm trying to make sense of your grades." I was just floored when the teacher, when the parent asked, you know, could she go into more detail about how these grades had been -- generated. And the teacher's response was, "Well, I threw everything out, so I can't exactly remember." And, of course, it didn't match up, it didn't match up with anything, you know, that either the teacher was saying at that time what she had written, or her grades, so her grades were nonsensical. (4:1, p. 18)

Joan (a parent, a former pre-school teacher, and currently a trustee on the school board of an averaged-sized, rural-urban district) recalls what happens when "being nice" instead of "being honest", and "being sloppy" instead of "being careful" leads to a "lost soul".

We have a foster son living with us...and [he] lived at Fernwood House for 2 years which is a treatment centre for...That child came to live with us a year ago,...started at S_____ in September. I kept in touch with the teacher, always saying, "How is he doing?" "Oh, he is doing fine." Now I found that hard to believe because I knew exactly how he was performing at home. Back up I would go, "How is he doing?" I knew the teacher really well. She was

retiring that year. "Fine, he is doing really well, no problem." But I kept at it. Every time I saw her. Never did she ever indicate that there was a problem...The child is 10 years old and in grade 3. He tries to read to me and he can't...so it comes back to August and [time to] go back to school and he doesn't want to go back to school. Finally, he says, "It is too hard, I am going to fail." "No, we will get you help. I promise you will get learning assistance. Whatever it takes, we will make sure it is in place." So we call the child's social work, psychologist, Larry and I, the school principal, teacher [all meet]. The teacher comes on the defensive, like, "Why are we having a meeting about this kid, there are kids far worse in my class?", that's what she said! The principal comes to the meeting having never read the child's file, knowing nothing about the child's background. So there we are. And what happened? The social worker, the psychologist, Larry and I get outside and say, "Well, that was useless." There was no plan made for that child to get learning assistance at some time. So there you are...but there's a lost soul because...you know, hey what did you learn last year? And he can't exist this year and survive

without learning assistance. He spends probably a quarter of his time in learning assistance.

(3:3, p. 16)

The question one has to ask is, how many cases like this would it take to destroy the credibility of the school? The answer is, maybe only one if the experience was sensational enough. History is full of cases where single incidents of lying and covering up have brought down entire governments. Individual schools and school boards are much more vulnerable in this day and age than large political bureaucracies.

The issue of professional incompetence leads to a large ethical and politically-tangled web that cannot be unraveled here. However, it would certainly seem that poorly done assessments contribute to the strength of the notion that educators need to be watched carefully, and held accountable for their judgments by external "objective" arbiters. George, an official with the Ministry of Education, raises an interesting question in this regard.

I mean how does the kid know, if there are no external criteria, no extrinsic means of evaluating skills and abilities, how does a kid know what he stands for...I've seen kids who were illiterate... who've been given 85% or 90%...in English 11 or 12. What does the kid think? I don't know. (6:2, p. 12)

We have come up against an issue here that is larger than simply monitoring incompetency. It comes back to a notion that was discussed

earlier in this chapter and in Chapter 4: the loss of "a sense of place", that is, the dissolution of an idea of where one fits in the larger scheme of things. In reading, are confronted in this day and age, not just with "a" scheme but with many schemes, and many criterial sets for judging those schemes. It is to this source of ambiguity that we must now turn.

The uncertainty of the complex, ambiguous character of reading

It was noted earlier that variance in the way children's ability and performance in reading was judged, was viewed, in some cases as inevitable and in others as completely unacceptable. That is to say that tolerance for ambiguity in assessing children's ability in reading was negotiated differently, in different situations, using different perspectives. The next section deals more explicitly with this wavering sense of security.

It might seem at first that matters would be simplified and people would be a lot happier if there was a single monolithic set of criteria for judging reading ability. This was Descartes' desire--clear, univocal truth. Certainly that is what principals like John and teachers like Kathy and Yvonne have done--set out the skills into levels so that the "exact skills are specified" (1:2, p. 12).

However, it is not that simple or easy. Underneath the hard surface of all criterial lists in reading/language arts sits an ever-changing, complex social phenomenon (Scribner, 1984). No matter how thoughtful or empirically rigorous the process of generating a

"brick wall" of criteria for "what counts" in reading is, inevitably it must be set down on unknown, shifting ground. As Farr and Carey (1986) note:

There is no critical list [of skills in reading]... there may be processes or strategies or even discrete facts that most persons in our society share but they have not been isolated...[there is no] indispensable domain of knowledge that students should have "minimally mastered" at a given grade level...Chances are quite good that the things we perceive to be on the critical list are things we know. (p. 186)

The so called solid foundation of reading assessment opens out into ambiguity, contingency, even mystery, and what Strauss (1975) calls a "negotiated order". With the dissolution of "givens" into "possibilities" in reading assessment, politics and rhetoric are brought into play. Many of the participants found the uncertainty that this implied particularly hard to live with, some denied the ambiguity altogether, others in this study lived with it quite comfortably. As the next section shows, this "comfort" ebbs and flows as well, as it has done in the past.

Responses to the Interplay of Tensions

The legacy of the past

As we have seen from Chapter 4, in the seventeenth century the loss of a sense of place in the cosmic order through the dissolving of the absolute truths of the day and the disintegration of the "old" social order, precipitated an attempt, first, to purify thought through separation, demarcation and rational classification, and then to bring nature under control using technology and these same processes. In the mid-nineteenth century, the rapid change, disorder and loss of a sense of community that the pursuit of this technological program produced, led to a large scale attempt to reconstruct a "new" cosmic order and a national sense of community by: (1) forging bureaucratic structures with formalized social orders and ranks; and (2) establishing uniform integrated standards, by which ranks and orders could be compared and impartial selection decisions could be made and legitimized. The common public school and standardized forms of reading assessment are two particular by-products of the response to these larger order trends.

In addition notions of "individuality" and an "untrustworthy inner space" emerged out of the sixteenth century flight from ambiguity, and the separation of fact from value, as well as the devaluation of personal experience and knowledge followed. The submission of judgement to an objective "outside arbiter" (in the form of mathematized method) was another step in the unfolding of a logic (i.e., a response) that has shaped and defined the current ideological base of reading assessment in

education. The rise of the "meritocratic intellect" (Smith and Hamilton, 1982) and "possessive individualism" (McPherson, 1962) are two particular philosophical manifestations of this logic that now lie hidden beneath the methodology of assessment and serve to "hold" the dominant forms in place. This legacy then forms part of the universe of signs and symbolizations that the participants in this study must use and work with in their daily life. That is, they have become, as Schwandt (1989) maintains, part of the epistemological air we breathe.

Living with certainty and ambiguity and the implicate and explicate order

Presented in this manner, the development of a "collective consciousness" in Western Society appears to be oddly static or "thingified" as Whitehead (1933) would say. Set apart from the ebb and flow of life, and the contours and rhythms inherent in the experience of living, purposeful humans, it seems much more "substance-like" than it was in this study. This is to say that the Cartesian legacy, rather than being a fixed, unvarying point of view held by participants in all situations appeared more as a role that some would, at times adopt and at other times reject in response to certain internal or external imperatives. Perhaps this is to say that this way of thinking was as much "in here" as it was "out there", and that it exists not by itself but in conjunction with other roles and assumptions. This is also to say that the participants in this study contradicted themselves, or at least adopted what appeared at times to be contradictory roles--sitting beside

to assist and sitting above to judge, and map-making and exploring the territory are two such examples. The internal human "map" appears far too complex and is too subject to change to be presented accurately as a singular, overriding point of view.

Barb places both perspectives, both "participating" and "non-participating consciousness" (Berman, 1984) together in a dialectical relationship that gives rise to a certain rhythm, mirrored in the slower, larger order rhythms of society and history.

I'm wondering if people don't go through...there's a freeing effects where, "Wow, I get to do all these things!" And then after a while you are doing all these different strategies, then you come back to asking the question, "Okay, how do I account for the learning that's going on in the classroom?" And so then we re-invent the mastery test (laughs)...I am not so sure we don't go through these cycles of coming back and asking those questions again and again...part of it may be that we don't have enough assurance about what we do to simply go on being free. (4:1, p. 4)

The same rhythm appeared inherent as well, in the state of "knowing" and "not knowing". Although an exaggerated sense of "being wrong" was a strong theme in certain parts of the data in this study, there were times when participants seemed more comfortable with error

and appeared to accept the limits of their knowing in the face of ambiguity.

Yvonne, a grade 1 teacher for 16 years, illustrates both her awareness of the ambiguity involved in assessing a large number of constantly changing "little people", and her comfort with that situation.

It [reading assessment] is like trying to look inside of an egg...We don't have any tools to dig in there and find out what really is in there. We can just make good guesses...For little people, particularly. And especially when you are trying to assess...trying to settle all our 28 altogether...even the tests...any kind of standardized test only tells you some things, and probably half of them are wrong. And your own judgment is going to be wrong a lot of the time, too. (1:2, p. 12)

Yvonne is not celebrating ignorance here, wringing her hands at the unknown, or making claims that she can account for "100% of the variance". Her statement points to the image of a hesitant, yet resolute practitioner. The same tone is in Kathy's account.

...like I predicted, one of the kids would fall flat in their face in the first month and now she's coming along great guns and ...'s just been in the last two months...Oh yes, it can change rapidly...all of a sudden, just around probably March, Jeanine

just took off. Understood what she was doing, a little Indian girl...it just clicked...but that... but the other little guy, he's just gone downhill, you know, there's...learning spurts and learning lags. (1:5, pp. 24-25)

The unpredictability here is accepted, surprise and rapid change expected—"Oh, yes."

Mark, a beginning teacher, not as confident as Kathy or Yvonne, still seems to have come to terms with the possibility that he can at times be wrong.

I don't think it [my assessment] is totally valid because I slipped up on a few kids that really surprised me, and when I went through this process, whatever it was, you know all this standardized stuff and I really found some, uh, some discrepancies on what I thought, I mean, the girl who worked hard, put her hand up and was able to con the system and knew all the routines when, when she was put into different situations she...she wasn't necessarily as good as I had thought... but mostly I was "bang on", and I feel good about that. (5:1, p. 23)

As the participants began to view assessment from the within the framework of "above", "below" or "working within standard", that is from a position where sharp lines are drawn, where categories are made

distinct and "objectified" (Berger and Luckman, 1966), errors become less tolerable and seem to produce more anxiety. "Others" enter the account in the form of "contestants" who know better. Fear of being "found out" emerges.

I will take a child who I had thought had been doing fairly well, you know, they are "working within standard" on some things they are more interested in and seem to understand better than others and then all of a sudden they will just floor me with something that I will think, "They didn't understand a damn thing in that story," and it's, you know, why didn't they understand that? You know, have I missed completely? Is this kid when he gets to grade 5 and the grade 5 teachers come and throw up their hands and say, "How did this person ever get out of grade 4?" (5:1, p. 59)

From this perspective, errors no longer seem "natural", but instead the result of ineptitude. Blame gets laid, feelings of inadequacy arise, experience withers into "mere opinion". As Barb said, the feeling is "something's wrong with me...I must be missing something. I just don't have enough background to make proper judgments." (4:1, p. 63)

In the end, the sure-footed practitioner is reduced to an "imposter"--someone who is able to fool the ignorant and the naive through bluffing. The "omnipotent outsider" (Smith, 1989) enters the

picture and expose becomes an imagined event. Three short excerpts are presented to give the reader the sense of inauthenticity these individuals felt.

Really you know, if someone...if someone came in, one of these parents came in and really knew what they were talking about in terms of evaluation, they'd say, "This is crap." (5:1, p. 23)

Now if I had your child and you sat down and I said this is how I evaluated your child you would have said, "Well, this is not really valid you know." (2:1, p. 17)

I mean if people ever found out you know if...I mean if people really found out what was going on and some of the things that we do...they would crap their drawers. (1:1, p. 10)

The signs here point to a lack of confidence in "knowing", what Bordo (1987) calls "epistemological insecurity". The same deep-seated skepticism that overwhelmed Descartes, as John notes, "haunts" professionals.

...in the back of your mind you had this feeling haunting you and you say, "Well, if somebody brings me to task, then what?" (5:2, p. 12)

Now, as in the seventeenth century, these fears serve to deepen the desire for certainty and increase the need for an "objective outside arbiter". The notion of an "inner space" as untrustworthy emerges, and

this means, as it did for Descartes, that every judgment is circumspect. The "sense of knowing" becomes so fragile that any error produces fears that everything is erroneous. The knowledgeable practitioner, the sage, who is resolute in the face of uncertainty disappears and the "bluffer" emerges, a charlatan who lacks the inner strength to admit to being wrong, or worse, perhaps lacks the strength to admit to not knowing at all.

Joan, a former pre-school teacher who is now a school board member, notes what happens when practitioners will not "own up". In the quote below she recounts the explanation for her son's apparent disability.

...They don't know, she [teacher] doesn't know what that is. The psychiatrist doesn't know, the social worker doesn't know. And maybe because they are professional people they can't say, "I don't know." So they come up with some cock-and-bull story like, "He's having a resting day." You know, "There is something wrong with his brain." (3:3, p. 12)

Instances such as this one only add to the general atmosphere of skepticism and doubt that surrounds and pervades the education profession today--what Schon (1983) calls "a crisis of confidence".

The crisis of confidence in the professions, and perhaps also the decline of the professional self-image, seems to be rooted in a growing skepticism about professional effectiveness in the larger sense, a skeptical reassessment of the professions actual

contribution to society's well being through the delivery of competent services based on special knowledge. (p. 13)

Ironically it is a crisis we have contributed to. We have pretended that we can be exact and scientific in assessing reading in the face of a process full of ambiguity and mystery. Confronted with the often impenetrable conditions of "not knowing", and lacking the epistemological security to admit this, we serve to deepen the doubt when we attempt to "bluff our way through" and are "caught out" in the process. It is a question the profession must eventually face, i.e., Do we have the strength to admit that we, as Berry (1987) notes, "live within an order more intricate than we can know"? (p. 17).

To do so would be to work against the notion that to be strong is to be certain, to be uncertain, hesitant, in this day and age, often means to be weak. This is the legacy of Descartes, Kant, Hume and Bacon.

At the same time it should be noted that the issue at stake here is not simply just "being weak and being strong", but also has to do with assuming the mantle of responsibility that comes with passing judgement on children's growth and ability in reading. Morally it would seem we have a duty to justify our judgements, to be able to point, however incompletely, to the "warrants" of our decision-making, so that we are not simply subjecting children to a pervasive, insidious kind of surveillance that they (and their parents) are powerless to resist or challenge. For some, the solution to this problem was to invoke the

"power of number", to construct a two dimensional mathematical map to both organize and justify their decision-making. Note what Mark is doing:

What I did here [points to numerical records], was um, uh, this...this is the work that they did. When I went through and evaluated...and again, I...I don't know whether...you know, I needed...to get some kind of a number to what it seemed to...to just focus it in my mind. You might not know...you might not be able to...to...you know...you could say "Hey man, those are just numbers." But you must realize that anything that's a number here is...uh, I can look through...I can go and say, "Okay, here's the book, here's all the material they did, and this is why I gave them 10, or 9, or 8, or whatever it was." I just felt I needed to justify what I'd done.

(4:1, p. 33)

At another level, Yvonne describes the same process. In this case the participants are constructing a "map" for viewing the entire sweep of child development in reading, from grade 1 to grade 3. They are attempting here to both create a "sense of place" and to address the "grumbling" of others. Noticeable here are the notions of "standards" and "minimum levels". The influence of mathematics can be seen and slowly, at the end, the creeping sense of "being wrong".

So what we did was we sort of made standards for grade 1, these would be minimum type of things, but we went over grades of, you know, minimum type of standards and...we sort of sat down with the different grade 2 teachers, grade 1 teachers, and discussed what different type of things would you like...have the kids know by the time they got into grade 2. You know, what would be a solid student. And then the grade 2 students, the teacher sat down with grade 3, you know, what type of things would you like to have the kids know. And so...and that way, we sort of tried to spread the wealth of...skills out between grade 1 and grade 3...you know, they...they just sort of were helpful and handy for our staff. We looked at the student...would he retain it, we didn't know this...this...this...type of stuff. But we tried to make it general enough...from a consistency point of view and also from people...for people grumbling about it..."Why did you pass this child?" you know, "I can't understand it." (1:5, p. 26)

In both instances the participants were in the process of "doing those damn reports" (5:1, p. 10), transforming their experiences and the qualities in children's work into quantitative terms. When they did this, a clear, distinct, sharply bounded world became available for

conceptual sorting, but something was lost as well. In the first instance, Mark seems to sense this when he says, "You could say, 'Hey man, those are just numbers'". He seems to sense that he is in the process of entering a different discourse world. He sees that he can see both ways, that he can connect the numbers with children's lives, but that others could not. The referents that the mathematical symbols point to are lost to everyone except him. His presence is required to breathe "life" back into the signs. Out of his hands the children's experiences become hard reflective mathematical "surfaces", they became fixed, static and "kicked loose" from the emerging qualities of children's reading.

For him, as well as for Yvonne, a clear, fixed map emerges, but the rich, three dimensional landscape of children's lives are left behind. The concrete referents of a living world disappear. Gone as well are the uncertainties, the mysteries and the variability that so characterize the unfolding of reading ability in younger children. All of the torment is gone. In fact, within this mathematical discourse world, variance is treated as error. The notion of singular truth emerges, becomes defined sharply and is sought after--"true score" is deeply desired. The price, although not always immediately felt, is steep. As White (1990) maintains, the "negative effects of disagreement are exaggerated" and a "heightened sense of error" builds up (p. 17) leading to an intolerance of ambiguity, a "throwing up of arms" as Mark says, and the often heard statement of "How the hell did this kid ever make it

to grade 5?" Forgotten are the intractabilities involved in reading children's minds and predicting the future.

The commonly held belief that truth (i.e., children's growth and ability) was something that existed in clear, distinct univocal terms brought several different kinds of responses--some of which have been touched upon above. The "bluffer" is one particular manifestation already discussed, along with feelings of inadequacy pointed to in Barb's statement that "something must be wrong with me". Laying of blame is another--obviously if a true score exists, some one must be right and all others wrong, thus the "contestants" both real and imagined in the accounts. Part of this perhaps is due to the fact that a single univocal score or letter grade is often required, judgements must be couched in clear, distinct terms, thus it follows logically that the underlying reality ought to be the same. Some participants attempted to keep these two worlds consistent--mathematized judgements require mathematized methods, objective scores and letter grades require objective arbiters, external to the classroom, severed, ostensibly at least, from the biases inherent in any human relationship.

John (the principal), sees assessment this way--he attempts to "shut the signs down" and constrain the judgement process, make the selection decisions less problematic and promote consistency in grading. What follows is the assessment scheme that he and the district resource person "mapped out for the whole school" (2:1, p. 12). His thinking demonstrates the utilitarian nature of technical-rational thought, he identifies ten different "enabling functions" (Scarth, 1984) the

technology provides. The power of the logic, the clarity and the order of the Cartesian map are impressive. The full force of this legacy, over 300 years old, arrives in a single chart. It is as beautiful and seductive as it is frightening.

<u>Instrument/Technique</u>	<u>Information</u>	<u>Enabling Functions</u>
a. CANADIAN COGNITIVE ABILITIES TEST administered to Grades 2, 4 & 6 early October, district provides for Grades 4 & 6, school fills in with Grade 2.	provides an indication of the potential (ability) of students	to compare with actual performance, "Should he be doing better?"
b. STANFORD ACHIEVEMENT TEST Grades 3 to 7 (1st term) Grades 2 to 7 (2nd term)	comparative achievement (norm-referenced) in percentile and stanine form	a. for report grades (intermediate) & comments (primary) b. one of bases of discussion for placements Learning Assistance, Special Ed & Retention c. measure rate of growth d. compare all children in a grade (composition of classes)
c. STANFORD EARLY SCHOLASTIC ACHIEVEMENT TEST (form 2) administered May, June, Grade 1	provides information whether students are reading or acquiring their skills	placement decisions used to help decide composition of early splits (Grade 1 & 2)

(continued)

d. CANADIAN ACHIEVEMENT TEST administered Grades 2 to 7 in May, district provides for Grades 3 & 7, school fills in grades 2, 4, 5 & 6	measure achievement (growth)	provide information for next year's placement decisions, "last line of defense" for borderline or ambiguous cases
e. MERRILL every Friday beginning in late September, Grades 1-7	scores out of 20 on a battery of questions, word attack exercises	informal to teach test-taking skills, provide drill and practice, keeps kids focussed
f. PAL	verbal	modification for placement decisions in Grade 1: Junior 1 (transition between K & 1) split grades, or regular classroom, confirm diagnoses by classroom teacher
g. CROSS GRADE TESTS (subtests of CTBS, teacher made tests) mandatory at intermediate, optional at primary		composition of letter grades, report card comments

We can note how careful and meticulous all this is, how reliable and technically elegant it is, and how clear, distinct and smooth the logic appears. The power and genius of Descartes emerges fully blown, for it appears that this assessment system has made it possible to capture the "genie" in the "ampules" of technology, that is, to give substance to something as ephemeral as learning.

For John, this plan "has given us something a little more substantial to work from" (2:1, p. 8). He, like Putnam and Weir (1925), feels a little more comfortable now that he has replaced "mere opinion" with "objective tests free from ambiguity" (p. 261). Having made the results clear and distinct, he wants his teachers to "open up" in their pedagogy and believes he has given them the freedom to do that because he can find the "true score".

Okay, let's open up, I mean I don't give a damn whether you use Dick and Jane or whether you use Ginn or whether you use Impressions or you bring in something or take them to the library, just teach them to read, teach them to read well, and teach them to enjoy reading. But in the end it has got to fit, because if it doesn't fit, then the service to the child falls apart. (2:1, p. 16)

The way he uses assessment here, so that it will all "fit" is not new. The curricular freedom that he would like to see, is the same approach recommended by the Putnam and Weir (1925) report. He seeks to combine progressivism of Dewey, with the certainty of Des'artes.

I think I see more report writing, I see more researching type of skills, it is part of the reading program. I think there's...the thinking skills are probably on the rise too as a result. And before, they ...all they did was fill in the blank...I feel it. I feel very good about it...But

to me, as I said to you before, it mustn't run away like it did the last time. If we cannot maintain the assessment and evaluation process, then it will go down again like it did last time. (2:1, p. 33)

For Mark, who labours on his own, who selects portions of instruments (like the Diagnostic Reading Program, Alberta Education) to help and works from "watching and listening", who builds his own map from the ground up (in a professional vacuum), John's system is unacceptable, i.e., "I sure as hell wouldn't want that, but I wouldn't mind a little help" (4:1, p. 60).

He does not work "under the cover" of a math or basal series and talks here about the "struggle" that ensues.

Often they [his lessons] don't work, it doesn't work the way I want it to and I think, "Geez, you know, I could go over and pick up a basal series and a math series and there it [the program] would be, open it up, start on page 58...I find it hard to cope with all the ability levels. Quite frankly it would be easier to put them [the children] in ability groups...I can see why people go that way...but what I fear most? Research has shown that no matter how hard you try to treat those children differently...these expectations are dangerous things...The reason I struggle so hard in the first

year is because I know this is the kind of teacher

I'm going to be. (4:1, p. 31, 45)

Mark is aware of the power and danger of his (Kantian) expectations and the logic that would subdivide his children into ability levels. He struggles to hold these impulses in obedience, in a context where things would be much easier if he simply "let them go". The weight of the legacy that he must work "out from under" is heavy, and in spite of the pain that he must bear, largely on his own, he refuses to simply succumb to the "givens" of the situation. Somehow "he knows" that he is also shaping the future of his career by his work in the here-and-now. He is not just being pushed along by the legacy of the past, but pulled as well by the possibilities he sees in the future, and in his children. He works hard to keep those possibilities open and thus stands in direct opposition to practitioners like John, who would like it "all to fit" as he says and not "run away like it did last time". John sees the divisiveness, the anarchy--his "tribes" metaphor creates powerful images of that--and the unhappiness that the existence of a multiplicity of criterial sets for what counts in reading creates. He too is motivated by a vision of the future, and Broadfoot (1975) captures powerfully the possibility John works against.

If each social group is enabled to pursue praxical learning--learning involving the creative exploration of its own reality and evaluation according to a critical consciousness embedded in its own experience of and influence on that

reality--it is possible to envisage a major disintegration--indeed anarchy in the political order (p. 131).

There is plenty of evidence that such "disintegration" is not simply a possibility, but part of a contradictory, post modern reality that has both technocratic uniformity and deep seated "individualism pursued to the detriment of the common weal" (Sullivan, 1988, p. 17), as the Royal Commission on Education in British Columbia found.

As Schon (1983) maintains this is not so much a problem as an ill defined "mess": "Principals would have to ask, in framing their own roles, whether to let the thousand flowers bloom or to advocate their own standards of excellence...if they choose the latter course, what would happen to the teacher's freedom to reflect-in-action?" (p. 335).

Robert has answered this question in his own way. Here he discusses reactions to his invocation of a program of standardized testing to "stabilize" the assignment of letter grades or as he would say "be more consistent, credible and accountable" (1:1, p. 10)

...I get resistance from teachers who...who say I'm a dictator, and I don't respect their professional rights, and that I don't have any right to do that [institute a program of standardized testing in reading]. "What makes you think you're right?", and all this kind of stuff. I...I have one or two every year that do that. But I am bulldozing, I find I'm

gonna do that anyway. You don't like, transfer!

(1:1, p. 38).

This then is one of the predicaments: How is it possible to maintain "standards of quality" and give student's a "sense of place", without making their learning or their teacher's powers of observation and judgement infantile? This does not appear to be a technological problem, thus Athey's (1990) advice that "we need new and radically different tests for this new construct" (p. 178) seems wrong headed, to say the least. In a scattered system "radically new and different" will only serve to add to the complexity and deepen the disorder.

Related to this is another predicament of the same "kin": How do we recognize children's growth and ability in reading, talk about it so that there is common understanding without colonizing it? That is, referring to some thing means including it and excluding all else, privileging one thing while suppressing or ignoring others. We cannot see or talk about "everything at once". This means we must categorize, order and fix something known for its resistance to definition, for its complexity and disorder and for its flux and vitality. This dilemma is summed up in Wordsworth's poem.

Sweet is the lore which Nature brings

Our meddling intellect

Mis-shapes the beauteous form of things

We murder to dissect.

The need for stability and predictability (reoccurring patterns) in assessment comes up against the changeable, unpredictable nature of those being assessed.

Akin to this is the facticity of our own natality, of the renewal and change that is occurring in our emerging understanding of children's growth and development. The basic question posed, at least as long ago as 1908 by Huey of "What goes on inside the reader's head when they read?" (p. 17) has not yet been answered to anyone's satisfaction, nor is it likely to be in the near future. Few issues: i.e., Is it skills? Is it strategies? Is it "lived experience" (Rosenblatt, 1978)?, have been settled, new ones keep cropping up. Even the question "What is reading?" has been deemed inappropriate, in that it implies a singular definition, a critical list. (See for example Parker, 1990). Thus the need for simplicity, for concrete representation, for a common set of shared symbols and referents to provide for fair, equitable decision-making and clear communication in reading assessment comes up against the complexity, intangibility and mystery of the process under scrutiny, as well as the existence of divergent, often conflicting definitions of the situation, and the necessity of using language personally and imaginatively to generate insight into children's growth and development. It isn't just the vitality and differences among children that make assessment problematic, but our own renewal and idiosyncrasy as well. It is constant change in relation to constant change that creates the "dilemma with devilish characteristics (Pearson and Valencia, 1987, p. 17). How do we categorize, order and

communicate, without having those acts and signs "turn on us" and fossilize our knowledge, intellect and language? As Berry (1987) notes

We live within an order...that is both greater and more intricate than we can know. The difficulty of our predicament then is made clear if we add another principle: Though we cannot produce a complete or even adequate description of this order, severe penalties are in store for us if we presume upon it or violate it (p. 55).

Worse yet is the possibility that we may not even know we are violating children's growth and ability in reading by our assessments, nor does it seem that we can be held completely accountable for that violation. As we have seen, much of what goes on in assessment is tacit, hidden and inexplicable. Assessment seems to proceed at least as much by intuition as it does by analysis, as much by "sitting beside to assist" as it does by "sitting above to judge". How is it that teachers can locate precisely the source of their insight? Externalize (in mirror like fashion) their judgements so that they can be scientifically "verified" and legitimized. Two things seem clear: they cannot, and further, they should not. Classroom life would be impossible to sustain: all action paralyzed by analysis and verification if teachers even attempted to be "conscious" of all the judgements and moves they made, even in the course of a single day, in assessing their children's reading ability. And so the question is "How powerful are the effects, when we begin to tacitly analyze, categorize and judge children's growth

and development in reading, and subtly socialize them with our responses? Isn't this what we do from the moment we first meet our students, when we first begin to watch them, listen to them and converse with them about doing things with books?

If this is the case couldn't we, by "kid watching" (Goodman, 1985), be subjecting children paradoxically to a more intensive and penetrating form of power and social control? As Mark has said, "You know, you could really do a number on a kid, if you were so inclined" (5:1, p. 28).

Is it possible that we might be "doing a number on them" anyways, while we think our inclination is elsewhere, that is, while we sit beside them to help? This is the "dark side" of informal assessment. When we consider it carefully we can see that there is something noble, even honourable about formal testing in reading. At least when crucial assessments are "out in the open" for all to see then can be invigilated and subjected to criticism. Our children can "get ready" for them, they still, in these instances, have the power to display or withhold what they choose. Johnston (1987) talks disparagingly about assessment that produces "ego-defense" and offers an argument for a teacher-driven, process-oriented approach that would "allow immediate accessibility...that the information should be personally 'owned' by the teacher" (p. 345). Perhaps ego-defense is all that children have left in a world bent on "possessing" them individually. We need to think carefully about inducing children, with the noblest intentions, to let down their guards completely.

This brings to the for another difficult question: When do we stop assessing children, either formally or informally, if ever? Can we allow children to take refuge in mystery or must we force everything out into the open such that nothing is left unknown, so that there is little room left for the child to "hide", nothing left of self to self? Could we ever say, "I don't know and I don't want to know?" In the interest of being accurate and accountable should all our "knowing" be made public? Arendt (1979) reminds us of what is at stake here.

Whenever [the life of childhood and human life in general] is consistently exposed to the world without the protection of privacy and security, its vital quality is destroyed...Everything that lives, not vegetative life alone, emerges from darkness are however strong its natural tendency to thrust itself into the light, it nevertheless needs the security of darkness to grow at all (p. 186).

What are we "thrusting into the light" with our assessments in reading? What are we unwittingly violating? Perhaps this is what Mark witnesses in the following situation.

Even when I try to explain to them [his students] the day before the report card and I fill it out, and I go over the report card with them...it still happens that they all rush together to see "what you got", and "what I got" and uh, count their I's (improved) and S's (satisfactory) and O's

(outstanding) and burst into tears and you know it's just really awful. You should come in and watch it happen. I couldn't handle it. I went over to the pub and I had a couple of doubles after I gave them [the report cards] out, I was really upset...You should have seen the look on some of their faces, like...like they had been betrayed (5:1 p. 27).

So the question "What is there to 'holds us back' in assessment?" Is it simply the magnitude of the effort, or sheer exhaustion, or as many participants felt, our own inadequacy or inefficiency? Can we hope for new and better technology or methods that will one day allow us to overcome this "difficulty"? Then surely our desire for clarity, certitude and indubitability will have finally been fulfilled, but also in the process, surely we will have "killed everything that moves" as Phillip Slatter suggests.

On the other hand we simply cannot give in to the difficulty and mystery, declare children "unknowable" and our own knowledge "unspeakable". The alternative to Cartesianism in assessment is not chaos, nor what Smith (1988) calls "vague licentiousness" where all convention, authority and understanding simply "wither away" as Mark has so cogently stated.

Nor is it maudlin sentimentality, or romanticism about the "secret gardens" of children. These are the excesses of "child-centered" curricula, that the

authority that tells the individual child what to do and what not to do [and what counts], rests with the child group itself, and this produces a situation in which the adult stands helpless before the individual child and out of contact with him (Arendt, 1979, p. 181).

This and other forms of abandonment, like the naive notion that "it's all individual and we shouldn't be comparing children" ends up breaking off the natural relationship between parents and children, where we "watch out for them". We cannot simply wait, as was the case with Joan's son, until children themselves declare publically "I can't go on, I'm not like the others" before we act. It is difficult to see how we can escape the necessity to judge children in relation to others. Croll, Moses and Wright's (1984) statement is worth quoting here in full.

Put simply, if we are concerned to assess children, particularly those whose progress is giving us cause for concern, any criterion, the skill or ability we decide a child does or does not have is only meaningful against the concept of what is appropriate for a child at that age or developmental stage or with that level of educational opportunity. It is not simply that we do not have an absolute notion of the appropriate level of reading competence that, say a 7-year-old should have, but

it is impossible to arrive at such a notion
(p. 147).

So that if we want to assess children early so that we can identify those who struggle and help them, then we are inevitably going to view these children in relation to their peers. Again the predicament presents itself. Children are different. It is unimaginable that we would want them all to be the same in spite of how "easy" and "efficient" our pedagogy might become if they were. So the question "How different should they be?" is a problematic question. At what point are we invoking procedures to help children "recover in reading" (Clay, 1980) from their differences, from their natural "spurts" and "lags" as Kathy calls them. Is our desire to help, really a desire to "finally have the situation where every child is always above average in reading ability" as Gardner (1985) has remarked?

In the end it seems that we must learn to live with the difficulties and predicaments, not eliminate them or give into them. Intimacy, forbearance and intuition have their advantages, but so do distance, action and analysis in reading assessment. The mystery and ambiguity of life is not something to be "stamped out", but neither should we avoid being clear and certain about our knowledge and action. Poverty and excess in assessment seem to result when these "agonies", as Hillman (1985) calls them, are not held together carefully in an ecological relationship. They are not polar opposites, or problems to be solved or weaknesses to be "shorn up" or eliminated. They are "dramatic tensions", they help us understand, each one holding the other

back so that we do not either rush or drift into the extremes of pedocentrism or gerocentrism, emancipation or tradition, commonality or idiosyncrasy. They help us maintain the proper relationship between the "young" and the "old", between adults and children. We need to keep all of these possibilities alive then, in an on-going "community of conversation", so that we can listen carefully to each of these "voices" and take them into consideration, adopt them as perspectives each time we assess, however much difficulty and agony they cause us.

The purpose of this study has been not to "hunt out new facts" as Wittgenstein (1978) would say, but "to understand something that is already in plain view. For this is what we seem in some sense not to understand" (42E).

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APPENDIX A

Interview Index

<u>Participants</u>	<u>Interviews</u>	<u>Taperecorded</u>	<u>Transcribed</u>
A. Ministry level			
1. 6:1	3	1	1
2. 6:2	5	4	4
3. 6:3	3	3	3
B. District level			
4. 3:1	1	-	-
5. 3:2	1	-	-
6. 3:3	4	4	4
7. 3:4	1	1	1
8. 3:5	3	3	3
C. School level			
9. 1:1	4	3	3
10. 1:2	3	3	3
11. 1:3	4	4	2
12. 1:4	4	3	3
13. 1:5	4	3	3
14. 2:1	3	3	3
15. 2:2	4	4	4
16. 4:1	4	4	4
17. 5:1	4	4	4
Totals	<u>55</u>	<u>47</u>	<u>45</u>
	interviews	taperecorded	transcriptions

APPENDIX B

Informal Ranking of Participant Interview

Criteria	Rating	Comment
	5 4 3 2 1	
1. Comfortable and unrestrained in interactions?		
2. Willing to spend time?		
3. Open and candid?		
4. Provides solid answers with good detail?		
5. Stayed on topic?		
6. Thoughtful, willing to stay on topic?		
5 - positive 4 - 3 - neutral 2 - 1 - negative		

APPENDIX C

Collecting Themes from Interview Transcripts

Example: Original Typist's Transcription,

Final Interview 4.1, Aug. 8, 1988

- P: Because they weren't addressing the real issues of that situation.
- J: Mm-hmm. That's different than looking at the parents and having the parents transform what they believe, and saying, "Ah-hah, I believe." It's, "Well, we'll try this, but we, underneath, we really believe," and when they hear what they really believe, they go, (slap), back. That's what you were --
- P: Mm-hmm. Mm-hmm.
- J: That's different than being changed by listening to somebody, and believing all along that what somebody else is, and doing something else, and then so --
- P: Yeah.
- J: And then so --
- P: Yeah.
- J: Acquiescing.
- P: Yeah. The rationale for creating the combination is numbers. It's not a belief that --
- J: Ooh.
- P: We can manage this in a different manner --
- J: Oh.
- P: That can address these, these questions.
- J: I see. It's --

P: And so, therefore, you have no foundation to come back on, all you can say is that it's better to have lower numbers.

J: The rationale is numbers. The rationale is not learning.

P: I don't see it, I don't see it that way. I don't. That's what I'm hearing from people --

J: Yeah.

P: When they're talking that way.

J: Yeah.

P: When I hear teachers, you know, dreading the split.

J: Yeah.

P: Then it's a very negative view of that. They buy whatever, I doubt if they could buy the same argument the parents do, but I certainly think that they, they view it as, um, a less than desirable situation.

J: Yeah, uh, yeah. Are they fearing not being able to handle the diversity? Is that what they're fearing? Or they're, or is it a created diversity?

P: My view, my view is, and it comes back to the terminology, "split." They see themselves split in half, "I've got to --"

J: Doing two of everything.

P: "Group my twos, twos and threes over there, never the twain shall meet." They will meet! At certain points, they know that, I mean, they will, they will, "Maybe I'll do my socials together."

J: Yeah.

P: "But math. What do I do with math? How do I," you know, particularly feeling alot stiff(?), uh, curriculum, uh, "How do I avoid the three curriculum with my twos so they don't have to repeat it next year?" They don't address the question of "How do we create a program throughout the school?" and that, that becomes a non-issue.

J: That's right.

P: It's, it's, um, "I'm afraid," you know, "I may have these kids next year, and I want to do the same thing I did this year." (laughs)
"So, I've got to make sure I somehow springing(?) them up."

Example: Final Version of Edited Transcription

Final Interview 4.1, Aug. 8, 1988

46. False rationale for combining children: "mathematics" of social book-keeping

The rationale for creating the combination is numbers. It's not a belief that...we can manage this in a different manner...that can address these, these questions...and so, therefore, you have no foundation to come back on, all you can say is that it's better to have lower numbers...when they're talking that way...When I hear teachers, you know, "dreading the split"...Then it's a very negative view of that. They buy whatever, I doubt if they could buy the same argument the parents do, but I certainly think that they, they view it as a less than desirable situation ...My view, my view is, and it comes back to the terminology, "split." They see themselves split in half, "I've got to...group my 2's, 2's and 3's over there, never the twain shall meet." They will meet! At certain points, they know that, I mean, they will, they will, "Maybe I'll do my socials together...But math. What do I do with math? How do I," you know, particularly feeling a lot stiff(?) curriculum, "How do I avoid the 3 curriculum with my 2's so they don't have to repeat it next year?" They don't address the question of "How do we create a program throughout the school?" and that, that becomes a non-issue...It's, it's, "I'm afraid," you know, "I may have these

kids next year, and I want to do the same thing I did this year."

(laughs) "So, I've got to make sure I somehow springing(?) them up."

APPENDIX D

Themes Arising from the Interviews (4:1)

1. Managing uncertainty in assessment: holding off because of imagined impact
2. Problems in defining the struggling child: need for "comparable" information / the child that has difficulty over time
3. Constant search for new methods: inadequacy of training
4. Perceptions of increasing polarity in definitions of the situation: flexible vs. sharply defined ordered
5. Different orientations to assessment; different language, different knowing and different "ways" of knowing; different orientations; different knowledge bases; different symbol systems
6. Recreation anew of "old" order in assessment because of the uncertainty of the validity of alternate, "new" forms
7. Change in assessment [because of larger order "outside" practices in assessment] not using standardized tests to using them
8. Shifting towards traditional assessment in non-traditional program: lack of common comparative benchmarks
9. Testing [tacit] assumptions, tests defining situations [success, progress]
10. Concerns: focussing on things other [objective, lessons] than the child

11. Concerns about the orienting effects of tests
12. Concerns about false security, premature closure in using tests, cessation of minding
13. Use of tests: minimum requirements
14. Tests as general indicators of possible anomaly
15. Tests to check placement decisions, promote fluidity of placement: verify/adjust decisions made already / fluidity: using CTBS tests to verify or adjust decision already made
16. Stance towards assessment: information for decision making; the principal's role, district's role re: assessment
17. Supportive role for district [procedure information for decision]
18. Role of learning assistant: ambiguity as a necessary condition for creative response
19. Reorienting cumulative records: quantitative, premature definition of the situation
20. Assessment as constant vigilance, constant adjustment, and the lack of preparation for that approach
21. Using intuition to create a class profile
22. "Constant vigilance" as driver of curriculum
23. Self: definition of role as administrator
24. Communicative constraints on being defined by others' expectations
25. Definition of self: negotiating roles, what is expected as communicator
26. Problems of symbolic interactionism: "jar" of missed communication, synergy of shared meaning

27. Women's knowing: not legitimate
28. Mathematical knowing
29. "Legitimized" mathematical learning
30. Limitations of mathematical knowledge: not addressing gut stuff
31. Women's knowledge
32. Women's knowledge not recognized as legitimate
33. Expectations for clarity
34. De-legitimizing claims: blowing it out of proportion
35. Parents with unreasonable expectations: hurried children
36. Giving "limited warranty" suggestions
37. Caring parent; careless teacher
38. Expanding curriculum potential through collaboration
39. Being told what to use for testing: restricting choices
40. Holding children back: difficulty with withholding "final"
judgment: answer definition of tests
41. Genuine parental concern vs. my kid's the best
42. Splits vs. combinations: conjuring up images
43. Arbitrariness of concept of grade levels
44. Seeing through surface of grade levels
45. Using language to conjure up inappropriate images
46. False rationale for combining children: "mathematics" of social
book-keeping
47. Dealing with diversity: teach the grade 6 curriculum, fail those
that don't get it
48. Subdivision into unmanageability

49. Being "in trouble": who decides?
50. Anxiety among parents: comparison with others
51. Losing and finding a sense of place
52. What counts: love of learning
53. Self-image for children who struggle
54. Creating groups: depends on numbers
55. Reaching parents without sacrificing integrity
56. Parents not "hearing" difficulty
57. Taking responsibility, but not offering guarantees
58. Dilemma of destroying hope
59. Which knowledge is of most worth?
60. Old [mathematical] wine in new bottles
61. Danger of certainty and closure
62. Specifying criteria then letting go
63. Specifying criteria for what counts
64. What the "alternative" assumes: a hell of a lot
65. Creating possibilities, not just theory from inservice
66. Keeping language open, not assuming "we know"
67. Report cards: the last one
68. Clarity as changing the parent to be able to "read"
69. Problems with new report card: no goods or very goods
70. Intentions for clarity that go awry: having the opposite effect
71. Report card comments as problematic
72. Difference in first, second and third reports
73. Finding out about "clarity" from parents

74. Clarifying discussions: what is important to report
75. Policy for making decisions on four-year program
76. Uncertainty of group configurations for classes: changing numbers
77. Retention: not being clear
78. Parents' reaction to changing report card formats
79. Changing to letter grades in grade 4
80. The necessity of leaving things as "judgment calls"
81. Being explicit about responsibilities to parents for reporting
82. Principal's role: being watchful and committed

SUMMARY 4:1

(From four interviews: 4/27/88, 5/20/88, 7/26/88, 9/8/88)

A. Background

B. is an elementary school principal--with a new placement this past year (1988). She has been a principal for 13 years at an "alternative" school, or as she says, "very much not traditional". She took a one-year leave to begin a Master's degree in curriculum (in 1987-1988) that she is in the process of completing.

B. Themes arising from the interviews

1. Managing uncertainty in assessment: holding off because of imagined impact

But the ambiguity is in terms of, it seems to me is that the decision making which is very, very difficult. You are constantly balancing things, and it is, it is a holding off, holding off. The problem with that scenario is that the parent wasn't informed to begin with that there was some uncertainty. If they had just know that there was some uncertainty, here's how we are going to deal with it. We are going to hold off for a while making any decisions we want to know how you feel. Perhaps it wouldn't be so drastic, but there is a lot of fear in doing that, you are going to alert the parent prematurely and that parent is going to get all

upset when they don't need to. Very difficult situation. But there are ways of, you know, of at least being fair in terms of that situation. Saying to them we have concerns. There are concerns.

2. Problems in defining the struggling child: need for "comparable" information / the child that has difficulty over time

That is the kind of child that I am always concerned about for placement (classified as "LD"). I needed to know how that child might fit into another placement. I was looking for some tests that I might do with that child. Because obviously they are going to put the child in the other situations because we weren't communicating with the child, we were considering possibly another placement but we didn't want to upset the child. How do I get that information and see how the child might fit in at this other group without actually putting the child in the other group? What kind of data am I going to use? I can start out with using the tests that have been given to that class and see where that child fits in overall. That's a way I can go about getting some data. And it was interesting to see that I was looking for not standardized tests so much, but certainly some kinds of tests that I could put on a scale with the rest of the class.

3. Constant search for new methods: inadequacy of training

We are constantly looking for something that's

new...something that maybe is a little bit more sort of easier to look at and do something with. You know, "Oh, these kids need some work in comprehension. These kids need some work in beginning sounds," or however you break it down. That you have some way of doing that. And we have certainly been trained in that, I think about teaching some years ago, that's the training you had, is how you do that. The very question of whether you deal with the data when you get it.

4. Perceptions of increasing polarity in definitions of the situation: flexible vs. sharply defined ordered

There are a lot of contradictions coming up, you know, with people; they are on one side or the other. Some schools going even more towards a real "skills" approach, you know, using computers as a base, or a really defined program, more defined than the basal reader.

5. Different orientations to assessment; different language, different knowing and different "ways" of knowing; different orientations; different knowledge bases; different symbol systems

Maybe it has to do with the language that women use versus language that men use. And it has to do with how we...the knowledge that we have. And very often, I'm thinking of female knowledge, in a very broad sense, it is often not legitimate. It is like intuition is not legitimate, there's all that kind of thing...If you can't have hard data...It is

really based on intuition. It really is based on observing and making some kind of statement about that observation. It is a different way of getting at stuff. It is just that we are predominantly...tend to predominate one or another. And I thought if you are coming with that orientation, whether we call it male or not, a quantitative orientation, then how are you going to bridge that?

6. Recreation anew of "old" order in assessment because of the uncertainty of the validity of alternate, "new" forms

I am wondering if people don't go through, there's a freeing effect where, "Wow, I get to do all these things!" And then after a while you are doing all these different strategies then you come back to asking the question, "Okay, how do I account for the learning that's going in the classroom?" And so then we re-invent the mastery test. (Laughs). That's why I am asking that question, that I am not so sure that we don't go through these cycles of coming back and asking those questions again and trying to...because that is all that is familiar to us. We are thinking that the other that we let go a part of it may be that we don't have enough assurance about the informal evaluation perhaps, or other forms.

7. Change in assessment [because of larger order "outside" practices in assessment] not using standardized tests to using them

I mean when we started at the school I was at, we never used

standardized testing. That was a big to-do when we did start using it. And then we decided to, you know, the reason that we decided to was that our kids did not know how to do the tests and if they did transfer to schools they didn't know how to take these tests and scored very, very low. And part of it was that they didn't know how to fill in these little boxes and things. So we decided that we weren't being fair. And that we would get some standardized tests. And then they could give us a bit of an external view and we were really careful that whole year and we really struggled with what we were going to use. We didn't like any of them. We tried CTBS, we tried Stanford, we tried a number of them, each year something different. And then there were teachers who had preferences, I prefer Stanford, someone else preferred something else. We thought that wasn't very good because everybody was all over the place which comes back to what you were saying before about the districts. But then we decided that we needed something that everybody was doing. You could do whatever you want, you can use the other tests, but we wanted something that everybody was using for the red flag. That was basically what we were looking for and that we would do it three times a year and that was, you know, basically you run into that but nonetheless, the parents felt very...it's really funny, what we do to parents because we had convinced them that standardized tests were evil. Now

how do you convince them that you have to do this? That it is a good idea to do this? Especially when you didn't believe, necessarily, in the test?

8. Shifting towards traditional assessment in non-traditional program: lack of common comparative benchmarks

Oh, very much not to be traditional. But we began to move a bit close to the traditional [defining the school "type"]. I think, as the grades went up. We were primary and then we moved to grade 7 eventually. And as we became more intermediate predominant, the teaching staff then, of course, kept changing. Then, of course, you were bringing in different types of beliefs. And trying to deal with that whole issue of kids transferring, that became a major problem. Because if they...just like you were describing...if they were transferring to other schools and parents were perceiving that you were a year behind and...we weren't being very clear with these kids. So we had to do some rethinking about what we were doing and preparing kids for any situation they might encounter. So that is what we did begin to reduce it. And there were, I think, one or two teachers who were uncomfortable with not having those standardized tests and felt that it helped them just clarify, you know, where the kids were in terms of progress. You needed to. And that is part of it. You lose perspective as to whether your kids are at in comparison to other kids.

9. Testing [tacit] assumptions, tests defining situation [success, progress]

Once again the assumption is that the CTBS test is equivalent to the grade. That there is some kind of match-up in terms of program. It also, you see, it comes into this whole question, "What do we mean by progress?" The child has been progressing in terms of that school. Very well. But you pull him across town and there is a very different criteria. It's a bigger issue than whether we use CTBS tests or not. It is what's relevant. That's the question.

10. Concerns: focussing on things other [objective, lessons] than the child

What are we looking at? When I go into a classroom, even if I am evaluating what is happening in a classroom, what am I looking at? If I focus on the teacher, that is one thing; if I focus on the children and what they are doing, that is another way of approaching that evaluation. And that's what I mean, is that we tend to focus on lesson plans, or we focus on how we are going to get there. We don't spend enough time focussing on the children themselves and what it is they do, the process. And so we keep looking for easier ways [to evaluate] which are not the appropriate ways; the appropriate ways are so time consuming.

11. Concerns about the orienting effects of tests

But it also feeds into the overall picture in terms of making

decisions about what kind of assessment the school's going to use, the kind of assessment the district is going to do. Where it is going...what it is going to stress. The more that...one of the problems with this kind of testing (CTBS) is that it becomes highly stressed and, I think the focus on those skills rather than other types of learning...it's a narrowing effect. And in some situations particularly at the secondary level where the testing actually orients which direction you think it will go rather than the other way around. And that kind of thing is what concerns me.

12. Concerns about false security, premature closure in using tests, cessation of minding

And I think that is what happens though, because then these also become used for making all kinds of other decisions. And maybe some of thoses decisions are valid based on that kind of information. I think another thing that happens though is that you spend so much time on CTBS testing that you don't put as much energy then into the other kinds of evaluation that you might be doing that might be far more significant. That would be a concern that I would have, "Okay, I've done my assessment, I don't need to do any more." And some people do use them for grades and I find that a cause for concern.

13. Use of tests: minimum requirements

Let's say we are going to use standardized tests because it

is the lesser of two evils, then at least we should have a clear understanding of what they can and cannot do. I think that is the minimum we can ask of ourselves. And I don't think that is a hard thing to ask of people.

14. Tests as general indicators of possible anomaly

I would say very much that is how I have used tests in the past. It is giving one more piece of information to the total picture ...That would be my use for standardized tests. It does give me another piece of information. It does say to me the child has been scoring at the 10.6 in vocab., 9.3 in comprehension and is really not doing very well in the classroom and that something is wrong. Either the way the teaching is wrong or there's something going on here, or it just happens to be that kind of day, but when you consistently test that way then it tells me that we should look at that. And I do need those kinds of indicators. It does help me as a principal to look over the school and say, "Okay, what's happening with this child?" And if everybody understands and says, "Yeah, we know what's going on," then fine, don't worry about it. But if no one notices that anomaly and questions it, then I think we're being shortcut. But, I don't think, I think that in itself it doesn't tell a great deal. Just as an indicator.

15. Tests to check placement decisions promote, fluidity of placement: verify/adjust decisions made already / fluidity: using CTBS tests to verify or adjust decision already made

I'm not sure how I will handle it in whatever situation I am in, but whatever situation I am in, but what I'm thinking there is that what my experience has been is not using it as a way of sorting kids, but a way of checking out whether that child really is...usually what happens is they've gone from level 7 to level 8 to level 9, that's how they are grouped and then you bring in somebody and you test them on the informal inventory reading and whatever...that's how you decide where they are placed. But then when you look at the overall, is this child being placed at level 7, should they really be at level 9? And this, the CTBS test or whatever, might give some indication that this child has been misplaced. So rather than making them grind through all those levels, that there is some fluidity there and you can move them and it tends to move up rather than down.

16. Stance towards assessment: information for decision making; the principal's role, district's role re: assessment

It is information, it is bringing in information, Gluckman talks about this. Creating an information environment and what you are doing is expanding that potential. You are saying here are these buckets. Here's what this can do, and here are the problems with it. Okay. And here's what we

recommend, this is what we are finding gives us the best kind of information and I will go with that because you have given me a good rationale for why that is better than something else. But I want still that choice because there may be a very good reason why I am going to reject CTBS. For instance, with Stanford, we use Stanford. We never used the whole Stanford. We picked certain parts that we were interested in and other parts we felt really didn't give us the kind of information we wanted and gave us the wrong information. I want that kind of choice, you see, I don't want someone saying, "You have to now do this this, the whole lot."

17. Supportive role for district [procedure information for decision]

Okay, let's come back to something like this. I know that a year ago, or a year and a half ago, I really wanted to see some hard work done at the district level, in terms of testing and in terms of offering a number of possibilities. I was not hung up on too much to some extent, but not too too much on the idea of fine tuning standardized testing. But what I wanted is what if they wanted us to do certain things, then they were going to have to supply the backup assessment to go with it. They couldn't expect the school to keep re-inventing all of this, take the Ginn for instance, we were trying to reorganize those tests, rewrite them, in fact. In

fact, we rewrote I think about five or six levels because they were nonsense, they are absolute nonsense.

18. Role of learning assistant: ambiguity as a necessary condition for creative response

...but I also think that it assumes that we are all going to decide what this person in here is going to do. Just as we decide what we as a teacher are going to do. That you have a defined role in that sense. I think that is just a product of being a teacher. That is a teacher there. And they are going to define their own role to a large extent. And you want to be able to have that situation where you creatively look at what the learning assistance teacher can do. I'd hate to think that we are going to come out with a sort of "This is your role and this is how you decide." So, okay, ambiguity is the name of the game.

19. Reorienting cumulative records: quantitative, premature definition of the situation

So the problem with it [cumulative records], you see one of my goals is to take this [the school's cumulative records] and to crawl through it and take out the stuff that is years old and is no longer seems relevant. Because it is defining the child prematurely. The kind of stuff that you would find in it is quantitative stuff...

20. Assessment as constant vigilance, constant adjustment, and the lack of preparation for that approach

I think, coming back to informal assessment, and it certainly is an area I've been a lot of thinking about. The whole element of looking at the child and watching what the children in the room are really doing, which is very difficult anyways as you are teaching, but nonetheless, that constant vigilance of what is the child doing compared to what I am expecting the child to do or expecting the child to learn. And being able to use that information and that, I think, is an area that is very exciting, you know, to think about how do we get at that? But that is what we are not really trained to do. We are trained to look at them in terms of our objectives, or in terms of did we get 100% on a math, you know, assignment that I gave them. No so much looking at how did that child go about it, what did they actually...how did they avoid it, how did they approach it? We are just not geared to look at it that way. Where there is a constant adjustment in terms of what I'm trying...where I'm trying to go. We are not trained that way, I don't think...are _____ oriented that way, maybe that's the word I want.

21. Using intuition to create a class profile

Okay, so it (the rating exercise) was developing a screening

for classes, mostly on an intuitive basis. That was the teacher's interpretation, so that way these kids were weak and strong, right. And then, being able to stick by their side, and then we had constructed a scale of 1 to 10 on develop a class profile, it wasn't a profile on each child, but a class profile. And then state why you thought this, this was teachers being able to clarify or justify, you know, here's my impression about this child. Here's the information I've got.

22. "Constant vigilance" as driver of curriculum

The curriculum that I am designing in my classroom should be emanating from what I am finding from what I'm finding from the kids. That everyday changing that I am doing...This kind of assessment should drive education, not quantitative assessment.

23. Self: definition of role as administrator

You see part of it has to do with that dichotomy of teachers and administrators. And what I would do as administrator is very different that what I do as a teacher. And I don't mean that they are very different, on the one hand you are trying to facilitate change, on the other, you are changing yourself. And that is very different in terms of trying out things and looking at your own preferences. Rather than dealing with other people's preferences. So I have to constantly balance that and come to terms with what people's

beliefs are and then come to terms with, "Okay, how do we shift those beliefs and who says my beliefs are better than their beliefs?" I mean, I've got to be really convinced that...in fact I am...never going to be right, nobody is going to be right...but this makes more sense in the education situation than perhaps that does. And so my task, I see, is shifting some of that thinking and support it with as much information as I can and what's happening in the classroom. It seems to me that that's the key. Is it really working and that's what we say, but is that what is really happening?

24. Communicative constraints on being defined by others' expectations

I think the terms of reference are so different and I think what is perceived as the expectation is difference. And that is part of it. It is a constant backing up process. When you are talking with someone, especially when you are in my role, there is a feeling into what they believe is your expectation, of what has been traditionally their experiences in terms of expectations of administrators. You know, I am accountable in terms of assessment. I am accountable in terms of records and all that kind of stuff.

25. Definition of self: negotiating roles, what is expected as communicator

And so part of my thing is how do I...I am constantly trying

to find a way to bridge that without being threatening. To clarify without being threatening. [For example] "What do you mean by that?" It has a lot to do with roles.

26. Problems of symbolic interactionism: "jar" of missed communication, synergy of shared meaning

But it is hard...it has been hard...language has just got so much in it, it makes it really hard to move. And I noticed it because I was talking to someone the language was...I suddenly was really aware of the language that they were using doesn't match with what they are talking about. I know that we are not talking about the same thing that the language is...I am trying to discuss a concept like cooperative learning. And we are talking along and it sounds right. Yeah, this is where we are wanting to go. And I am assuming that we mean the same thing until suddenly something in the language strikes me as a jar. It doesn't fit in with my concept of that. So we definitely have a different concept of what we call cooperative learning or what is called ...whatever it is. It is just different. And it is at that point that I know we are not talking the same language when we talk about cooperative language, when we talk about what is... any of the things we might be talking about. Other people really add to that concept. We are not only talking about the same thing, but we are really adding to the meaning of it.

27. Women's knowing: not legitimate

Yeah, what I was, what, it's interesting I used, "It's not legitimize." "It's not legitimized," is what I wanted to say... It's the thing of...and again it comes back into the, the world of research, it comes back into what it is that's considered valid knowledge, and intuition is one more base? Having faith in your intuition. It's not based on necessarily hard data. It's, the data's there, but it's, it's not, I guess, articulated as much...in the same manner that...that we think of as knowledge that's out there, that's proved, and all this kind of thing. And that's, that's what I mean by legitimize. There's also a tendency to look down on that as being the serious, and therefore kind of put aside...and part of it is how we, the personal, the person themselves views knowledge...In other words, we don't...We make, listen to our intuition, our gut-level, it's that gut-level ...You know, this is how you should be teaching, and yet, somehow that doesn't match my experience, and you think that your experience, because it's yours, somehow isn't enough to state why that's not appropriate. Somehow these guys over here have more legitimacy, you know, they're listened to, so something must be wrong with the way that I experience the world. Something's wrong with me. Or, you know, this is a unique situation, and so therefore, you know, I can't, I can't generalize...It's that kind of thing.

28. Mathematical knowing

What we were talking about, and it, and I'm looking at that, that thing of, okay, I've got all these numbers, all this fits together and tells me about this child, or this class, or this school. And now I can tell everybody, and I've got something to base it on. Never mind that, that there's nothing there really (laughing), it's...That I've got this, and it's "hard" data...It appears to be, yes.

29. "Legitimated" mathematical learning

We're now running into all these external organizations that offer tutoring to students...Sylvan Learning, or places like that. And parents go to that for this hard data. Immediately what they get is this testing, immediately what they get are these numbers. And they come back to us, and say, "Well, now, what are your numbers?"...(laughs) They want to see if they match it up. If you don't have any numbers, then, "Why don't you have any numbers?" you see? Again, never mind what that, that stuff says, in trying to communicate that 5.6 doesn't really mean anything, because of the kind of testing, and stuff...Well, it's also a way of saying, there's that frustration with, "My child is not succeeding in the way that I wanted to see. They're not getting the A, or whatever. So, I want to dump it on somebody." Now, Sylvan puts, or whatever, whatever the organization is, somehow reassures them by giving them this

data, and now "We're going to move the numbers, in other words, we're going to go from 5.6 to 6.6," or whatever. And, they're coming back to the school saying, "Okay, what are you going to do?" Again, referring back to these kinds of numbers, and it's, it's kind of a frustration because you know that the, the organization is really focussing into that, because once again, it's, it's their clear-cut picture of saying, "We can guarantee you," and I think they even put that in their ads.

30. Limitations of mathematical knowledge: not addressing gut stuff

That kind of knowledge doesn't address, if you call that knowledge, I mean, (unclear)...It doesn't address, though, all the gut stuff that you see happening in the classroom, that this child is struggling with this, or this, or this, or this, and it's in a social context, it's within the context of the school, and so, you know, there's a kind of frustration there. And when I'm talking about women's knowledge...And I'm not sure, you know, I just use that as a, a...catch-phrase, but it certainly seems to fit in a lot of ways. I do believe that women approach children and they approach education in a whole, women as a whole, differently than men as a whole do. And that has a, has a lot to do with how we view work, how we view teaching and I, and I, my

experience in elementary certainly has...done that, over and over and over again, it's been like that.

31. Women's knowledge

And I'm not sure that it has a lot to do with the whole thing of mothering and how you watch...having watched children...I'm thinking...of, of a parent right now, who's, who's adopted a child, and she's just so excited, and it's just, every, you know, incremental step she's aware of, and there's this constant questioning and waiting and hypothesizing about what's going to happen next. Now, if the male's in the workforce and doesn't have that experience, and I'm not assuming that all women have... that experience...And I'm not saying that all, all women, certainly, do it that way. I'm not sure if that has anything to do with it, but I think it must...I think those experiences must have something to do with it, so when they view a child in a classroom, there's a lot of stuff that's going on there that they're seeing, and again, not necessarily even recognize, you know, not necessarily, it's not at the...conscious level. It's, you know, "I know something's wrong here," or, "I know, you know, that the child's going to be okay and I'm not going to worry about it, despite what these numbers say."

32. Women's knowledge not recognized as legitimate

...even when explicated, it's [women's knowledge] a question

of whether that explanation is recognized as legitimate...It's a big part of it...So, it's attending. Like, who is your audience?...And, what are they attending to? What are they listening for?

33. Expectations for clarity

...what I'm talking about there is felt obligation to let the parent know that you have some concerns...and the fear is that you communicate that you have a concern, and the parent panics. That was de-Sylvan (laughs) or puts a lot of pressure on the child, or all kinds of things happen, which, which is bothersome ...it comes back to where it's certain here, I'm not exactly certain what's going on [with the number]...I'm not certain, and I can't, I can't ever have any total certainty about that...but the parent wants something less ambiguous. They want much more clear answers...as if there were any...and the belief is that you as a professional have those answers, that somehow you, you have more ability to predict what the child is going to do, you have more ability to hone in on a particular problem, and, and solve that problem...and, it's like the, it's like the doctor. You go to the doctor, and, and you expect that he's going to cure you ...And when he comes back saying, "I don't know what's wrong with you," (laughs), "except I know something's not right" (laughs)... You go away saying, "Well, I don't know if I have much confidence in this doctor," (laughing) or he

pulls a book off the shelf and looks it up, that's even worse (laughing).

34. De-legitimizing claims: blowing it out of proportion

Now, see, that's the flip-side, actually, of what I was talking about, again, it's male/female views of things, that a woman may view it as a problem and a man will say, "Well, no, you know, you're just, you're just blowing it out of proportion. It's not a big problem."

35. Parents with unreasonable expectations: hurried children

There are those [parents] who, I think, view the school as, "Your role is to educate my child to help them succeed...and my belief is my child is an A, A student," I use that terminology...And if the child isn't getting an A, what's wrong? Now, yes, laying out a line of action of what you're going to do as a professional and what the expectations are of the child, and is that feasible within the circumstances of the home? The irony being that you lay out a, they lay out a thing of action, and then discover that the child spends 24 hours a day in dance (laughing) how heartwarming, 200 other things which are all wonderful things to be doing, you should be doing...but then the question becomes, is this feasible?

36. Giving "limited warranty" suggestions

Some of it is the parent wants the problem solved, but

doesn't want to be involved, others, very definitely want to know what can they do? There's no question about it. And the more ambiguous the plan is, the more frustration everybody, I think, has. So, I, I see when people are very clear, and suggestion, suggesting, you know, routes that parents can take, with caution, the better that is, that relationship is, the more secure the parent feels, and the more it's communicated that, this is not predictable, that "Here are some things that seem to have worked with other children, but don't necessarily work with other ones," you need to add that in, and when they do that...then that seems to have more success...They, they do want some action. They want to know what I can do, some kind of power over the situation.

37. Caring parent; careless teacher

I had one conference with a parent, the end of the year, god, she was wonderful. She was really wonderful. She came in with all the right questions, it was very straight(?) conferences where teacher really hadn't done what they should have done, and I felt really embarrassed...the teacher was aware of the problems this child was having...but had, and I thought, was enough aware that, that would have addressed some of them, but hadn't actually done anything about it. And, the comments made to the parent were, in fact, contradictory. They were just contradictory left, right, and

center. And had sent a note home with the report card with this long, long, long list of, statements about the minding(?) of the child and which I couldn't make heads or tails of it, and, you know, they didn't make sense in, in light of the written material. So the parent, in a wonderful manner, came in saying how frustrated she was because we had, I had talked to her about different problems the child was having, didn't know where to go anymore, and the, and the note didn't make sense, but she didn't address it that, "This doesn't make sense," but, "I'm trying to make sense of your grades and the other," and you know what the teacher had done? Wrote a standardized test and graded straight on standardized test, that's what I discovered at the conference, and I was just floored. Never referred to the writing, and never referred to the reading...I was just floored when the teacher, when the parent asked, you know, "Could she go into more detail about how these grades had been..generated?" And the teacher's response was, "Well, I threw everything out, so I can't exactly remember." But in front of her, she had the standardized test scores and grades next to them, which I had been very explicit on a number of occasions during the year that in no way this was going to ever happen. And here I was...a day after school got out, and I was in that horrible situation of I can't, I don't really want to say anything to this parent in front of the

teacher, but I was just really angry, because I knew at that point what indeed had happened. And, of course, it didn't match up, it didn't match up with anything, you know, that either the teacher was saying at that time what she had written, and then the (unclear) it was grade, so we're, grades were nonsensical. But the parent was handling it very well. The parent wanted to know...for understanding what is it that I can do, what is that, the school can do to help? And we did. We laid out very specific statements about what we were committed to do for next year, and some suggestions for the summer...little things. Fun things that you can do that would, would kind of help, recognizing the parent's situation, recognizing the nature of that child. We didn't want to turn them off by giving them any more "facts"...But, the parent was just so good about honing in to what it is that she needed to know, and the frustration that as a school we sort of shirked on our obligation, that was my feeling...I'll be, I'll be lucky if we see her next year (laughs)...But, I feel badly, I feel like I want to go back and...and thank her for her, for her approach.

38. Expanding curriculum potential through collaboration

Glickman talks about, Ben Peretz is actually who talks about expanding the curriculum potential, talks a lot about that, but Glickman also talks about it in, if we used curriculum in a very narrow way, just instead of goals and objectives,

then, the implementation of those, well, depending on how we do it, then we, we really restrict what it is that we do...do you see it as ways of expanding that curriculum potential, you know, and that's done collaboratively...with another teacher...He's talking about the principal and the teacher, and the principal's view of curriculum...The more narrow that the principal views the curriculum, the more narrow, in terms of supervision, they will be and in, and restricting the teachers sense of what they can do...but if collaboratively, if they work together, they can expand that, that potential, and you have to see it as, as always expanding, and then Peretz talks about that, too, that teachers collaborating together, the ideas that they generate expands that potential.

39. Being told what to use for testing: restricting choices

What I was referring to was I didn't want someone else out there restricting what it is that we might do, by demanding that, whether it's provincially or district, demanding that you do tests at a particular time, etc., because then you get wrapped into tests, and you suddenly start narrowing down, because you're concerned about tests and their results. That's sort of what I'm referring to, but I was also referring to if someone tells me I have to do CTBS reading and math for all my students at certain points of the year I want to know on what basis and how that's going to be used,

because, in fact, over and over again, and we went through it again this year, gave the CTBS, and all sit back and said, "Why?" I mean, they're level. Not because tests wouldn't give you certain information, but because of the construction of that test, you question just what it was that you got out of it. The kids were so frustrated you know, there was whole elements of it that just didn't make any sense, and kind of looking at that and saying, "Well, how do I, you know, how do dress(?) that fold(?)?" Giving them the test that troublesome, taking of the test, and justify...the information which I get from that, which I'm so uncertain about, so very certain about, in the end...Does it make any sense to be doing that? Does it make any sense in terms of the time that we've spent with that, and then what do we get at the end? Valid, in terms of these scores and of course...the impact that it has on the kids, and, gee, you know, we've got to find another way, and part of it is because there's just nothing out there...There's nothing out there, and partly the reason there's nothing out there, it means that the media center, is no one, I think the district people are saying, "There isn't, there isn't anything that we would, recommend at this particular point in time," so we've got the CTBS there, but they've taken everything else out, so you don't have access to anything else. So, then you're left with, next year, "Let's forget testing at grades 1 and 2,

this is silly." What's that kind of testing? You've got to find something else, but we're still stuck with the, with the problem of, when (laughing), when kids are coming back Sylvan, saying, you could(?) explain why you're not doing that kind of testing? So it's reassuring them that, that the information that we have is consistent with the information, perhaps, that they're getting. 'Cause that's actually what we find, is that information, it would come from, from different places, but it's not inconsistent.

40. Holding children back: difficulty with withholding "final" judgment: answer definition of tests

The difficulty is, and I come back to that, but we are very...we struggled with it this year and haven't come to terms with it... we've got a child, I have faith that this child just needs more time to get on track, the question becomes is the child ready to move on to grade 3 or is it that are we going to go into a four-year program, our...are we just simply going to move the child ahead, and we've got to, got to be really clear about the reasons that we would or wouldn't do that...It is. It's a question of giving that child more time, okay...and putting them in an environment that doesn't overwhelm them to the point that they give up and say, "I can't cope, because I'm competing with these kids over here." And it's the child's view of themselves competing, not necessarily the teacher's, that you have to be

over there, and it's also a parent view that...in comparing, comparing that child...So you struggle with this thing of okay, I want a four-year program, but everybody else thinks of it in terms repetition, failure, etc., so you, you sit down and you look at that child and say, "What's the best learning environment for that child?" Now, you, all this time, you've been saying to the parent, "At the level that your child is functioning, he's doing very well, he can do this, he can do that, has learned to do this, has moved from this to that." That does not say where that child is in relationship to everyone else in grade 2 or grade 3...Well, that parent needs that...The parent needs that because suddenly they're surprised at the end when you say, "We really think that...your so-and-so would probably benefit from a four-year primary program." "Nobody who ever let me know how far behind they were!" (with expression). They've not heard all the stuff we've been saying, and, and so there's the frustration... The numbers are very secure. "Well, the testing showed your child's still at grade 1 level" (laughing) when they were supposed be at grade 2, you see?

41. Genuine parental concern vs. my kid's the best

I think it's more a worry about "Whether my child is achieving at the level that most people would achieve at this point in time. Is there something wrong? Is there a

learning disability? Is there, inattention on the child's part to, to dealing with the subject matter? Do we need to be looking at other approaches?" For some parents that's the question, for others, it's just, you know, "I want my child to be number one, and how do I get them there?" (laughs)...I don't know if I'd call it the pushy parent, it's, it's the high achieving parent themselves, who views the world as very competitive and that "My child will not have the options that I want for them unless they're at the top, so how do I get them at the top?"...And part of it is, too, a reflection on themselves, that, you know, "If my child's doing well, I can brag about them," and they do that a lot. The "Grey Cup" of Group, and, you know, and automatically "If, if my child is viewed as being in the top group, that's fine," if you put them in what they view to be the lower group, even though you've stated over and over again, it's homogeneous, for whatever reasons they attach that this is not quite as high a group as that one over there, there's, "What's wrong with my child?" you know, it's a real fear of, of definition...of where they're going to go. And some of that happening, must have come from personal experiences, at private schools, that kind of thing, it's that need to be at the top.

42. Splits vs. combinations: conjuring up images

I also find, though, at least I found this year, that that

becomes a way of talking about their concerns, when the reality is they're more concerned about the teacher, or they're concerned about something else, and this becomes the latch(?). The tension becomes focused on, about splits, which I really object to the terminology...and does not address the other issues about whether this child is going to be getting materials or learning experiences appropriate to their learning age. And that's what's got to be addressed, so we've got to stop talking about 2-3's and 3-4's, and start talking about how do we manage within that combination to address these kinds of questions?...I've said that to parents. I think I told you that, that as long as we use "split," conjures up an image of...split teacher...that's why I will refuse to use the term "split." It refers, it conjures up in my mind a group over here and a group over there, and you've divided yourself in half.

43. Arbitrariness of concept of grade levels

I was talking about the arbitrariness of that [concept of "grade 2"]...And that you had to see it in, more in terms of continuum..and if you saw that, then, then it didn't matter, I mean, if you grouped 2's and 3's together, well you had a grade 3. You still have this kind of continuum there, and it was how we, we addressed it, whether it was grade 3 or grade 2-3, but once we go over the semantic games, or what they perceived as semantic games, you see, a lot of them

really got excited about, "Okay, you know, maybe this thing is okay, give it a try," but as soon as you moved into something else, then, of course, they got all that into play.

44. Seeing through surface of grade levels

Yes, and it was a belief that, "Because my child's in grade 2, in a grade 2-3 combination, does not mean that because my child, quote, is grade 2, could not be working at grade 3 level, what's considered at grade 3 level," and then in a lot of ways they would be, more than a grade 3 might be working at a grade 2 level, whatever that means. It may not mean, it's only how we arbitrarily chop up the the curriculum, and say, "This part's grade 2 and that part's grade 3."

45. Using language to conjure up inappropriate images

I talked a lot about that this year to people, and I know I was probably very abrupt with a couple of people, because...with staff, I was in a meeting with, it's called a team meeting, and one of the people I met in the group kept referring to the kids "failing" and I got really irritated by it and I said, you know, "I don't view kids as failing, and I really wish you wouldn't use that terminology," because if the person's someone who talked to parents a lot, and I said, "Particularly when you're talking to parents, because then I've got to fight that all the way through. What we're talking about is time for children to develop and we're

talking about four-year programs." The person was really offended, and said, again, thought it, this is just semantic, and, my, I, my reaction to that was, "As long as you view it as semantics, you don't understand what I'm talking about, and it's really important in terms of a total philosophy and a total approach, that you do, that you not use that, even if you don't understand it. I don't want you to use the term 'failure,' 'cause you've already pegged these kids and you've got them in these little boxes." And, it's interesting how people respond to that, because, well, and I've stated(?) at the time, "Language is really important to me, I don't want you using the 'splits,'" and I said, "Ooh, gee, (unclear) failure. Ooh," (laughs), and I don't expect people to come to my point of view. but I do want them to think a little bit like you're saying, and how that gets communicated...and what it means. And I see that whole issue of split, to then tell a whole district comes to terms with the terminology that they're using. You then, sort of, in a way, find that will contribute to fight that fight. Everybody will view them as negatives, and the district has that same view of, to grade kids. They view it as a negative, "We'll do anything to avoid the," so they'll try to address it...It's a total district thing, of, I think at one of the schools they tried to create a combination and they must have had 30 parents outside the principal's office all demanding that it go

otherwise. And there was another school where they created a combination, I think they had 30 in grade 1, and they had 20 or something, 15, in the grade 2, and they created the combination, and there was so much protest, they switched it back, they had 30 (unclear), and I couldn't believe that they had done that, I mean, that was, that was definitely to the detriment of the kids, but because the parents...kicked up so much fuss, that implied, in my mind, an acceptance that, quote, this was a split and that this was a negative.

46. False rationale for combining children: "mathematics" of social book-keeping

The rationale for creating the combination is numbers. It's not a belief that...we can manage this in a different manner...that can address these, these questions...and so, therefore, you have no foundation to come back on, all you can say is that it's better to have lower numbers...when they're talking that way...When I hear teachers, you know, "dreading the split"...Then it's a very negative view of that. They buy whatever, I doubt if they could buy the same argument the parents do, but I certainly think that they, they view it as a less than desirable situation ...My view, my view is, and it comes back to the terminology, "split." They see themselves split in half, "I've got to...group my 2's, 2's and 3's over there, never the twain shall meet." They will meet! At certain points, they know that, I mean,

they will, they will, "Maybe I'll do my socials together...But math. What do I do with math? How do I," you know, particularly feeling a lot stiff(?) curriculum, "How do I avoid the 3 curriculum with my 2's so they don't have to repeat it next year?" They don't address the question of "How do we create a program throughout the school?" and that, that becomes a non-issue...It's, it's, "I'm afraid," you know, "I may have these kids next year, and I want to do the same thing I did this year." (laughs) "So, I've got to make sure I somehow springing(?) them up."

47. Dealing with diversity: teach the grade 6 curriculum, fail those that don't get it

So the issue is, "How do you deal with diversity?"...Not whether or not it should be two grades together...What I see happening, over and over again is, "I've got a grade 6, I'll just do what the grade 6 curriculum says, never mind about the kids."...And that's the way I get around the whole horrendous issue of, "How do I deal with the diversity?...Well, if you can't make it, too bad for you, I'll give you a D or whatever."

48. Subdivision into unmanageability

I had six groups once...I spent all my time giving them busy work, so that I could go and talk to one group, exactly. I didn't accomplish anything...Absolutely, you know, I wasn't accomplishing anything, and I needed to pull back and look at

that, and say, "Isn't there another way?"...And, you know, maybe I have to give up a certain amount of, "OK, you're at this level, you're at that, quote, level," whatever it was, and somehow do some consolidation, say, "Never mind about some of this, because I'm not getting anywhere, and you're not getting anywhere. We're not really addressing, a set(?)." Now, that's where a whole different way of looking at teaching comes into play...And instead of seeing them in levels, necessarily, I haven't come to total terms with all of that, but, but...because, well, I still use the language, yes, but what I'm looking at is "levels" implies that those within that group are all at the same place in terms of all that that goes into language....So what are we talking about? What, what is a common...commonality between the kids in that group.

49. Being "in trouble": who decides?

...it's interesting the use of terms, "in trouble," and who's in trouble, I mean, is the child in trouble for themselves? Is, is the child going to experience trouble? Are they...in trouble because the parent is going to have difficulty with that? Are they in trouble because I have to make that assessment, and, and, I have an obligation, and suddenly I have to...state, "Well, they're not quite there yet." (laughs)...difficulty, yes, and that's different in this case...because the, the high achieving child is in trouble

often, so the question is whether or not the child is coping and whether the child is going to continue on, or whether they're going to give up. That's really the issue at stake.

50. Anxiety among parents: comparison with others

There's a lot that goes on between parents. If parents were dealing with just their own children...and dealing with the school, that's, that's one thing. But they're listening to each other, and the parent is going on about how great their child is doing, and suddenly there's this, "Ahh," total anxiety about, "My god, you know, maybe I need to be paying more attention to this or that."

51. Losing and finding a sense of place

I think it comes from perspectives, or not perspectives, it's, I'm thinking about the teacher who's been in a school forever and has lost complete, you know, touch with whatever else is happening in school or in the province in terms of the kids that they teach. In other words, their expectations of the kids may be very narrow, you know, and it's only when you get to perspective in the district that you realize, "Gee(?), these kids are really achieving far beyond"...Or they're achieving, "I'm not really expecting much at all and the rest of the world can do all of this, and I didn't realize that, you know, I could expect a lot more." And that's how parents gauge, you know, their expectations of their kids. They take a look at what other kids are doing,

and saying, "Geez, you know, maybe there's a lot more out there that, you know, I should be pushing for."...The teacher comes, with the professional, and says, "Well, I've had this experience with all of these children," and you depend on that..."You know, because you've experienced 200 children versus my one."

(JF: And it's terrifically difficult for beginning teachers who don't have the, the 200 inside the head...Can you imagine what the ambiguity about it, "What, what is a grade 4?" I mean, that's a very good question for them....And so, they, they cannot define the situation, they turn to something, or someone for a definition.)

I think that is why they turn to the CTBS.

52. What counts: love of learning

It's interesting, coming back to the parent who says, "The most important thing to me," and I hear this a lot...is "My child's love of learning, and I really want my child to be turned on." And it's hard to reconcile that when you're sitting down and you're talking about reading or math achievement in light of that, that it's a balancing of that, we're bringing that belief that they talked about back into sight." It's important that your child really loves learning. No, he's not doing fantastic in relationship to, you know, that kind of achievement, but, boy, is he turned on."...And when they've got to struggle with that, language(?) is not

important. Because, ideally, the other is, of course, the most important from the desire to play with language.

53. Self-image for children who struggle

And part of that comes back to the child's view of themselves. It comes back to self-image, because they may 1-, have a love of learning until they suddenly encounter someone else who's putting them down...because they can't do the same thing that somebody else can do. And suddenly the, the parent starts to picking up on that anxiety, and, and, that other definition, that external definition.

54. Creating groups: depends upon numbers

And it depends on the number of fields, for instance, if, when we created the, the two streams(?), and we only had six 2's, now that told me I was going to pull the most competent 2's. I was not going to take a homogeneous group of 2's, because what I was going to end up with was one or two sitting there all(?) lonely, struggling with just what you're talking about. Had I had a class of 15 and 15, very different...very different.

55. Reaching parents without sacrificing integrity

I, that's what I was saying to you when I was talking about creating the group of parents, is that it's one thing to feel strength in the justification coming from the professional point of view...from the teacher point of view, but that still doesn't answer the, the parent's need to hear certain kinds of

information...over and over again, I would read teachers' comments. I'm looking at particular teachers, and I, I feel really good about what they do, so I know that I, because of that belief, that when I look at their, their reports, they look fine, I don't have a difficulty with them. If I were having difficulty with a teacher, I might look at them a little bit differently, I don't know, so there's that orientation coming in there to begin with. But on three separate occasions, teacher asked me, he says, "Read this through, I need to know whether that gets across, you know, what it is."...Now what, what came through to me loud and clear, for each teacher, differently, was what it was that was important in the classroom. The kinds of comments that they made told me what it was that was important in the classroom, and that was interesting, because, you know, there'd be these really bold descriptions about what the child could do and you really got a sense of what it was that was being focused on. A parent doesn't hear it that way. Parent's still looking for hard information as to where their child is at...In a harder sense that we're, than we've been willing to give it, and, and that's the problem, is that how do we give the information without totally moving into something that's philosophically incongruent with what is, what they're trying to do. So, I think that the, the comments have really been refined and they make sense to me and, and they seem to certainly address, and

they're, but they're not clear enough to the parents, and I need that group of parents to go through a whole number of comments and what is that sound, what is, what does that mean to you?...For some it was very definitely, they wanted very definitely some wanted, "good," "very good," they, 'cause that had been eliminated, you see? The "good," "very good," there was simply a check list of, of goals and focus on comments, so they weren't getting those comparative things. They weren't getting a sense of how good, you know, when you said, "The child was able to do such-and-such," well, what does that mean in terms of what they should be doing? That wasn't clear enough. Were we being clear enough about the difficulties a child was encountering? What we tend to do is to create language that is very positive, I mean, that's what we want to do.

56. Parents not "hearing" difficulty

What do you, what do you write actually in a report is a little bit different, and there's no difficulty with writing, "He's experiencing difficulty," or, but, but what happens, tends to happen is, "Joe is getting along better with his peers than he had been at the beginning of the year."...The parent doesn't hear the "better than," that there was a problem, that's implicit in there, it's not explicit, "Boyd was trying out a rough time with peers" (laughing)...I mean, don't write it that way....We don't write it that way, because it's very

negative...and as soon as you start writing it that way, you get the opposite reaction, "Boy, is this teacher down on my kid." And so, it's coming to terms about language that is understood and yet doesn't come across a real dumping on the child...And we keep getting trapped in that...I keep hearing teachers put down on, "The teacher never told me." And the teacher did, and I've been through so many conferences where the teacher was very explicit, and the parent still didn't hear it (whispering), they weren't ready to hear it yet...So that I can't take responsibility for...and neither can the, can the, teacher...And what you do is you document what was said in the conference, and you try to come back to that, and then read, explain, "This is what we were meaning when we said this."

57. Taking responsibility, but not offering guarantees

What's happening right now is that the teacher anticipates fury(?), it's an anticipation, "I've had these problems before. I want to be sure that I don't get caught in this dilemma again." So, wants to be sure that this part is really clear. Checks it out, that's the amazing part (whispering), is this checking out, and we sit down, and, you know, here we are in March, got these three kids we're not sure what we're going to do with them. "Have you approached them, gone through these forms, we, we've, what have you said to parents?" I said, "This is this." "What was their reaction?"

"Well, it was this, this, and this. They're really aware that I'm thinking about a four-year program and we haven't come to a decision yet, but I'm going to look at that, blah, blah, blah," and they go on and on. I've even been in at the interview where we've talked about that. Hit, Jim, and suddenly (laughing) they don't what you were talking about that, and I go, "Wow!" In this case, I don't think any more could have been done on the, on the school's part. I think it's this kind of real rejection and denial going on, that "No, I, I, I heard you even then, but I don't accept that anymore." There's been a shift that's gone on, and it's how do you avoid that?...I don't know that you can, but I, I guess part of it is, is learn that you've covered all the bases, and feel really good about what's been said, and it's all this little stuff that you hear of there in terms of comments and, and statements that make you feel, "Well, I don't know, you know, are we just assuming we're communicating?"...But the issue is taking responsibility for as much as you can do...and that's what we're trying to address.

58. Dilemma of destroying hope

That's what it is, because you don't know. You cannot predict where this child's going to go, you have certainly gut level feelings about, "Okay, we're going to have to try for this," but you don't know, and the parent has that daily experience with that child, and there's a whole lot of knowledge that

parent has about that child and what that child can do that, you know, is really important, and so it's, it's a question of looking at that and saying, "Well, geez, you know, this is only, you know, I've only got this little portion of information about this child"...I mean, I've, I've seen parents, you know, focus in on minute details and, and just never hear the other...A lot of it has to do with parents coming from a professional background themselves, or all into teaching, and as soon as you counter that, you know, they're all very...set about what we believe about teaching, and so then they tend to latch on, "Well, I wouldn't do it that way," or, "You're not doing this," or they need to be very critical.

59. Which knowledge is of most worth?

It, it's what is it that is important to know?...but, more than that, it's also what is important in terms of learning, is it the process of learning, or is it subject matter that we learn, is it...knowing so much vocabulary which is what a CTBS might...determine. So you do well on the vocabulary part of it, CTBS test, what does that tell you about the child? Kind of, and I keep struggling with that, because certainly if the child does not have a lot of vocabulary and certainly there are some indicators there from the(?) CTBS, then I would expect that the child will probably have difficulty with the reading material... It doesn't mean I'm going to go and teach them that vocabulary, but certainly gives me a clue...it's a

piece of information, but if, if I use them as an indicator of achievement, to measure that child over several years...then I've left out whole ranges of stuff that in fact is very important...unless I've got a way of identifying that, and tracking that also, and giving it just as much importance to that kind of tracking, then it seems to me that you get lost there, people get hi-, hooked into, well, there's tests that gives me the information that I need to tell you whether or not your child is doing well...it's not as much telling you whether your child is learning, it does not tell you whether your child is cooperating with another child to learn...And it doesn't tell you whether or not that child can take information and put it together and communicate it somebody else. It just doesn't tell you those things. And yet, in the everyday life, that is the most important thing....And you can go through life and never do well on a CTBS test, and be very successful (laughing) --

60. Old [mathematical] wine in new bottles

I hear loud and clear from, from the people in the district, and I've heard it in several contexts now and I feel good about that, a clear statement about CTBS are not to be used for grades, you can, exactly what I just said there...CTBS draws you in the wrong direction, be really careful with them, there really isn't adequate testing material here, so, you know, it goes on and on like that. And the same time those

people are talking about the new computer program where you can access math tests, and they're all multiple choice, and how wonderful this is because you can do it by objectives, you can feed in the information you want, and you generate all these tests...which to me, yeah, item based, which to me are not unlike this other, they're more closer to, perhaps, your, your, what you're looking at, but they still don't get at the process, they still don't get at these same questions, and I find that an interesting, and interesting thing to be going on, because the same people that are talking about the CTBS that way, are also advocating the other, in, in, you know, great, words of excitement, you know, about what you can do now with this, and I'm going, "Wait a minute."...What I've don't hear people saying enough, hardly at all, is a question about, don't hear the questions coming up that make me feel safe, not safe, but feel a little bit of more assurance that those people who are involved are looking at these other questions. And I see that in a lot of areas, that it's gung-ho and it's a very narrow picture, it's like a lot of these people don't, with these questions (laughing) don't decide, "We'll deal with them later."

61. Danger of certainty and closure

...there's a lot of danger in that, in that you spend a lot of energy, you know, in that area..."And maybe some of those decisions are valid based, I think another thing that happens

though is that you spend so much time with CTBS testing that you don't put as much energy into other kinds that you might be doing that might be far more significant. That would be a concern I would have. Okay, I've done my assessment, I don't need to do any more."

62. Specifying criteria then letting go

The one thing that I became really aware of this year is the need to be clear about criteria, you need to go back and say, whether we do it with the math, or whatever we do it with, I see it as something that's very time consuming, but going back and saying, "Okay, what is it that's important in terms of this overall thing?" And if we're looking at...co-operation and process orientation and all of that, then we need to take that criteria, and say, "Okay, what are our indicators? And how are we going to manage that? And where then does something like CTBS testing, or this testing come into play? What role can they play in, in giving you one little part of that information? Not closing it off, but simply adding to information...Or does it at all?"...If, if people feel that it, it doesn't give that kind of information, then they, they can feel justified in letting that go.

63. Specifying criteria for what counts

So when I'm talking to you as a parent, I can say, "The criteria we use," if you get beyond immediate level it comes back to that end of the year conference, and, "Criteria that I

used for assessing this child was how the child behaves in COD(?). These are the things, these are the areas that we will focus in on, and in these areas, and it includes the process, I tucked in(?) the process, okay?" Then you say, "This is how I assessed it"... whether it's informal or formal or what...assessment, in other words, it's (unclear). And I think, if you can do that, I think certainly the parent goes all the way(?) too, as well, I think, screen it to somebody else...I have an account, and the reason the child isn't getting, you know, can't do what your child can do is because that's not deemed as important, but what is really important, which is what's important to me with that child is learning how to learn, and it's that, exactly what you agree upon as being most important. What are we talking about these days (unclear)?...Come up with some kind of alternative....and that's been interesting to me because over and over again I hear a lot about approaches, you know, process approaches. We don't see much of the other end in terms of criteria, and I think that's really positive sometimes(?) (unclear).

64. What the "alternative" assumes: a hell of a lot

I was, I was just writing about this, this morning, in fact, was, was appears the implications of, whether we can even(?) approach, may not be a new approach, but an alternate approach, another way of looking at teaching...but it, it assumes certain grounding on the teacher's part in terms of

understanding about what that process is about, and all the implications how the child learns and how you go about looking at the, all of that stuff. It assumes a knowledge of even, I'm thinking of whole language, of the literature, of looking at literature, children's literature and being able to assess even in that dimension, "This is good," "This is lousy."...Having had enough experience with that to say that this is the criteria I'm going to use for, even using this material. It assumes a wide experiential background on the teacher's part to bring that to bear in the classroom. That's a hell of a lot, you know?

65. Creating possibilities, not just theory from inservice

Yeah, I was just thinking that, and I think the persons who are trying to, to do the inservice need to be very aware of both the proximate and the distal future. They need to be throwing out a picture of, "Here's what you're going to encounter. In other words, "Here's what you do tomorrow." That's what the teacher's asking for, "Christ, you know, you gave me all this theory, but I've got to go into my classroom tomorrow, what do I do now? You know, I need something more from you, something very quote, practical."...But the person presenting, and that, that was given very well, at the, whole language workshop when, I think Alison and Norma and Terry did that threesome at the, the big conference a couple of years ago, gave a wonderful picture of the incongruencies in the

classroom, and that was what was hooking people. "Yeah, I tell my kids to put away the books so we can have reading," (laughs). They, they gave these pictures. One could, you know, really identify with that, and then we're able to go into some theory and stuff. They also need to give, "Here's what you're going to encounter down the road. Now, how, you know, here's some questions you're going to need to answer. You're going to need to know this." It's creating that need to know, so that the teacher says, "Yeah, I want to know more about that so I can address this in the future."...And then it's not the frustration, "Well, I just keep getting all this theory and that's not doing me any good because it doesn't help me tomorrow."...You've got to create those same pictures of identity...of, "How do I, how do I get to this?"...It's how we conceive, or conceptualize, again, that giving of information to people, and...how we connect to that information.

66. Keeping language open, not assuming "we know"

I need ways, and I think we all need ways, of probing that language that is not threatening...Giving them(?) a taking for granted assumptions about what we use, whether it's cooperative learning, we talk about testing, we talk about assessment(?). We talk about any aspect of teaching that we use the terminology so frequently, the jingo, that we assume that we're talking about the same thing, that, even down to

the most basic, expressions that we use. And an example of that was this whole thing that I got into on comfortableness and uncomfortableness. Trying to tear that apart. What is it that we're talking about? My, my immediate reaction when you say you're uncomfortable with it, is to accept I know what you mean.

67. Report cards: the last one

The last report, it tends to be a summary...much shorter, it's, it's really looking towards next year, and your predictions for next year, "Be careful about this. He may have some trouble there."...Some of it has to do with the writing. I wrote all this, and I look back and I say, "Well, I wrote that the last time. And I've got to change it."...You, what you said before was very true, but this other dynamic is very real when you're writing comments without being repetitive. One parent made the statement, "Well, you just have a list of comments, and those same comments could apply to anyone." It was like an astrology statement about your future. And it didn't have meaning for that particular child. I don't know how you do that...I think they're very differentiated. The parent doesn't feel that they're differentiated...The parent's saying, "Well, you could say this about anybody." It's a question of, "What are we looking for here?" you know? "Why is that not satisfying to hear that

particular comment?" To me, they're differentiated, the parent can't see that.

68. Clarity as changing the parent to be able to "read"

By becoming clear, if that is an issue, if that is the issue, then the action is not changing the comments, the action is communicating what this whole thing is about.

69. Problems with new report card: no goods or very goods

See, that's what it is. It's just a list of criteria. "Is developing, is able to," is, is couched in the, in the, the actual, like the kindergarten report card, the language of the goal. Let's take a look at what is our intentions, and then what you're doing is you're, you're checking off, yes, those things are relevant to what I'm doing and you comment in relationship to...you don't put "good," or "very good," or "satisfactory," you make it read like part of a book, "And now here's how your child is doing in total(?)." And what's disconcerting is that parents call(?), and you don't put "good" or "very good" there, so why put "goods" in the comments, and they don't look at that list any more of what the criteria was to begin with. And immediately you don't have that criteria, it says, "Reading," (laughs) so you know there's a real, switch there.

70. Intentions for clarity that go awry: having the opposite effect

The biggest problem we ran into was at the end when it said,

"Your child," can't remember exactly the wording, really problematic at the back of the report card, because it was making the recommendation for next year. Oh, "Your child is ready for," line, "and we recommend that your child do the following." In other words, it was a recommendation for some action. First of all(?), what the hell would it mean, "Your child is ready for grade 3" particularly if your child is not ready for grade 3 but we're going to place them in grade 3? What we're really doing is making a decision about what class we're placing the child into. And if I say your child is ready for grade 3, now I'm going to make recommendations about what you're going to do about that (laughs), it, it, it left this blank as if you had to fill it in. Now, you could not fill it in, but you just made all these statements on the other side, and it was a way of really focusing in. What's the first thing the parent saw? They saw these recommendations before they ever read the comments, scared the life out of them, before they ever opened the report card. So that part, we just thought, no, you know, we didn't want to deal with it that way. It was like setting them up, setting their minds to, to a negative to begin with...And we actually went through and had all the report cards taped through and took out this "ready for," because we felt that (unclear)...And it, it, assumed that if your child wasn't ready you were going to do something else. I don't know what,

s~, how you would do that... They were trying to find another way of saying, "Your child is, we're recommending that child be placed in."...Ah, but, see, they were moving away from that. That's what is said before. By my saying that your child is, we're recommending that your child be placed in grade 3, we haven't said to the parent whether your child is, in fact, of grade 3 level. So, what they wanted to do was to, to phrase it such a way so that it was really clear as to what level of learning your child was at, but, it...it had the opposite effect, you see?

71. Report card comments as problematic

...we all make these kinds of comments...all the time. Part of it is, "What do I say?" you know, "What do I say that's of any meaning?"

(JF: We don't have a language to say it?)

I think that's part of it. I think the other part of it is that we said it so often that it loses its meaning. That's at the thirtieth report card...sounds like garbage.

72. Difference in first, second and third reports

...the first is different from the second is different from the third, and...their dilemma is getting enough information to them. They, I really understand the frustration when they go...when they get it, you know, in March. One, one way of addressing that, though, is you give a little more information more frequent. One school I was talking to, they give six

reports each year. And they're short, I mean they're not these long, tedious...if you're doing it three times a year, then the intensity of that report is, is much greater at those times...Then you don't feel the compulsion to write everything that's happened this year, and when they're for. So you wouldn't be writing as much, that would be my expectations. And even if you were writing as much, you'd be a lot clearer about it, 'cause you, well, that's a contradiction(?) to what I said before...That the more you write, the less clear you are because the repetition. It's hard to differentiate from the, from the, Report A to Report B...Except that I think the intention of these interim reports was simply to touch bases, it was, as you've indicated(?) in October, "So and so is having a little difficulty in such and such, seems to be struggling."

73. Finding out about "clarity" from parents

But I'm making a lot of assumptions about where I think they're coming from and reworking(?) that, and that's my problem. I've got to come to terms with, you know...See, there has to be some pre-preparation at the end of September...just that(?), and laying out how this is going to happen. And the idea is to go to the parents with, actually, a set of statements, to get some feedback on that set of statements. You need to do that, to, to pull out statements

(unclear), to do what the parent or other teacher views those as problems.

74. Clarifying discussions: what is important to report

...it would actually be the beginning of November, the end of October, beginning of, depends on when I set the report date, because that group will get together anyway, because they're always going to get together at that time and then check bases as to, "Okay, wait a minute, let's take a look at our reporting. How are we going to be addressing these kinds of things? What kind of statements are we making at this time?" And it tends to be a more intermediate thing, get together and touch base, it's every year, saying, "Okay, you know, how are you handling this?" There's a lot of things that, for instance, like, well, "We're going to give grades in music," or, "Are you going to give grades in French? Since we don't have a total French program does that make any sense to do that?"

75. Policy for making decisions on four-year program

Now, paralleling that is a development of a policy which we don't have at this point, you set that policy, and that comes into, "What's the role of testing? When do we do it?" The retention policy, which we've worked a lot on last year, the four-year, you know, "How do you identify, and what's the procedure that you use (unclear)" and myself, "Where do I get involved?" And that policy outlines the purposes of reporting

and what kinds of things might be contained in that report...Well, the ways, the way that I, it reads now, at least(?) on an informal basis, is that I'm to be informed no later than the second report, and before the second report goes out, that this is being considered, together we determine what's going to be communicated to that parent at that second reporting, in what form, in other words, through a conference, and we're going to take a look at what kind of testing needs to be done, if any..."Is there going to be any testing? What kind of, supports have given to this child? Have we involved anybody else? What's the data, what's the basis for deciding this?" There's, a negative and a positive that we go through. "What's the, if we were to move that child with his peers, or with her peers...What would be the ramifications of that? What are we concerned about? If we retain that child in a four-year program, what do we need to be concerned about there?" And we look at the social grouping...We look at the, the emotional and physical growth of the child, we look at the readiness of the child, self-esteem...all those questions, as well as academic goals, and we come back to that issue you were talking about, that, "Are we putting this child in a, in a total ...environment of frustration so that their self-esteem is just going to go down the drain?"...That would all be included, this whole retention thing, which is what we worked on last year, is coming to terms with how that process

works, and, documenting it ...And, and we never did come to terms, at the bitter end, because, of all the people that we were recommending...for four-year program. There were three of them, and we just had, we could go either way with. One of them, no problem whatsoever. The parent wanted it, etc. My understanding at the interviews, in the second interviews was all parents had been alerted and most were in support when we got to the end, they weren't.

76. Uncertainty of group configurations for classes: changing numbers

Now, one of the problems that we were having in coming to terms with it is we don't know our configurations for next year. We keep getting these blips, you know, we started out with 20 grade 1's three months ago, figure you're going to have a straight grade 1...got to June, we had 30 grade 1's...If I have a child in grade 2, and I can put them in a 2-3 situation...with predominance of 2's...they're still with their peers, and that can still allow that developmental thing(?). If I'm going to put them in a 2-3 situation in which there's four 2's with all these 3's, no, it's, it's going into 3, that was the problem, it was being with the 3's, yeah, just being straight with the 3's, that was their concern. We saw the 2-3 as a way of addressing both sides of the issue, but when they were going into a straight three that was a different kind of any(?)thing...So we had to, we just

were really unclear about what we should do...We really didn't know, and I still don't know, I still don't know, 'cause I've got 36 grade 3's in. And for awhile there, it looked like a 2-3 combination, and then suddenly when we got this great flux of 1's, then suddenly it shifted again...And so those two scenarios...had a big bearing...on what we would recommend for that child. And our uncertainty about it, of course, doesn't help matters, but we knew that if the parent didn't support it, then...that that was a big problem, unless it was absolutely, no question about what the ramifications would be.

77. Retention: not being clear

We had the same problem with a kindergarten child. We really felt the child wasn't ready, he just wasn't ready (unclear), you know, just, we hadn't had the child for very long, and that was an interesting one. 'Cause we went through that whole one totally clear, and as we walked the door, as we walked out the door, the parent says informally to one of the people, and the whole has dispersed and they're all clear about what's going to happen, and says, "Well, really, if you're going to retain the child, it might be better to retain him in grade 1." After we'd all (laughing) (unclear, sounds like prayed over) it, and you just sort of do this stall thing, it's like, "Jesus, we went through an hour and a half and it never, ever sinks in(?)," 'cause we needed to address

that, and it was too late to pull the group together because they'd all gone their separate ways, but it was interesting...

78. Parents' reaction to changing report card formats

One thing that has to be done in there, I think, when I, when we send out the first report card, is a clear set of statements about what we already know as the limitations of this new report. It's in its plan, second plan of the year. It is going to be revised. We recognize these shortcomings, and they communicated to us and we're aware of that, and with that understanding, you know, and people need to know that, that we're not, we're not, trying to defend some aspects of that report...The plans, just a, a piece of information which'll be interesting to track next year, the perception of teachers was that parents who had had experience with the new kindergarten report did not have difficulty with this new report...It was parents who had never experienced the kindergarten report that really reacted. So our question next year is whether the grade 2 parents will react in the same way that grade 2 parents did this year.

79. Changing to letter grades in grade 4

The other big issue, that is in every school this year, is when they go into grade four. It's a whole 'nother kettle of fish [letter grades]...How we, how do we address that?...How do we prepare them in grade 3 for that?...I think what you do is, you become clearer...about where that's all coming

from...and you give parents more information (unclear). You see, it seems to me that that's implicit in the policy, I'm not sure if it's explicitly stated, I'm just not sure, because you can get trapped in that, is, "When does the teacher contact the parent? When does the parent do that(?)?" There's got to be more frequency in communication, it seems to me...And it's, it's establishing, you know, what are the, what are the signals, they're saying, "It's time, it's time to talk [to the parent]"

80. The necessity of leaving things as "judgment calls"

I don't notify every parent whenever their child an altercation on the playground...

(JF: I mean, you can, you can go, yeah, well that's just it.

It seems to me that that stuff can never be stated in a policy that, that has always got to remain a, a judgment call.)

81. Being explicit about responsibilities to parents for reporting

I think it can be stated in a policy in terms of, "Our responsibilities are," that's a (unclear) to say when and at what time and what format, it's simply a recognition that our responsibility extends beyond three and four reporting periods, and that we encourage frequent communication perhaps to give up(?) (unclear)...Part of what has to be delineated is these descriptions, it was what you called "anchoring," these descriptions of the situations that arise that parent who came

in in June who had very legitimate questions, and are we, are we prepared to answer those questions?...And if we are, then I think, you know, we've, we've done, and if you sit there and say, "Well, I can't remember," well (laughs), you've got a problem (laughs), and I don't think we're meeting our obligations...or, "What have you done about it?" "Well, nothing." That, and they have every right to be angry.

82. Principal's role: being watchful and committed

Part of what I perceive as my responsibility is being aware of when those difficulties are being generated. If I'm never made aware, then that's a different kettle of fish, but where I know that so-and-so is having a difficulty and been(?) informed me there's been a parent and the teacher, it's a question of monitoring how to(?) inform if I do(?), you know, "Have you/we(?) done anything about this? Have they seen so-and-so?" Maybe they want to set (unclear). Coming in and taking a look at the child is bound to be(?), it's keeping on top of that...But, it, it...(unclear), I, I certainly went away feeling good about the recommendations we made, I certainly made a list of things that I would connect/come back(?) with next year's teacher and say, "I'm going to be in here. I'm going to be watching for this." Not as a threat to that teacher, but simply saying that I feel an obligation to this child and I need be monitoring exactly, I need to be able to go back to that family contact (unclear) and say we're

watching...not making up a bunch of excuses (unclear). That's where I see my role is, is going to be in a simply straight away, making sure the child doesn't get forgotten in the rush...And if it's not possible for the teacher to do, to find that means of doing that, and recognizing, "Yeah, you've got a lot on your plate. well, how about doing it this way?" (unclear)... I think a lot of it comes down to honesty with the parents. It's making commitment, or following through, or saying, "I don't know, but, you know, we'll look at it."