Building a Culture of Collaboration: Supporting Teachers on Their Journeys of Change

by

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We accept this thesis as conforming to the required standard

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ABSTRACT

Through a narrative research model, this thesis explores my story as I moved from resisting change to the realization that my classroom practice needed to more accurately reflect the Principles of Learning described in the British Columbia Ministry of Education's *Kindergarten to Grade 12 Education Plan.* These principles--that people must be actively engaged in their learning, that people learn in different ways and at different rates, and that learning is both an individual and group process, apply equally to student and teacher learners. The research base for supporting these changes is woven into the story, and emphasizes the importance of building on teachers' professional knowledge through collaboration with colleagues, universities, school districts and the Ministry of Education.

The recommendations of this thesis centre on the individual's responsibility to continually reflect on, and improve, his or her classroom practices, supported by the institutions involved in teacher training, schools, districts and the Ministry of Education. This sharing of professional development responsibilities by individuals, and the organizations involved in education, is central to improving the system. Professional development activities must themselves model the Principles of Learning, and recognize the importance of these principles in supporting the teachers as lifelong learners.

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DEDICATION

To Dennis, my best friend and my worst critic, and to my daughter Ceilidh, who shows me the importance of the Principles of Learning every day of her life.

INTRODUCTION

Statement of the Topic

Building a Culture of Collaboration: Supporting Teachers on Their Journeys of Change

Why this Topic?

I have been very lucky. Within ten years, I have experienced the multiple perspectives reflected in this thesis: from education student to teacher in crisis, from taking the first tentative steps towards changing my relationship with colleagues and students to supporting teachers from a Ministry of Education perspective, from isolation to collegiality.

I chose this topic because it is one of optimism, one that recognizes that the vision of a program (expressed in the Principles of Learning of the *Kindergarten to Grade 12 Education Plan*) comes alive through the interplay of teachers' professional knowledge and the support provided by the educational community. This goal is an attainable one; it *is* possible to work together to make changes that can benefit the education system and its inhabitants, and to put the policy into effective practice.

What are the Principles of Learning?

I wanted to find ways to make the reality of the classroom more closely match the vision of the *K to 12 Education Plan*, the foundational document which outlines the British Columbia Ministry of Education's philosophy and goals for the education system.

A quote from the document describes the Principles of Learning:

> Three principles support the foundation of the education program. They guide all aspects of educational practice including curriculum development, instructional planning and practice, resource selection, school and classroom organization, assessment, evaluation and reporting. These are:
> - learning requires the active participation of the student
> - people learn in a variety of ways and at different rates
> - learning is both an individual and a group process. (p. 1)

This thesis is a chronicle of how I used the Principles of Learning to change my understanding of the nature of teaching, and how I continue to use them as I work with colleagues in the province.

Overview of the Thesis and Research Methodology

In this section I wish to briefly outline the content of the four chapters of this thesis and describe how the process of narrative research guided its construction. My thesis is my story, a story that identifies the shifts I have made on my journey as an educator. Woven into this frame is the research, a broadening of the scope from my story to one that may be of interest and benefit to others who struggle to participate, and, in a meaningful way, improve the system.

I wrote this thesis as a personal narrative for three interconnected reasons. First, and most importantly, I wanted to situate myself in this study as both researcher and participant. As I constructed the frame of the thesis, I imagined flying over the landscape of my career. I wanted to see what emerged in relief, the unavoidable and towering events that would become landmarks on my journey. I began to see that I had used these events to navigate a path that more closely connected what I was doing in the classroom with what I knew I needed to do.

The second reason I am undertaking this study as a narrative is because it does not take long for a Ministry of Education employee removed from the classroom to lose credibility, or to forget the day-to-day lived experience of teacher and student. I want to re-engage myself in the me that is a teacher. By retelling (and thus reliving) the events that were so significant, I can connect these stories to the topic of this thesis, and I am better able to work with other educators.

Finally, the inseparable intellectual and emotional experiences of teaching (What feels like the best action? What do I know about learning?) can best be conveyed through narrative. I cannot remember the despair during my dealings with Ben without feeling it also; I cannot revel in the success of Flexible Studies without involving my heart. Connelly and Clandinin (in Carter & Doyle 1996) emphasize that "teachers know teaching experientially through images, rituals, habits, cycles, routines, and rhythms that are imbedded within the narrative unity of their experience" (p. 125). By accessing my stories, along with their pain and hope, I can relive my individual experience within the context of what I now know.

A survey of literature about using narrative to "make sense" of teaching provides the following connections to the chapters in my thesis. In Chapter One, I describe my unpreparedness for teaching and the difficult first years in my career, culminating in my realization that I was disillusioned with the reality but afraid to change. Using a narrative methodology enabled me to:

> ...capture, more than scores or mathematical formulae ever can, the richness and indeterminacy of our experiences as teachers and the complexity of our understandings of what teaching is and how others can be prepared to engage in this profession. (Carter, 1993, p. 5)

Cochran-Smith and Little (in Lee & Yarger, 1996) describe it this way:

> With the growing use of narrative inquiry, teachers who have traditionally been silent are now interested in sharing their ideas with researchers. Teachers are telling stories in their own voice. The idea of a teacher researcher has been recognized as a means of teacher growth or professional development by some in the education community. (p. 19)

The narrative is my voice, a voice that was mute during my first years of teaching, but gained strength as I became more actively involved in changing my teaching practice. Using a narrative research model in this thesis is a testament to finding my voice and ensuring its continued existence.

Chapter Two, a description of how I was supported in reconsidering the act of teaching and learning, also finds a home in the narrative:

> Teachers have been told often enough (or it has been taken for granted) that other peoples' understandings of teaching and learning are more important than their own and that their knowledge--gained from the dailiness of work with students--is of far less value. Outside experts have often viewed teaching as technical, learning as packaged, and teachers as passive recipients of the findings of "objective research". (Lieberman, 1995, p. 592)

The essence of Chapter Two is my move away from the "cookie cutter approach" to learning and teaching to a more active, personal involvement for me and my students.

The Flexible Studies Program, a school-within-a-school, is described in Chapter Three. It was here I found a home and a place where I could use a variety of instructional strategies, work on implementing the Principles of

Learning, and begin to make sense of my pedagogy. Greene (1987) describes making sense of her teaching through story:

> It became a journey then. I realized that our commitment as teachers was, in part, to try to stave off various kinds of disorder and inhumanity, to undertake raids (as T.S. Eliot put it) "on the inarticulate," to try to find our own voices, to read and in time to name our lived worlds. And that, over the course of time, is what probably made me want to make the process visible--the process of searching, questioning, finding and losing, reaching out to achieve some kind of freedom in a resisting world. (p. 12)

Finally, Chapter Four details my move to the Ministry of Education, where I work with teachers on Vancouver Island to implement changes to classroom practice. Through the collaboration of schools, districts and the Ministry, I have an opportunity to establish a shared vision with colleagues, and work and share to make that vision a reality.

Greene (1987) describes using narrative to:

> ...find out how to open spaces. And how, in some respect, I think of teaching as a way of finding space. This may be, in the last analysis, what seems to connect artistry and teaching--this effort to open out of the commonplace, out of the cotton wool of habit and of dailyness, to discover (in our plurality, in our human being together) what it is like to look at things as if they could be otherwise and somehow learn enough to actualize that otherwise in decency--and then to move beyond. (p. 14)

Using narrative methodology will not add quantitative data to an already large body of knowledge. Instead, I am attempting to listen to the voices of those who make up my community, reflect on the themes and images that surface, and interweave these in my pedagogy. As I reflect on my own experience, I ground myself in the experience of others. Incorporating research into the narrative offers insights into common experiences in teacher education and into the implementation of changes in teaching practice. The survey of the literature also reinforces my feeling of the legitimacy of my inquiry and establishes me within a community of educators.

The literature included in this thesis constitutes a picture that can be looked at, but not around or through. My personal context and the choices I made about change add depth to the picture, much like my metaphor of a relief map. Putting it another way, reading about successful classrooms is quite a different thing from constructing them. Thus, my thesis emphasizes the construction of change through collaboration and offers counsel on the tensions between an individual's readiness to effect change and the context within which it is to be achieved.

The narrative, in conjunction with a survey of relevant research, gives my story depth, like a sculpture, so I can look at it, walk around it, and bend to examine it from different angles and perspectives. I can also invite others to look, ask questions and offer their stories. The sculptural analogy is flawed in that it implies a permanent, unchanging creation, just as my thesis will become an artificially static creation. However, the story continues. Every day that I teach, and learn, and listen, the work progresses.

How Do We Get There From Here?

I have included recommendations at the end of each chapter because I believe it will take effort at every level to support teachers in better meeting the needs of their students. However, although the organizations that support teachers at various stages of their careers can till the soil, sow the seeds and even water the seedlings, it is the individual who chooses to reap the harvest. I hope my recommendations, entitled "How Do We Get There From Here?", reflect both our joint responsibilities, and the responsibility of the individual in creating opportunities to implement the Principles of Learning.

PROLOGUE

On June 9, 1987, near the end of my first year of teaching, a special staff meeting was called. The purpose? To allow the staff of Hazelton Secondary School to talk to the Royal Commission on Education, part way through their fact-finding tour of the province. The mood, generally speaking, was gloomy. It wasn't that the school was full of dissatisfied teachers, marking off each day as they drew closer to retirement; the staff was relatively young and enthusiastic. It wasn't that the students were the problem; we had many promising and talented young people. It wasn't that we were in the winter doldrums, with weeks stretching before Spring Break arrived; it was nearly the end of the year. The mood was gloomy because the meeting provided us with a chance to express our concerns about the many students whose needs we were not meeting, the overwhelming nature of the job, our stress, and our inability to stop and celebrate the successes we had achieved.

Teachers who had many years of experience were able to talk to the Commission about their perceptions of the nature of education, the changes needed to teachers' jobs, and our responsibilities to our young people. For me, a first year teacher, I could only listen in perplexity. Change? I didn't even have a routine! I had been in a state of continued upheaval since I'd arrived in the small community ten months before. The idealistic platitudes of the commissioners only made me feel resentful ("You try teaching for a year!"), betrayed ("I have spent five years and thousands of dollars at university in order to teach in this system...and now you want to change it?") and overwhelmed ("I have quite enough on my plate coping with the status quo, thank you").

After dinner that night, I remember a group of us talking, the way only young people in a new job can. We figured the Royal Commission ("Headed by a lawyer, for God's sake!") had spent far too much time in Victoria looking for a project with which to make a name for themselves. We knew the system wasn't perfect, and it seemed an expensive and lengthy way to find that out. I also remember feeling somewhat victimized, as though the public was putting teachers under a microscope and blaming them for all the inadequacies of the system, exacerbated by the fact that, as a first year teacher, I had yet to contribute to the system's success or failure.

And yet, here I am now, working for the same Ministry of Education that commissioned Barry Sullivan to travel and talk and listen. And I too, travel and talk and listen.

Here is the story of how that came to be.

CHAPTER ONE: ISOLATION

> Soap and education are not as sudden as a massacre, but they are more deadly in the long run.
>
> Mark Twain

The story told in this chapter is divided into three sections that represent key experiences during the early years of my career: my preservice education, the first two years of full time teaching, and my experiences with one student, Ben, who made me realize that my instructional practices were not engaging my students. Throughout these three sections I examine the literature about student teachers and beginning teachers in order to explore consistent themes between my story and the generalizable reality of many new teachers. Finally, the chapter touches on some alternative teacher education and mentoring programs that encourage sharing and risk taking among professionals. These lead into the recommendations found at the end of this chapter where I explore some possible ways to improve the articulation between teacher education programs and the responsibilities we have as teachers to enact the Principles of Learning.

Preservice Education

In this section I explore my own teacher education experience, framed in the larger context of teacher education programs in general. Research shows the two most significant inadequacies of teacher education programs are (1) the lack of connection between the education faculty, other faculties in which a student teacher might study, and the teaching community, and (2) the failure to recognize the importance of the attitudes and conceptions that new teachers bring to their career (Carter & Doyle, 1995; Fullan, 1991). Consequently, this section also explores some alternatives to the traditional experience which

provide both the sponsor teacher and student teacher with a more effective model for communication and professional development.

The limitation of my teacher education program was primarily due to the disconnectedness between the subjects I was studying at university (English and History) and learning how to teach these subjects to high school students. My pre-service education left me well-versed in the content I was to teach, but without the skills and confidence to attempt different styles of teaching. As a result of this, I used the same technique that I had experienced as a student: the teacher as "sage on the stage". My inability, both through personal choice and lack of proficiency, to broaden my repertoire of strategies led to my confrontations with Ben, described at the end of this chapter.

During the five years it took to complete my degree, I did a lot of sitting. I attended hundreds of hours of lectures on English Literature and History. I wrote approximately 20 major papers and read close to 40 novels. My professors were knowledgeable, intelligent, and for the most part, good public speakers. Only one of them modelled a variety of strategies that I could use in a high school classroom. Even though I was in an education program, the usual teaching strategy modelled was "stand and deliver". Which does not mean to say that other strategies were ignored; but they were talked about, not modelled. Role plays, cooperative learning, and case studies were all advocated as methodologies, but they were rarely used. Some professors suggested books that

offered alternative strategies, but, again, I was reading about, and not participating in, these strategies.

> Education students begin to learn about teaching very early, as pupils in elementary and secondary schools, and this prolonged apprenticeship of observation (Lortie, 1975) is far more powerful than formal teacher preparation experiences in shaping their attitudes and conceptions of how to teach. (Carter & Doyle, 1995, p. 186)

I was 22 when I did my first practicum, closer in age to my students than my colleagues. Young women, I had been told, had a tough time initiating and maintaining authority in classrooms of teen-aged boys. The advice was simple: "You are not there to be friends with these students; you are there as the authority. Don't smile until Christmas".

Although this issue of control was raised as central to someone of my age and gender, my university courses did not deal with this issue. My fellow students and I literally planned in a vacuum, creating lesson plans, units and tests for an imagined group of students. Our creations were marked on the basis of covering objectives and testing everything we taught (in order to validate its being there). I learned how to write questions that addressed each level of Bloom's taxonomy, and how to write lesson plans detailing how I would achieve each of the day's objectives. I planned units for "typical" Grade 9 students -- students I had never seen. It was through this that I assumed that all of the responsibility in the classroom was mine. During my practica, the students completed the work I assigned, attended the classes and answered the questions I developed, but when the bell rang, and the class ended, it was back to me to plan the next step, mark the work, and determine the sequence of outcomes and questions.

The literature I examined corroborates my personal experience. The teacher education programs that exist in Canada and the United States (Fullan, 1991; Goodlad, 1990) closely parallel the University of Victoria's. Most teacher training programs are not adequately preparing pre-service teachers for the realities of the classroom (Fullan, 1991; Goodlad, 1990), due to a lack of communication between the faculties in which teachers-to-be study, and the design of programs which do not encourage student teachers to use their prior knowledge and attitudes to contribute to the development of their own teaching style.

In Canada, for example, most programs contain three components: general education, methods and foundations courses, and practica (Fullan, 1991). To complete the general education requirements, students take courses in various faculties, and there seemed to me to be little cooperation and communication between these faculties. For example, as part of my general studies, I took the required number of units of English and History courses from the Faculty of Arts and Sciences. There were some requisite courses, such as Canadian poetry and history, but also many electives. I decided to focus on those areas that were within the high school curriculum (the Renaissance and Reformation, for example), but I also took American history and Nineteenth Century Literature, because the topics interested me. I took only one Geography course and one Political Science course, even though the Social Studies curriculum in B.C. high schools contains large components of geography and political science, not to mention current events, civics, urbanization, multiculturalism and a host of other "social" studies. I just did not have room in my program to explore all the areas I might be expected to teach.

The foundations and methods courses were a collection of courses in the Faculty of Education designed to explore teaching methods, evaluation, practicum preparation and the philosophy of education. Of all of these, one stands out. My Social Studies methods instructor modelled many strategies we could use in the classroom and really put the Principles of Learning into practice. Each day as we arrived, we were exposed to a new idea; cooperative learning, role plays, field trips, hypothesis testing and other interactive strategies were modelled, and we were given copies of all the lesson plans. That three week course (taken in the summer before my internship) did more than any other to provide me with some concrete, usable alternatives to lecturing.

The others, which have faded in my memory, involved creating statistically valid tests, reading and discussing literature for young adults, and analyzing textbooks for their reading levels, none of which seemed to survive my transfer to the world of teaching. In no course do I recall talking about the individual needs of the students, dealing with diversity, the sheer volume of content, and other burning issues that even experienced teachers grapple with. There were also few forums for expressing our emotions about this career we had chosen, emotions that ranged from terror and anxiety to optimism and opportunity.

I was fortunate to be accepted into the Saanich Internship Program, an alternative to the traditional fifth year practica in that I took courses during the summer to allow an extended (September to June) practicum in one school. In many ways it was a first year teaching experience, since I was responsible for two classes throughout the school year and also had the opportunity to become involved in school activities. Probably the most significant benefit was that I experienced the "rhythm" of a school year, with its excitement in September and

at Christmas, the doldrums of February, and the thrill of spring and graduation. I got to know many of the students and staff members, and felt a real loss at the end of the year. As a practicum experience, it was hard to beat, and I believe it was instrumental to my being offered a job.

The difficulty lay in the fact that the supervising model was very traditional (my sponsor and university supervisor would come in to the class and write a report which then became the basis for a post-lesson discussion). There was not a sense of being jointly responsible for the class, and my sponsor teachers at the school and supervisors from the university did not always share the same criteria for evaluating my performance. I remember one bewildering exchange with my university supervisor who suggested I pretend I was a rain cloud and climb on my desk to demonstrate the concept of a rainshadow, while ironically, the sponsor teacher of the same class was concerned when I did a role play about colonization because, as he put it: "There was lots of noise, but I'm not sure how much learning was going on". And even though I was not comfortable climbing on my desk, and felt the colonization role play had been very effective, my own pedagogy was not valued by me or my supervisors. It seemed I was expected to do what my sponsor teachers were comfortable with rather than find my own pedagogical comfort zone.

However, there are a myriad of alternative programs (Fullan, 1991) which work to more effectively and naturally reflect and support the growth of teachers through their practica. Most of these contain elements of mentoring, where student teachers and experienced teachers have a shared responsibility for classes (Clandinin, Davies, Hogan & Kennard, 1993), allowing for a more natural conversation about teaching and learning to occur since the pair are working together in the classroom. The journals these teachers wrote best exemplify the

level of support and guidance the team offer each other. Perhaps the most significant unanticipated benefit is that experienced teachers can learn much about their own teaching because they need to formally articulate their beliefs to their partners.

Garry Jones and Gary Godfrey (Clandinin et al, 1993) describe their sponsor-student teacher relationship as a partnership. They met on the first day of school, and co-taught their students, using journals and conversations as methods of communicating about those "difficult problems".

One of Godfrey's (the student teacher) concerns was exactly what I had worried about on my practicum:

> My first worry was classroom management. I said to you, "I've got something that is really bothering me. How do you maintain discipline? How do you keep control of everything so they don't go crazy?" You said to me, "That's a very good question. I don't know how to explain this to you. It's a little bit of this and a little bit of that. You'll have to wait and see." I remember thinking, "I will have to wait and see? This is no answer!" (p. 120)

Since teaching strategies are a combination of science and art, they can be very difficult to articulate. As well, the time of day, week and year, age levels of students, each student's needs and abilities and a teacher's own frame of mind at the particular moment she is called upon to make a decision will affect the decision that is made. As a preservice teacher, I wanted one answer for situations where there were many possibilities, and did not trust myself to have the answer that was right for me.

Jones (the sponsor) felt initially guilty about not being able to articulate the answer, but he did give an answer, just not verbally. Through Jones and Godfrey's team teaching and journalling, some of those intrinsic, difficult-to-articulate concepts became clear. Godfrey learned through watching Jones, and

then by practising what worked. The benefit was mutual; the student teacher found a safe place to ask questions and watch an experienced teacher, the sponsor found himself forced to look at, and articulate, just what he did in the classroom. Schön (1983) writes about professional knowledge:

> When we go about the spontaneous, intuitive performance of the actions of everyday life, we show ourselves to be knowledgeable in a special way. Often we cannot say what it is we know. When we describe it we find ourselves at a loss, or we produce descriptions which are obviously inappropriate...It seems right to say our knowing is in our actions. (p. 49)

After Godfrey watched Jones, he noted:

> I watched the way you brought those kids round on the first day...I didn't know at the time you were building community and I didn't know that the kids would have a voice in this community. But it was then that I noticed that you knew what you were doing, you had confidence. It was a different you. It was not the you I had walked down the hall with, the undecided you, the unsure-how-to-answer-the-question you. In front of the audience you were a different person. (Clandinin et al, 1993, p. 120-121)

Although at the time of my practicum I would have doubted it, I see now an essential source of information and insight for student teachers and sponsors: the student teacher's own experiences, values and beliefs. Because practica are generally seen as one-way learning (that is, the novice learning from the mentor), a whole range of possible ideas and strategies are excluded. If nothing else, preservice teachers were students more recently than most of their sponsors, and can offer that perspective to the conversation.

Helen Mahabir (in Clandinin et al, 1993) describes how she came to trust her instincts as she describes the relationship between herself and her sponsor, Pam:

> Each of us brought our past experiences and expectations into our new relationship. Pam had already experienced intern teaching in a collaborative situation. I had the knowledge I'd gained in university. I entered the relationship quite hesitantly, waiting to see what role she wanted me to play. I was conditioned to see her as the expert. As the student teacher, I believed I knew nothing and would have to learn everything. The only way for me to learn would be to do as I was told, to listen to the advice of my cooperating teacher, and to internalize the proper methods of teaching. (p. 24)

However, through the journals and conversations, Helen's abilities and equality in the classroom were encouraged:

> There's just one last thing I would like to mention. It's in regards to discipline. I have automatically assumed the role and have asked some kids to lower their voices, keep on working...I hope I have not overstepped my place. (p. 24)

Pam responded:

> I'm glad you have! You are a teacher in this class too and so you should take on that role. The kids need us to be consistent, so it would be difficult if you didn't respond according to your feelings. We can be very honest with each other and you need to find your rhythm in the class. Respond in ways that feel right to you. (p. 24-25)

Pam did not offer answers or solutions to discipline issues; rather she encouraged Helen to trust herself and welcomed her as an important member of the class. Helen's self-confidence rose through these journal exchanges:

> Having Pam and Pat Hogan, my university teacher, respond in my journal provided a place for me to figure things out with their support. Writing about my struggles allowed me to develop a feeling for self-evaluation. As Pam and Pat validated and acknowledged my feelings and understanding of my situation, I found I gained peace of mind and acceptance as a teacher. As I struggled with aspects of teaching that were new to me, Pam and Pat storied similar experiences from their teaching careers. I could relate my experiences to their situations and examine the strategies or answers to see if they were relevant to mine. With their help I gained confidence in my ability to work things out. In my journal I discussed classroom management, something that had haunted me for a long time. Pam acknowledged my fears. She did not, however, provide answers. (p. 25)

What is described above was what I had hoped would happen in my teacher education. The collaboration between student teacher, university supervisor and teacher sponsor allowed for a meaningful exchange. The recognition of the fears and concerns associated with starting a teaching career were acknowledged and the beginning teacher was encouraged to develop strategies that felt comfortable and share her thoughts and feelings about the experiences. The additional benefit of acknowledging the student teachers' contributions and allowing the mentors to question their own practice provides a recognition of the cyclical and developmental nature of learning.

The First Two Years

Because I did the systematic reading of literature about new teachers after I had written this section of my story, the single most powerful effect it had was to authenticate my experiences as ones that are common to new teachers. My reality reflects many, if not all, of what has been gathered in the literature. I have interwoven my experiences with the findings of a detailed four volume study

(McDonald & Elias, 1980) on beginning teachers in order to illustrate the match between my personal experience and the generalized experience.

1. Transition Period

My first teaching experiences were terrifying. I felt alone, even though I was surrounded by people. My fellow neophytes seemed to accept the mantle of responsibility and power easily. Becoming "Ms Robertson" did not bring with it instant confidence and authority; if anything, it made me feel an impostor.

> Almost all teachers experience the transition period into teaching as the most difficult aspect of their teaching life and career. There apparently are some teachers who move into teaching smoothly and efficiently, but the majority report the period is one of great difficulty and even trauma. (McDonald & Elias, 1980, p. 42)

2. Anxiety and Isolation

Teaching jobs were scarce in the 1980s. I sent resumes to all 75 school districts in the province, and even attended the "California cattle call". As a result, my graduating class were far flung. A couple of very lucky ones stayed in Victoria; most of the rest of us went North or South. I took the one and only job that was offered me (in northern B.C.) and felt lucky to have it. And yet somehow I felt even more of a charlatan because I was hired without attending an interview. I felt sure that if I had met the principal, all of my insecurities would have been made manifest. When the principal phoned to offer me the job, it did not seem the time to admit my fears of losing control of the class, of breaking down in front of the students, or of letting them get the upper hand. And despite being amongst 600 students and 30 staff members, I was not connected to either group in any meaningful way. If I expressed sadness at leaving Victoria, it was interpreted as an indication that I didn't like my new

community. If I voiced my fears that what I was doing in the classroom wasn't working, I got platitudes back.

> The least studied aspect of this transition period is the fear, anxiety, and feelings of isolation and loneliness that appear to characterize it. There is sufficient information in existing reports to indicate that these feelings are not uncommon; however, individual conversations with teachers are far more revealing than the current literature. (McDonald & Elias, 1980, p. 42)

3. Classroom Management

So I took the route that for me guaranteed some measure of control. In using the word "control", I mean the classroom agenda over which I was gatekeeper. Exactly what was to be studied, how it would be explored, how I would know that the students knew it, the criteria on which that knowledge was judged, and the symbol that represented it on the report card were decided by me as the teacher.

I asked for a copy of course outlines that my colleagues had prepared, and around it built my agenda for what the students would learn, how they would learn it, and how they would show me that they had learned it. Anyone looking at my lesson plan book would have found each lesson itemized, right down to the questions I would ask and when I would ask them. I taught four classes of English 10 that first year, and each one got the same plan, same questions, and same amount of time allocated to the same concept. This does not mean to say I wasn't willing to help students who were having difficulty. It was more that my students, their parents and the school had endowed me with this huge responsibility, and I was responding in the only way I knew. I wanted to show them that I deserved their trust, and that I was in control. The result was that some of my students were engaged, if they happened to learn as I taught, and many others passed through uninvolved and unaffected. It was only through

my discovery that my students were not in charge of their learning that I realized I was in charge of too much.

> The major kinds of problems and difficulties that teachers experience are readily identifiable. Most of them relate to the management and conduct of instruction. These problems are so critical that it is easy to overlook the equally obvious fact that the range of problems includes difficulties with evaluating pupils, being evaluated by the administration, working with parents, developing a consistent teaching style, finding out how the school functions, knowing the rules that must be followed, and a variety of other problems. (McDonald & Elias, 1980, p. 42)

4. Lack of Support

I wish I could express the terror I felt when a class was acting out, the sick feeling of another weekend ended. I kept a calendar hidden at work where I crossed off the days and counted the weeks to the next holiday. And I did not talk about it to anyone. I had wanted to be a teacher since high school. I had invested five years and thousands of dollars in the process of achieving a degree, and found out in January that I had won the Maxwell Cameron Award bestowed by the university for excellence in coursework and practice teaching. The award only reinforced my feelings of pretence.

> Almost all teachers report that they went through this transition period "on their own". They had little or no help available, and found help only through their own initiative. This help usually took the form of seeking out some other teacher in whom they could confide. (McDonald & Elias, 1980, p. 43)

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I remember very few of the individual students that I taught that first year. They came to me as a group and I taught them as a group. The ones I do remember individually are the ones I got to know through the Students' Council, Grad committee, and other extra-curricular activities. I really had fun helping them plan events, and helping them with something they had chosen to do. The

pressure to be an authority did not exist there. We talked about the task at hand, life, then the task at hand again. It seemed to me a more natural exchange, a dialogue between people. On the other hand, the pressure to remain "on task" during class time was enormous.

During my first year of teaching, the principal evaluated me. I ran those classes he observed like a carefully orchestrated dance. Not a moment was wasted on incidentals, side talk. On one horrible weekend, a student was killed in a car accident, and her passenger paralyzed. The Monday after the tragedy, I proceeded with classes as usual. I had made a conscious decision the previous evening to avoid discussing the situation with my class, partly from what I assumed would be the students' wish not be continually reminded of the events, and partly from my own worry that I would say the wrong thing. What made my response so inappropriate was my *assumption* that I knew what was best for her grieving peers. Even though the first block on Monday was a writing class and the girl who had died was a member of that class, I did not provide them with a formal outlet for writing about their feelings if they so wished. I still feel very sad about this. What did these teenagers think about their teacher not wanting to deal with the situation? Why was I not able to find the words to, at the very least, convey to them my sorrow? What opportunities for making writing meaningful, personal and therapeutic might have been acted upon if I had offered the opportunity?

Naturally, a university cannot fully prepare a person to teach. Even the best teacher training program cannot provide all the answers or techniques needed to deal with situations like the one described above. There is a certain amount of on-the-job training that must occur and is dependent on situation, personality, experience, and commitment. However, I found no formal

mentoring system in the school to provide that follow up; at best the support was sporadic and undertaken on an ad-hoc basis by caring veterans. Fullan (1991) describes the need for teacher education to become a continuum, and the understanding that teacher development and school development must be intimately reciprocal. He describes the notion of "induction" (deliberate support programs for beginning teachers) as "one of the most powerful strategies for realizing these assumptions". (p. 301) I recall being so tired of theory that I threw myself into the reality of teaching without a backward thought, while veteran teachers around me bemoaned the lack of time available to reflect, refine, reread and rethink how they did things. It was not until after my second year of teaching, once the immediate need of "learning the ropes" had been satisfied, that I felt ready to examine the pedagogy underlying my actions. Is there not a better mix of theory and practice, of exploring our beliefs about learning within the reality we face?

There have been models developed to address the issue of induction, both from an institutional and individual perspective. Cole and McNay (1989), writing about system-wide support for beginning teachers, identified four major goals of induction programs in Ontario. These include "orientation, psychological support, acquisition and refinement of teaching skills, and development of a philosophy of education" (p. 9) by offering a reduced teaching load, consultations with experienced teachers and administrators, opportunities to observe other teachers, seminars and workshops, and group meetings.

Individual teachers can also become more explicitly aware of their own growth during their beginning years by keeping a portfolio (Zubizarreta, 1994). New teachers must make their own sense of the job, and trust that they have (and are continuing to develop) the knowledge, skills and dispositions that enable

them to make effective pedagogical decisions. A portfolio provides a formalized way to keep a record of successful (and unsuccessful) strategies, reflective statements or journals, descriptions of teaching assignments, samples of student learning, teaching goals and self, peer, and administrator evaluations. The combination of externally provided support and personal formalized reflection mirrors what we know about learning: that people seek out information from many sources, and make sense of it in very different ways.

The last section of this chapter focusses on one particular student who crystallized for me all my concerns about teaching. While the mentoring and induction programs described above may not have prevented this situation, the formal arena for sharing problems and strategies might have alleviated some of my feelings of isolation and provided an opportunity for formalizing and articulating the differences between the way my classroom operated and the way I wished it could operate.

Ben: Shaking the Foundations

> There is probably a strong relationship between how teachers pass through the transition period and how likely they are to progress to high levels of competence and endeavour (McDonald & Elias, 1980, p. 43).

I moved back to Victoria for my second year of teaching. It was not much better; in fact, in many ways it was worse. I assumed that my first year of teaching would be the hardest, and that returning to a familiar place would restore my sense of community. Unfortunately neither proved to be true. It was sinking in; this was the job. I knew that I could not continue in the profession if what I was experiencing was a function of the job rather than the function of it being a new job.

It was in that second year of teaching that I taught Ben.

Ben was in my Grade 10 Social Studies class. His objective seemed to be to do enough work to pass, and disrupt my class with the rest of his time. He managed to push my buttons with every rebellious action. He was a master of whispered comments, yawning in my face, sharpening his pencil while I was talking, walking by a classmate and knocking their books on the floor, jokes made at other people's expense, declarations of "This is so boring", and wandering in late shouting: "Hey, what did I miss? Nothing I bet."

I was in tears the evenings before I saw this class, worrying about what would happen. This was exacerbated by the fact that I had not taught Socials 10 before, and was struggling to stay ahead of the class in terms of lesson plans. I talked to colleagues about how to deal with the situation; their advice was to give the students more work. Typical of people feeling out of control, I seized control over what I could. I planned more, organized more, decided more and prepared more work. This was not better or more interesting work. It was individually assigned seatwork. Thus the class (and I) were punished for Ben's misconduct. The thought of offering a variety of activities to the class, including cooperative strategies, never entered my mind. I rarely sat down with this class, and I rarely left the front of the classroom. That was my position of authority and my place of protection. The issue of control and losing control was as large as when I had started teaching.

Firestone and Rosenblum (in Fullan, 1991) describe it this way:

> The teachers who blame students for difficult classroom situations are the most likely to display an "attitude" to students, to be abrupt with them, and not explain things in detail. Students receiving such treatment recognize that they are not respected which in turn reduces their commitment to school. (p. 175)

I discovered the key to controlling Ben's behaviour was keeping him busy. I gave marks for everything, and was secretly pleased when he failed. In legal terms, marks cannot be used to assess or address behaviour or attitude; they must be reflections on how well a students has achieved the learning outcomes. In practical terms, I used my marks as weapons, and they were one of the few things that worked. Class acting out? Give a pop quiz.

I tinkered, but only to the extent that I became more organized, planned more and "tightened up" my presentation; I was still afraid of doing anything different. I learned some terrible strategies that year. I learned that writing out questions on the board and having them copy down the questions and then answer them took longer than handing out a photocopied sheet. With only one class set of texts, I could use the "Do it now or get zero" approach. I had them copy down boardsful of notes. I moved Ben to the front of the class and kept empty desks around him. This only showed he was winning, and only made him talk louder so those around him could hear. I was thrilled when Ben was away; the tone was better and more productive, and there was more opportunity for positive interactions.

I began to look for ways to keep him from class. I instituted a rule that prevented students coming into my class late. As the bell rang and I closed the door, I breathed a sigh of relief when Ben was not there. During this time it never occurred to me to give this class more freedom or choice; I slowly withdrew all flexibility to maintain some sense of authority. By the time the class ended, I had a pounding headache, which stemmed from my absolute need to be in charge. If I could have controlled the class with my mind, I would have done it gladly.

For me, the ultimate achievement with this class was when they were blessedly silent, all working, and I could sit down and literally relinquish some control. That was a successful day.

My anger towards Ben became harder to conceal or control. If he misbehaved, I'd send him out of the class. This had the added advantage of being formally recorded by the vice-principal. And if he didn't show up to the office? Double whammy. I actively worked to have him removed from my class. Finally, he committed a major transgression at the school, and this combined with his history of being sent out of classes (thanks to me), was the final straw, and he was told to withdraw from school. When he came to me to withdraw, I could hardly hide my pleasure, and indeed, the rest of the year went more smoothly.

When I reflect on this story, I notice two things. One is that it was only Ben, not the 25 others, whom I remember, and yet I planned my lessons as if they were all Bens. The second is that although he was rude and his attitude towards his peers and me showed little respect, he did not threaten or put into question anyone's safety. His behaviour was not excusable, but he was by no means "the worst". And this fact again undermined my confidence. How on earth would I ever handle a really dangerous or threatening situation?

I've thought a lot about Ben over the years. A dropout in Grade 10. Smart, but misguided. He paid a big price for being misguided. He had not treated me with respect, but had I modelled any better for him? Did he see himself as the victim of an oppressive system, or did he have some sense of the choices he had made? How did he view what happened? What kind of job is he doing now?

Where did this situation leave me? I had removed the immediate concern, but had not addressed the issue. There would be Bens every year. The techniques I had used could be reapplied the following year, but they did nothing to inherently change the nature of the class, to make it pleasurable to be there, either for me or my students. I could plan better, be more prepared, have worksheet after worksheet ready to dispense, but the real issue would keep resurfacing. The dynamic in my class was me vs. them; each lesson a battle to be won or lost. And if the war continued, I would lose. At 180:1 the odds were against me. How much energy could I devote to being in charge every moment of every class? Was it humanly possible to plan for every eventuality, always to have the answer, the decision, the strategy ready to put in place?

My experiences and stories related here converge on one theme: control, or more specifically, the losing of it. It began at the university: from my false supposition that planning alone creates an effective classroom atmosphere to the conspiracy of silence that faced me when I tried to talk of these issues. As a new teacher it continued: the lack of mentoring and disavowal of anything learned in the "ivory tower". It culminated in my experiences with Ben, as he continually scratched the veneer of my authority. My attempts to shore up an already shaky structure took all the energy I had. It never occurred to me that perhaps I needed a different structure.

I realized by the end of the second year that I would leave the profession unless something changed. I knew that the level of stress under which I was living, and my unhappiness with my job, would leave me literally sick and tired. I was 25 years old.

How Do We Get There From Here?

The years of teacher training and practicum experiences are an important impact point for teachers. Because student teachers are highly motivated to learn techniques that will assist them in being successful in a classroom, because finding a job is largely based on the results of their practicum experiences, and because there are formalized opportunities for support (through university courses and interaction with sponsors and supervisors), these years are key in developing professionals who are lifelong learners.

Reflecting on the years described in this chapter, I have three suggestions. The first is that methods courses within the Faculty of Education model the Principles of Learning, valuing the knowledge and perspectives that students bring while, at the same time, providing support for continued professional development. Ideally all courses within the Education faculty should model the Principles of Learning, but at the very least, methods courses need to put their "money where their mouth is". The second is that sponsor teachers and supervisors be provided with explicit training to assist them in supporting their student teachers, and third is that a formalized mentoring or induction program be offered by school districts, so new teachers are provided with professional development extending throughout their career.

If methods courses were organized around the Principles of Learning and designed to value the professional knowledge of the students and professors, what might they look like? I will use a hypothetical English Language Arts methods course as an example. First of all, part of the course would involve a discussion about what we know to be true about teaching and learning. What teaching/learning experiences do we remember and why? What does the research offer in the areas of strategies that involve and engage learners, whether

adult or child? Based on what we want graduates of the K to 12 system to be able to do, what experiences will further that goal? What are some of the diverse needs of the learners in our school system? And specifically, how do these relate to the teaching of English Language Arts? I see these as the "warp" of a weaving, the professional beliefs and shared understanding of teaching and learning that anchor our actions.

Based on that jointly developed understanding, the course might then go on to explore the English Language Arts IRP (Integrated Resource Package), which provides the prescribed curriculum outcomes for the province, instructional strategies for meeting the outcomes, assessment techniques and recommended resources. These provide the "weft" of the weaving; the methods we use in English Language Arts classes, the strategies that support the differing needs of the learners, that provide opportunities for individual and group work, that actively involve students in communicating, reading, responding, representing and viewing.

Finally, the methods class itself should employ the Principles of Learning. The instructor would use cooperative learning strategies to teach about cooperative learning, self-evaluation models to show how it might look in a classroom, and so on. This would provide a logical segue into the world of the practicum, where student teachers would enter a classroom familiar with the curriculum, grounded in their beliefs and principles, and comfortable with a variety of strategies. The journalling that was described earlier in this chapter would provide a three way conversation between university sponsor, supervisor and student teacher which could reflect new insights or validate previously held beliefs, provide a "debrief" in order to refine strategies, and acknowledge the important realities of day-to-day management.

Many student teachers have valuable practicum experiences because of the talents and encouragement of their sponsors and supervisors. This informal network of people who are committed, as a professional duty, to supporting their new colleagues, could be built upon and acknowledged formally. Sponsor teachers should be required to participate in ongoing training where they could learn and share ideas about supporting new teachers, encouraging alternative styles of teaching, and effective and meaningful evaluation processes. Sponsors should also know what is modelled and discussed in the methods courses (or even better, attend parts of the courses with their student teachers) so they can provide the classroom setting for the practical applications of the methods. This cross-fertilization of ideas between methods instructors, practising teachers and student teachers would be a rich source of learning, either through discussion or journalling, and a chance to re-engage in the ideals while recognizing the real.

As the graduates of a university enter the teaching profession, a formalized mentoring or induction program would provide further opportunities for growth, which is my second suggestion. Even the most enthusiastic can find a full teaching load a daunting responsibility. Continuing the pedagogical discussion begun during methods courses and practica with a mentor would be one way of valuing the unfolding knowledge of the new teacher. A portfolio kept by the new teacher could either be a personal document or one shared with a mentor as the basis for discussion and growth. The mentor might also assist the new teacher in establishing routines and learning the explicit and implicit "rules" within the school.

Again, the Principles of Learning are central to this notion. If new teachers are given the opportunity to attend workshops, engage in formal and informal discussions with colleagues and create a professional portfolio, we are

recognizing their need both to make sense of the profession based on their individual knowledge about teaching as well as providing a network of colleagues with whom to explore new ideas, techniques and strategies.

Ultimately, through an approach characterized by individual commitment and collegial support, a scenario might unfold this way. A teacher makes the Principles of Learning part of the fabric of her classroom. As a sponsor teacher, her expectations, *and those of her students*, will be that the student teacher also demonstrate those Principles. The student teacher, supported by the methods classes and the joint efforts of the sponsor and supervisor during her practicum, is further enabled with the help of a mentor and inservice opportunities offered by the district and Ministry. It is through this ongoing commitment to a shared set of beliefs that the vision becomes the reality in the classroom.

CHAPTER TWO: REALIZATION

What man has made; man can change.

Frederick Moore Vinson

In Chapter One, I described the "problem", in the context of my discomfort with what was (and was not) happening in my classroom. In Chapter Two, I examine my awakening as a teacher, facilitated by the convergence of several events and opportunities. The first was the professional support I received, both within the school and at workshops and conferences. The second was the resulting personal realizations which allowed me to adopt more effective classroom strategies. Finally, through the Royal Commission's report, *A legacy for learners*, released in 1988, the government provided a new direction for education in British Columbia. These "events" transpired almost simultaneously, and provided me with the practical applications, confidence, and philosophical foundations to improve my classroom practice.

Professional Support: The Aha Experience

During my first two years as a teacher, I had the opportunity to attend some very powerful professional development activities. Many of these workshops provided glimpses into the possibilities of how wonderful teaching could be, but my lived experience in teaching had been so draining, I could not even imagine experimenting. Experimentation implied doing something without being sure of the results. Trusting in my experience as a teacher and the students' willingness to participate seemed more than I could imagine. As well, I was using all my energy just maintaining the status quo.

Brookfield (1990) states that

> ...feeling unsure, realizing our actions sometimes contradict our words, or admitting we are not in control in every event in our practice are anathema to many of us. We believe that unless we anticipate every eventuality and respond appropriately we are failing. Appearing confused, hesitant, or baffled seems a sign of weakness. And admitting that we feel tired, unmotivated or bored seems a betrayal of the humanitarian zest we are supposed to exhibit. (p. 3)

By the end of my second year, I had made two serendipitous discoveries. The first occurred at a national English teachers' conference in Vancouver. It was a profound experience where I saw energetic, committed, dynamic, enthusiastic teachers who loved their jobs. One of the best sessions I attended was with a teacher who had incorporated word processing into all of his writing assignments in order to value the process of writing and encourage students to share their writing with their peers. What was different about this teacher was his comments about engaging students, their interest in the activities, and their realization they were learning essential skills through his class. The other presenters echoed his passion. They were working to make their classes more meaningful to their students, and to give the students an active role in the class.

These teachers' relationships with their students had improved so much that I began to consider the possibility that I had conceived my role in the classroom entirely in the wrong light. It appeared that the very issues I tried to deal with by imposing more control, they dealt with by offering more choice and responsibility. The assignments were meaningful, and these teachers had offered students choices. The students, in turn, saw the assignments as intrinsically interesting. They didn't disrupt; they were too busy, too interested.

The other reason these sessions were so successful was the presenters' focus on the immediate needs of the teacher. By involving us in a "show, rather

than tell" workshop, we were engaged intellectually and emotionally, and we did not need "convincing" that the ideas were sound. Only when we had seen the possibilities in the classroom, did the philosophical discussion occur. Fullan (1991) states that

> ...in-service education pertaining to an innovation must...move from the concrete to the abstract, from the practical procedures and activities to a discussion of underlying principles. (p. 132)

My second discovery, which stemmed from the first, was that when I described why I did not enjoy teaching, I talked about "classroom control", "discipline", "behaviour management", "keeping on top of things" and "staying one step ahead". This only served to further crystallize the central issue. I was viewing teaching as a contest, a battle of wits and energy. I was seeking power over empowerment. I thought that quiet, order, control, and closure were expected and desirable. The assignments and tests I designed demanded these things. What the presenters at the conference espoused was talking, working together and open-ended results. They talked about the work it took to redesign and reconceive their classrooms, and they talked about what a difference it made.

I had finally experienced what had been so rare during my university experience. The presenters at workshops and conferences modelled what they were doing in their classrooms. They advocated engaging learners, and they engaged us. Time flew by in these workshops as I practiced what they preached. Fundamental questions were continually posed: How can students and teachers share responsibility? How can we cultivate a dialogue with students? What skills, knowledge and dispositions do we want to foster?

What I discovered upon my return to school, however, was that since I had been the only staff member to attend some of these sessions, it was difficult to impart to others the enthusiasm I had come away with. These workshops and

conferences were great motivators and "kick-starters" for me, but facilitating change among my colleagues in any formal way was difficult.

Fullan (1991) explains:

> One of the great mistakes over the past 30 years has been the naive assumption that involving *some* teachers on curriculum committees or in program development would facilitate implementation, because it would increase acceptance by *other* teachers....As far as most teachers were concerned, when the change was produced by fellow teachers it was just as much *externally experienced* as if it had come from the university or the government. (p. 127)

Luckily, paralleling these "formal" opportunities to examine change was the informal discussion with colleagues that provided just as much insight into what school could be like for kids. I was under the mistaken notion that, after these inspiring workshops, I was coming back to school with the "answers" for my colleagues. Instead I learned that we had much to offer each other. It is only now that I see that it was colleagues who conversed over the photocopier, by the microwave in the staff room, and in classrooms after school who really supported me as I changed my own beliefs about teaching and learning.

This discovery relates back to the discussion which described the need for continued opportunities for staff members to share and reflect, because

> ...change is a highly personal experience--each and every one of the teachers who will be affected by change must have the opportunity to work through this experience in a way in which the rewards at least equal the cost. (Fullan, 1991, p. 127)

I remember one conversation in particular. It was after school, and a colleague, Wendy, and I were in the teacher prep room getting materials ready. We began a conversation, tentatively at first, since we were both new to the school. What I discovered was that she was implementing many of the pedagogical changes I was only beginning to contemplate. She was involved in a

pilot project, a program called Flexible Studies, putting into practice some of the recommendations of the Royal Commission's recently released report. Listening to her enthusiasm and her belief that she was making school more meaningful and enjoyable for students inspired me. There was no excuse now! I could not rely on the arguments that had served me so well. She and I were similar in age, experience and were both new to the school. We were both in a steep learning curve about what full time teaching was really like, and we were both creating our materials, unable to rely on our still scanty files of resources. During that year, we both benefitted from our discussions, which continued late into the night, as we talked about our philosophy and how we could make it become the reality in our classrooms.

Making the Change Happen: Turning the Questions Inward

It was time to draw on my "personal knowledge", both in the context of what I brought to the classroom as a new teacher and the understandings I developed as I gained experience. For example, I learned from my years as a student that "chalk and talk" teaching was the primary technique used in high school and university, and I knew this method was not as effective as the dependence on its use would suppose. I learned that standing at the front of the class and delivering material was also boring and uninspiring for me as a teacher.

The decision to change occurred for me when the dissonance between what I was doing in my class and what I knew was effective became too obvious to ignore. The realization came with that particular student, Ben, who was my proverbial last straw. I knew the relationship between me and my students was at the core of the change that needed to occur in my classroom. The "why" I had to change and the "what" to change was becoming clearer for me; the "how" was

the difficult part. It entailed taking risks, experimenting, sharing ideas with students, and asking for, and using, their feedback.

Several smokers have told me that the very painful decision to quit occurred after seeing a relative die of lung cancer or a child express concern that smoking will "take you away from me". The knowledge that smoking causes cancer was not enough to encourage a person to quit; a personal crisis seems to be the catalyst, one that brought home the issue and was unavoidable.

I had gone straight from high school to university knowing what I wanted to be. I loved learning and was going to be a teacher; I would make a difference. Two years into my career I realized I was in crisis. I could continue teaching and be miserable and stressed and feel that I had failed, or quit teaching, throw away my ambitions and feel that I had failed. I had reached a crisis in my career. Everything was telling me that the very nature of what I did in my classroom had to change. From workshops and conferences to discussions with colleagues to the Royal Commission, I could not avoid change any longer. And so I began.

The workshops I attended proved to me that interesting activities were natural "anchors" to memory. The more we laughed and talked and practised, the more we really understood what was being presented. One of the funniest sessions I attended was on the importance of writing with a real audience in mind; in this case we had to write a paragraph to teach a four year old how to put on a t-shirt. Our paragraphs were then read, and a facilitator, pretending to be four years old, followed our instructions to the letter. The results were hilarious and thought provoking. The demonstration was proof of how effective (or ineffective) our writing was.

As an English teacher, I was constantly assigning writing tasks, without ever thinking of, let alone formalizing, the audience. What a difference that one

additional activity would make, how much more fun for the students, and how much more beneficial. Students, knowing their work would be judged on its demonstrated efficacy, would be much more likely to take the assignment seriously. The importance of writing appropriately for an audience would be self-evident, and the marking more accurate. What was there to lose?

By taking the proactive approach of involving students, many of the "burrs" that plagued me as a secondary teacher seemed naturally to fall away. Discipline, attendance, time on task, thoughtful responses, and taking school seriously, all improved, according to the workshop leaders. The answer to many of these problems seemingly was not to suppose all the negatives were an unavoidable reality, but rather to construct interesting experiences which assumed the best of the students and teacher.

I thought about Ben a lot during this time. Suppose he had come into class late, expecting the same old boring routine, only to find us all laughing as we watched a pretend four year old following our instructions. His attention-getting would be ignored as students discovered that what was happening in the class was more interesting than his attempts to be class clown. And hopefully Ben would begin to involve himself in classes that offered opportunities for laughter and meaningful learning.

I found that discovering what the research said about why teachers change their practice was difficult. There are many articles and books on new teachers, alternative programs and staff development initiatives, but very little on the *reasons* teachers decided to make changes, experiment and take risks.

Carter (1994) describes the problem of exploring teacher development this way:

> Despite general agreement that teachers' understandings are fundamentally important in teaching and that these understandings change over time, little is actually known about what teachers come to comprehend about teaching processes, their students and the curriculum as they situate their knowledge in the complex settings in which they work. For the most part, attention has focussed on new teachers' behaviours, attitudes and dispositions toward the occupation rather than on what they are learning about teaching. (p. 235)

My discussions with Wendy provided that day-to-day "reality check", bringing me back to why and how we could make things better. When I began to doubt that I could do something, she always asked: "What is the worst that could happen?" I would start to answer her in a number of ways, each time stopping myself at the ridiculousness of my response. What was the worst that could happen if I experimented with my teaching? The students would rebel, demand a "back to the notes" style? Nobody would come to class? An activity would flop and I'd have to modify it?

And I realized that for me, the worst had already happened. I was unhappy in my chosen career, and students seemed untouched in any significant way by the one hundred hours we had spent together in class. But this time, the choice was clear. What I gained through reading the Royal Commission's report were the broad philosophical foundations and provincial context for making these changes.

The Royal Commission

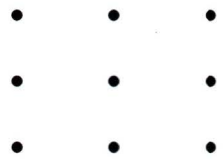
I'm not sure whether it was good fortune that caused the Royal Commission's report to be released in concert with my professional turning point, or whether the education system in general was ready for change. What was interesting to me was how much sense the report made, and how it both validated and valued the changes I was attempting. What made it even more

amazing was the recollection (was it only two years before?) that I had lashed out at the same Commission for their unreal expectations of teachers, and questioned their contributions to the education system.

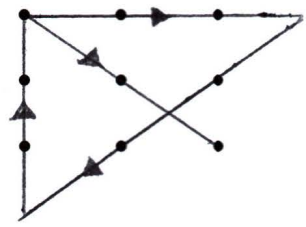
A Legacy for Learners is impossible to summarize in a paragraph, so I will focus on what resonated with me as a teacher. The Commission's recognition that school must meet the needs of its learners, instead of the other way around, was central for me, especially when I remembered my feelings about Ben. The realization that we learn in different ways, at different rates, and are good at different things (concepts that would develop into the Principles of Learning) also explicitly stated my responsibility to work with *all* the learners in my class. Having Ben removed from school was not a victory, but a defeat.

Perhaps most importantly, the report questioned the structures I had assumed were unassailable. The report called into question the traditional organization of schools into grade level, block-by-block covering of discrete subjects by individual teachers. My initial reaction is perhaps best represented by the following puzzle. I was given it in elementary school, and although I worked on it for what seemed like hours, I was unable to solve the problem.

Problem: Connect the nine dots below using four straight lines without removing the pen from the paper.



Solution:



The key was to go beyond the boundaries implied by the dots. I could not see past the nine dots forming a square. I remember feeling really angry. The teacher had not given me permission to go outside the boundaries! How was I supposed to know I could do that?

Going beyond the boundaries in schools would entail not only personally evaluating the efficacy of my teaching methods, but also reaching out to colleagues to jointly question, reflect and experiment. Administrators also needed to be included as the structure and organization of high schools was questioned. The Commission was asking educators to collaborate, brainstorm and problem solve, in order to offer the best for the students for whom we were responsible.

The one year described in this chapter provided me with the rich experiences, conversations, reflections and philosophy that encouraged me to rethink my pedagogy. This powerful combination of experimentation, discussion, and reflection prepared me for the challenge of working in the Flexible Studies program where I not only imagined, but went, beyond the boundaries.

How Do We Get There From Here?

> We have a huge negative legacy of failed reform that cannot be overcome simply through good intentions and powerful rhetoric. Paradoxically, the way ahead is through melding individual *and* institutional renewal. One cannot wait for the other. (Fullan, 1991, p. 354)

The recommendations in this chapter reflect the need for the professional to take responsibility for improving her own classroom practice; in other words, to commit to lifelong learning, and for organizations to support individuals through meaningful staff development.

I believe it is the professional responsibility of educators to challenge themselves to try new strategies, explore a variety of methods and adapt to the needs of the students they teach. Despite being around people every moment of the day, teaching can be very isolating. There are few opportunities built into a timetable for collegial interaction, team teaching, watching one another's lessons and so on. As a result, individuals must proactively seek time to discuss pedagogy with their colleagues and to reflect on the question "What can we do to make the teaching/learning situation better in our classrooms?"

So how might staffs at the very beginning of this journey start to look at issues within their schools and create a climate of mutual support? Of the many models that have been successfully used, I will describe two.

The first was an example at a workshop of two teachers unhappy with the negative tone that characterized teacher contact with one another. In the staffroom and hallways, it seemed as if every discussion was about the "bad" students and how disruptive they were. These two teachers made a pact that they would "catch these students being good" and share their stories with one another in the hallways and staffroom. By focusing on the positive and sharing stories of growth and change, these two teachers made a significant contribution to the morale of the staff. It became more common for good news to be shared, and although there were still concerns, a climate that acknowledged the good things that were happening had been established.

The second was a model of problem solving used with a staff highly resistant to giving up time after school to explore solutions. Posters were put up in the staff room asking everyone with a spare in first block to brainstorm "burning issues". The second block was used by those with spares to cluster and priorize the problems. The third block teachers on spare brainstormed solutions

to the problem identified as the most important, and the final two blocks were asked for input about implementing these solutions. The administration then began working with these ideas and involved interested staff. And so the growth began.

If it is the individual's professional responsibility to continually learn about learning, it is the responsibility of the teachers' professional community to provide vehicles which will foster that learning. Lieberman (1995) summarizes the concerns about current staff development, which is often seen as

> ...a transferable package of knowledge to be distributed to teachers in bite-sized pieces. It implies a limited conception of teacher learning that is out of step with current research and practice. (p. 591-592)

She also expresses the irony that

> ...what everyone appears to want for students--a wide array of learning opportunities that engage students in experiencing, creating, and solving real problems, using their own experiences, and working with others--is for some reason denied to teachers when they are learners. (p. 591)

What she is saying is that our own professional development opportunities often fail to acknowledge that the Principles of Learning apply to teachers as well!

Inservice modelled on what we know to be true about effective learning means that individual workshops must be reinforced within the organization in which teachers exist every day. For example, although I attended many powerful inservice sessions, I had no formal way of sharing the information with my colleagues. We need structures within schools that acknowledge that schools are learning organizations for the staff as well as the students.

Study groups, action research and "teacher as researcher" projects can be effective professional development activities which provide ongoing support for exploring innovations. Since these models necessitate that teachers work in

groups to explore a question or topic they have chosen, they share the information and insights they have discovered. Because the ideas explored are presumably ones of immediate interest to those involved, the findings can be quickly acted upon, and a new phase of exploring the impact of those findings can begin.

> What characterizes these examples of professional learning is that their lifespan is not one or two days. Instead, they become part of the expectations for teachers' roles and form an integral part of the culture of the school. Learning and development become as varied and engaging for teachers as they are supposed to be for students. Being involved as a learner and a participant provides openings to new knowledge and broadens the agenda for thought and action. (Leiberman, 1995, p. 593)

Again, the interconnectedness of the change process becomes an important consideration. If, as I have recommended in the previous chapter, preservice and beginning teachers are experienced in using a wide variety of strategies, and have worked with a sponsor or mentor to refine and adapt these strategies, then much of the groundwork has been done. A relationship has been built where there is willingness to take risks, discuss ideas, and to watch and be watched. An individual given the opportunity to attend a workshop or conference out of district would have a pre-existing community in the school with their mentor, sponsor teacher or study group, who would become logical beneficiaries of the strategies and ideas explored at the conference.

These long term support groups value both the knowledge that individuals bring and the extending of that knowledge that can be made collectively.

> For if teacher learning takes place within the context of a professional community that is nurtured and developed both within and outside the school, then the effects may be more than just an expanded conception of teacher development. Indeed such learning can bring about significant and lasting school change. (Lieberman, 1995, p. 596)

CHAPTER THREE: COLLABORATION

For the things we have to learn before we can
do them, we learn by doing them.

Aristotle

The previous chapters established the foundation for my decision to work in the Flexible Studies program. Flexible Studies gave me the opportunity to explore and strengthen my belief in the importance of providing students with choice in, and responsibility for, their education. In this chapter, I describe the program, including a typical day for a student and teacher. It was through my four years in Flex that I was able to make the changes I knew were necessary in my relationships with my students, my colleagues and myself as a teacher.

What is the Flexible Studies Program?

Flexible Studies was developed by parents concerned that their elementary school children had an alternative to a traditional high school, and by district and school staff who were ready to implement some of the recommendations that had recently been made by the Royal Commission on Education.

The tenets of the program involved combining those positive aspects of the elementary years (contact with fewer teachers, more project work, integration, more flexible timetabling) with an academically challenging high school experience. The idea was to maintain rigour and high expectations, but also to foster student choice, responsibility and self-directedness. The program centred on English, Social Studies, Math and Science. The students attended their electives in the regular program.

As the Flex team began planning for year two, they decided to expand the existing Grade 8 and 9 program to Grade 10, and they asked me to join the team.

I knew this was going to entail putting into action everything I was learning about how to engage and empower students, and it terrified me.

During my first year in Flex, we were still very much tied to the regular school structure. If Charles Dickens had been there, he would have titled his novel *A Tale of Two Systems*. We used percentages, letter grades and computerized report cards, and divided the school year into terms in conjunction with self-paced learning, student designed activities and integration of subject areas. There was a conflict between "regular" and "Flex" students (more from the staff than the students). Why could Flex students rewrite tests? Why were they eligible for the Honour Roll if they did? Why could they work in the hall? Was it fair to the regular students that Flex students had choices in how to demonstrate their learning? It was the best of times; it was the worst of times.

Many people have asked me if working as a "school within a school" was frustrating. The answer was "Yes!", but with qualifications. The frustrations of having to justify our every action had the accompanying benefit of ensuring we were clear about our philosophy and practice. Flex also enabled me to look at the traditional system, which had so troubled me, from a fresh perspective. I saw the opportunities our students had compared to their peers, and saw the frustrations of teachers who were bound by hour blocks, three times a week. I also discovered that how I spent my time had significantly changed from the previous years.

In order to explain our vision of the Flexible Studies program, I have used the Principles of Learning and William Doll's 1989 article "Foundations of a post-modern curriculum" (published in the same year I began in Flexible Studies) to illustrate some of the changes we were attempting to make.

1. Learning requires the active participation of the student

Doll states that a post-modern curriculum must be based on what we know to be true about people's development, understanding that it is "punctuational and erratic, not linear and incremental." (p. 251) Therefore:

> In regard to daily lesson plans the focus would be not on closure but on flexibility for alternative yet productive pathways. Lesson plans would be designed to produce just enough disequilibrium that students would develop their own alternatives and insights....Overall the broad goal would be to combine closure with openness, performance with development, right answers with creative solutions and processes. (p. 251)

Outside of class, I developed units for the students, but within those units were many options. The students could work in groups or alone, and could choose how to demonstrate their learning. Timelines were suggested but marks were not deducted if assignments were late, and students could not write an end of unit test until they had completed all the work within the unit. The key was that they needed to be actively involved because the assignments were constructed in ways that enabled this. Role plays, simulations, cooperative learning, "student as expert", and class presentations, were all strategies students saw as inherently interesting ways of approaching the Social Studies and English curriculum outcomes.

Because the students were with us for half their timetable, we instituted a weekly calendar which showed demands (which everyone had to attend), drop-ins (for those who wanted extra support or help) and testing blocks. When students were not scheduled to attend a demand or drop in, they organized their time to work on units through individualized help, studying for tests, or working with peers on a project.

Our expectations of the students were high. Students demonstrated their understanding of all the learning outcomes before they wrote the end of unit test.

This had the additional benefit of making tests a relatively unstressful experience. Students knew they would be required to indicate their understanding of the outcomes, understandings they had developed during the unit.

We also encouraged students to take responsibility for the organization of their learning. They checked the calendar for required sessions, signed up for tests, scheduled their time in school and at home to complete units in Humanities, Math and Science, and kept a weekly planner, in which they set goals and priorities for themselves, kept track of marks, and recorded appointments.

The responsibility the students demonstrated was the single most impressive component of the program. I listened to Grade 8s show prospective parents and students the program, and explain our philosophy and practices. Students wanted more input on the creation of units, and asked for more time to be spent on a topic because they were enjoying it. Some approached me to develop a grammar unit because they felt it was important to know. Groups have spoken in front of school district personnel, school trustees, elementary schools and parent meetings, explaining and describing how the program works for them. The students felt an ownership and pride in their education that I had never before seen.

2. People learn in a variety of ways and at different rates

Doll (1989) continues his view of a post-modern curriculum as one in which:

> ...curriculum planning should be a two-tier or hierarchical process. The first tier would involve broad, general goals, set by the teacher as the expert in the field....The second tier would emerge as the particulars of the curriculum began to take shape. This tier would vary from class to class and would involve the class--teacher and students--working as a group or community....Students could be involved in choosing homework assignments, methods of evaluation, projects to be completed. (p. 252).

The next school year saw two more changes; I integrated the English and Social Studies units into Humanities units, and I began teaching all the Grade 8, 9, 10 and 11 Flexible Studies students. These two developments were incredibly freeing. First, there are so many overlapping skills in English and Socials, and so many natural connections that the curriculum began to "come alive" as we explored war poetry in the context of World War I and II, for example, or looked at the broader issue of racism while reading *To Kill a Mockingbird*. And because the students were in the program for several years, I could watch them grow, and develop units appropriate to their abilities and previous experiences. The artificial year fell away as the students and I saw June as both a time for closure and goal setting for the next year.

The students began to take more "risks" in their learning, choosing strategies and timelines that worked for them, instead of relying on an externally mandated set of parameters. Some students worked on more than one Humanities unit at a time (even exploring ways of tying units together); others preferred to focus on them sequentially. Some would rework assignments to achieve a certain letter grade; others were interested in working through material quickly. Students who had felt such pressure to move at a certain pace began to

listen to their instincts for the pace that was right for them. Even the developing of units was more enjoyable. I wasn't making worksheets; I was using my creative capacities to develop role plays and other activities for students who looked forward to new units.

3. Learning is both an individual and group process

During class time I sometimes lectured, but more often I worked with small groups who needed help, marked student presentations (have you ever seen a musical of *Julius Caesar*?), and acted as a resource person. The stress of being centre stage to an unwilling audience was gone; instead I was interacting with students who found this way of learning meaningful. Teachable moments abounded because students came to me when they needed help, and worked on their own or with others when they didn't. Doll describes it as:

> ...the teacher and the students...seen in a sharing relationship....Mutual inquiry, rather than the transmission of knowledge or production of specific behaviours, is the general framework in which this relationship would be placed. (p. 252)

Wendy (the Math teacher) introduced the concept of "three, then me", which encouraged students to seek help from three peers before going to her for the "answer". Because all of our students were there at the same time, there was plenty of opportunity for peer support and older-younger student coaching. Older students became resource people for the "new kids", and since many younger siblings joined the program as the years went by, we became, quite literally, a family program. The younger students, then, came into our program with mentors and role models, a built-in support system, and an understanding of our expectations.

Within our Flex blocks, the staff and students manipulated the timetable. Being able to take the students for four hours at a time allowed me to spend a

day canoeing with Grade 10s in a voyageur experience, involve Grade 9s in a workshop on "Rethinking Columbus", have two media specialists in for an afternoon working with the Grade 11s on media literacy, and organize a Medieval fair for the Grade 8s.

How Did it Look for Students and Teachers?

What became obvious through conversations with colleagues and students not in the program was that, although we all started at 8:27 am and finished at 3:02 pm, what happened between those times was vastly different for the "regular" and Flex students and teachers. I have included a sample day for a student and teacher in the program to illustrate how the traditional student-teacher roles, relationships and expectations had changed.

Layle's Day

Layle is a Grade 8 student in the program. When she arrives Monday morning she reads the calendar for the week. She sees that she has a Science demand in the first block to do a lab on magnetism. Layle signs into the Science lab and attends the demand, taking notes and working on the lab as instructed. She asks Brenda (the Science teacher) a few questions about an assignment she is having difficulty with before she heads upstairs for her Math drop-in. Wendy had indicated on the calendar that any students wanting to go over the concepts in Unit 11 should meet with her at 9:30. Layle sits with four other students and together they go through the material, asking Wendy for guidance when needed. Next Layle talks with me about her upcoming test. She wants to do some review questions on the Renaissance; so I spend a few minutes quizzing her on the information. The rest of the morning she has designated for two things: she wants to do a few practice questions in Math to make sure she understands Unit 11, and she wants to finish writing up the lab for Brenda. When I walk around

the room, I notice Layle asking a Grade 9 student if she is on the right track in Math. She then finishes her Science assignment.

During lunch, Flex students often stay in our classrooms, and Layle is no exception. She eats lunch with friends and they quiz each other on the test they have signed up for that afternoon. Last block is a designated Testing Block. Students in all grades and disciplines have signed up for tests and handed in a "Test Me" slip to our assistant. Since the test takes Layle only forty-five minutes, she uses the rest of the block to show Wendy her Math work, receive the Unit 11 "Test Me" slip, and to get the new unit.

Kerry's Day

On Monday morning, I arrive at school with a pile of marked assignments to hand back to students via their mailboxes. I write my meetings on the calendar, so students can see my schedule for the week. I have a demand first block with my Grade 9s to continue with *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. We have divided the parts and are reading and analyzing the play together. Anyone walking into the class would see a fairly traditional model of instruction. However, since we finish Act IV ten minutes before the block ends, and there isn't time to begin something new, we end the demand. I go to my desk and deal with some student concerns regarding clarification of assignments, and I give out three "Test Me" slips after I check the work. Because all the students are there at one time, I must keep about twelve units in my head, since there can be a three unit spread at any grade level.

The second block is a Grade 10 demand where students are introducing a Pacific Rim country to the class. They have dressed in costume and made ethnic food for us to sample while we listen to their presentation. The group also was responsible for creating and marking a test based on information from their

presentation. During the break I am busy helping students or talking about the weekend with them.

I have two appointments the next block, one with a student who wants to do a test orally because he was not successful on the written attempt, and the other with a small group of students who are going to present a scene from *A Midsummer Night's Dream* for me. These do not take the hour, so I have time to mark and check in with students who are exhibiting what we affectionately called HAB (Humanities Avoidance Behaviour). Since the last block is a testing block, I did not schedule any demands. The time is useful for marking and meeting with individual students.

My Relationship with Students

Throughout this thesis, I have discussed how I made changes to more fully involve students in their education. Many of my decisions about the "how" of teaching were constructed based on research, modelling effective practices and trial and error. However, by its very definition, engaging students necessitates involving them in decision-making and incorporating their ideas in what happens in the classroom. Doll (1989) envisions a "post-modern" curriculum that "will accept the student's ability to organize, construct and structure, and will emphasize this ability as a focal point in the curriculum." (p. 250)

As the teacher and the "responsible adult", I needed to combine my experience, knowledge and values about teaching with the curriculum, as the foundations for making what happened in the classroom useful and suitable for my students. Just as importantly, and often neglected, however, were the students' ideas and suggestions and needs.

The best way to summarize my relationship with the students in Flexible Studies was that it was everything my relationship with Ben wasn't. I did not

feel intimidated, threatened or unsure of what I had to offer these students, nor they me. We were working together to learn, make connections, and improve. Students had a vested interest in making the units interesting and relevant, because they were responsible for completing them. Keeping us on track during demands was in their best interest; a far cry from the "do anything to distract the teacher" mentality I had previously encountered. Goodlad (1984) describes the problem this way:

> Somewhere, I suspect, down in elementary school...a subtle shift occurs. The curriculum--subjects, topics, workbooks, and the rest--comes between the teacher and student. Young humans come to be viewed only as students, valued primarily for their academic aptitude and industry rather than as individual persons preoccupied with the physical, social, and personal needs unique to their circumstances and stage in life. (p. 80)

Fortunately, our students took increasing ownership over what happened to "their" program. Instead of asking for ideas about how to present something, they invented their own. They amazed us with their talents, thoughtfulness and commitment to what they clearly saw as their education, and it freed us to be more experimental. I have seen dances, plays, mock trials, mobiles, pop-up books, musicals, videos, crosswords, board games, personal journals, newspaper articles, comic books, poetry anthologies and posters that made me as proud as any parent. The students were honest about what worked and what didn't and gave us the immediate feedback we needed to improve the system. I found myself showing my colleagues assignments that Flex students had done because I was so impressed with the skills and knowledge they were demonstrating. While some bemoan the behaviour of today's young people and fear for the future, I revelled in the possibilities and eagerly await the students' voice in the community.

The Flex team of teachers also offered the students a small, but significant, choice. We gave them permission to use our first names, which was eagerly adopted by the majority of students. If we really believed our students were our partners, and because we spent nearly 500 hours of class time with each other every year, Mr. and Ms seemed too formal for the intimate relationship we were working so hard to foster.

Perhaps the students' own thoughts will best express their feelings about Flexible Studies. The comments included here are from students in all grades in the program, collected three years ago for a presentation to school district staff. Their remarks are honest and insightful, and I believe, show a desire to do well at school, providing school is a place that is receptive to their needs.

When I asked them whether any student would be successful in the program, the response was yes, as long as the students wanted to be. What prevented them from wanting to? Several mentioned that elementary schools had not prepared them in terms of self-confidence nor had they provided them with a solid skill base in order to take on a challenge like Flex. Teachers at elementary schools were seen as prepared, qualified and knowledgeable, but the consensus was that students are not taught *how* to do things. The product was emphasized. One student commented that all students *can* learn, but we cannot expect everyone to move at the same pace. He said that even if it took some until they were twenty-five to graduate, at least they would have succeeded. When another student mentioned the cost of educating people for so many years, he replied, "What is the cost of failing? We end up paying for welfare and UI for those who don't succeed in school or in the workplace".

Ironically, it was the teachers whom the students thought would have the hardest time adjusting to a Flexible Studies program. Many, they felt, wanted too much control, and did not give students choices, let alone freedom.

All the students I spoke to felt that parents needed to know what was happening at school, but that the central educational relationship was between the student and teacher. What surprised me was how supportive the students were of communication between home and school, and yet, wanted to state strongly that it was, for them, a personal responsibility to take charge of their education and speak freely about it with their teachers and parents.

The skills and attitudes Flex engendered were given high marks, and the students noticed drastic differences between regular and Flex classes. Even in Grade 11, "regular" students were not given any choice in terms of the novels they read, nor the current events issues they studied, nor in how they demonstrated their understanding. Some of the students said that Flex was "better than nothing" in terms of freedom and flexibility, while others felt it offered them all they needed. The older students were the ones who were more interested in pushing boundaries and felt that school systems operated, in one student's words, on "This is what you will be taught'", rather than "This is what you can learn". Schubert (1988) describes it this way:

> The greatest act of social responsibility for educators, then, should be to acknowledge the existence of relevant and meaningful concern in the life-worlds of their students. Such an acknowledgement would go far to recover the sharing of basic human interest and concern that schooling too often erodes into insignificance. (p. 169)

Many of the students were highly involved in outside activities, and spent almost as much time involved with sports, dancing, music and work as they did at school. Because they organized how and when they did their work, Flex

benefitted those students most. They knew not to schedule a test the day after a band concert, play or performance, and appreciated that we encouraged them to use that flexibility.

I read many articles about programs similar to Flex. Although the organization, scheduling, target groups, and size of the programs varied greatly, the foundational philosophy of engaging and involving students more fully in their education was consistent.

The similarities show through the descriptions of students' experience as: "...teaching themselves, using each other's knowledge to learn more than just from a book or notes" (Nickle, Flynt, Poynter & Rees, 1990, p. 149), and "Low-achieving schools will demonstrate greater student achievement when the school and total community organize themselves as if each student was the only student in town." (Cawelti, 1995, p. 16)

The most interesting comment from the Flex students was that they did not want to be left alone, isolated or on a correspondence system; all valued the peer and teacher contact. However, they felt they did not need a teacher "hovering" or taking control of their education. In fact, the teacher-student relationship was essential to the success of the program. Like any interpersonal relationship, each member needs space and comfort, independence and support. They were happy we were there, and happy we gave them space. A Grade 8 student said: "It's easier to learn because I own my mistakes".

My Relationship with Colleagues in Flexible Studies

My question in this thesis concerns the combination of teachers' personal knowledge and professional support as key to making effective changes for students. My colleagues in the program valued both of these. As "subject area specialists", we relied on one another to plan effective curricular units and ensure

the different content area voices were heard in cross-curricular units. We relied on advice and support from each other, and were able to confront many previously hidden biases as we started to look at the "whole student". Some of my less successful writers were gifted mathematicians; and for the first time I had the opportunity to see sides of students previously inaccessible to me. We also began to share teaching strategies predominantly used in one content area, and saw the possibilities for use in others. For example, Wendy, the Math teacher, used manipulatives extensively. The Science teacher, Brenda, and I brainstormed possibilities for their use in our areas. I showed them portfolios students had compiled, and immediately they saw the possibilities. Nias (1989) describes it this way:

> [Teachers] are happiest in a social environment characterized by mutual dependence in which "sharing" is the norm and individuals do not feel ashamed to admit to failure or a sense of inadequacy....Relationships between staff who can and do help each other...are characterized by: personal accessibility; plenty of opportunity for discussion; laughter; praise and recognition." (p. 152-153)

Keeping the vision and reality closely connected took an enormous amount of work within the Flex department. We certainly met more often than any other department because we were responsible for the core of our students' learning. We had to meet to plan field trips, write reports on students, collate information, plan parent evenings, plan integrated units, modify procedures, stamp out fires, and keep apprised of how every student was doing in every subject. However, this frequent contact had a significant benefit; we really became a team. We needed each other for information, support and ideas. We had to continually revisit our philosophy and talk together, because we were constantly being challenged to defend and develop our processes and program.

Unintentionally we implemented many of the effective models of professional support. I became a colleague in the truest sense of the word with the other members of the Flex team. We shared a common goal, and encouraged and supported each other in its attainment. We were in an environment that respected risk-taking and encouraged multiple approaches to solving problems for both students and teachers. We read articles, visited other programs, took time to revisit our philosophy, and began asking our elementary colleagues for insights about what they saw as important during the transition between Grades 7 and 8. The teachers who had recommended students for our program wanted to know how their former students were doing, so we sent copies of our reports to them. This, in turn, helped inform their decision making for the following year.

Although we did not realize it at the time, we were living what the research shows to be necessary for effective educational change. Fullan (1991) states:

> Within the school, collegiality among teachers, as measured by the frequency of communication, mutual support, help, etc., was a strong indicator of implementation success. Virtually every research study on the topic has found this to be the case. (p. 132)

My Relationship with Myself as a Teacher

It would be untrue to say that I had completely metamorphosed as a teacher. I still had times of doubts, frustrations and questioning. However, I no longer doubted that my students had the opportunity to be active and involved in their learning. The issues I grappled with now had little to do with discipline, bored, inattentive students, or feelings of bitterness about my job. If anything, the opposite was true. I now examined the pedagogical soundness of a specific

strategy rather than whether it would take up a hour of class time. Atwell (1987) describes her transformation as a teacher this way:

> I confess. I started out as a creationist. The first days of every school year I created; for the next 36 weeks I maintained my creation. My curriculum. From behind my big desk I set it in motion, managed and maintained it all year long...I didn't learn in my classroom. I tended and taught my creation. These days, I learn in my classroom. What happens there has changed; it continually changes. I've become an evolutionist, and the curriculum unfolds now as my kids and I learn together. (p. 3)

I was proud to be a teacher. I felt as though I was making a difference, and offering students something new and empowering. I enjoyed working with students because I knew they would be eager and involved. Again, I do not intend to paint a falsely idyllic situation. Some students found the demands of the program too rigorous, and others chose not to involve themselves. Every phone call home was not positive and glowing, but the attitude of most parents and students was one of problem-solving and working together rather than denying and blaming .

An additional benefit was the confidence I gained as a teacher. It is true that part of that comes with experience, but because I was immersed in the program and believed in its tenets, I found that I developed a much clearer picture of my educational beliefs. I had to defend, explain, and analyze why we were doing what we were doing with prospective parents, other staff members, visitors, and students. It was a great feeling to be approached by other staff members for ideas about teaching. This takes me back to the "empowerment" issue described in Chapter Two. At that time I realized I needed to change, and I was ready to try some new strategies in my own classroom, but was too frightened to approach my colleagues with my ideas. Through the subsequent

years, however, I came to believe that I did have something to offer other teachers.

When I compare the words I have used in the preceding paragraphs to those in Chapter One, the changes in myself as a teacher and in my teaching become very clear. Gone were the days of "terror", feeling sick about Monday morning, crossing off days on the calendar, seizing control, and pleasure in a student's failure. Instead I felt pride, empowerment, confidence and enjoyment. Ironically, although I felt these positive emotions, they did not translate into having the "answers". I suppose it is best summarized in the permission I gave myself to be a "student" teacher, in both senses of the word. I now saw myself as a teacher of students, not of English and Social Studies, and I also realized that I would always be a teacher learning about her craft. This change in perspective, of course, necessitated changes in my classroom strategies, and it was in this context that I felt I had something to offer my colleagues.

How Do We Get There From Here?

I do not mean to suggest that Flexible Studies is the "magic bean" that will solve all our educational problems. Instead I offer the program as the path I walked to put my vision into action. Each teacher, or group of teachers within a school, must examine the needs of the school and the strengths of its educators in order to implement the Principles of Learning. The recommendation for this chapter is to take the time to articulate the vision, and work, slowly and patiently, through the process of change.

Again, building on the recommendations of the previous chapters, this will be a more likely and feasible scenario if there are already collaborative, supportive structures which encourage teacher reflection, discussion, experimentation and the sharing of ideas. Because of the immediacy of teachers'

needs, it is often advantageous to start with the specific and concrete strategies that a teacher might use in her next class, and work from there to the philosophical underpinnings. Designating time during every staff meeting to a pedagogical discussion based on an article, workshop idea or strategy, holding a "swap meet" for teachers to share lesson plans and activities, and hosting mini professional development sessions over dinner are examples of how staffs have begun to work together to improve classroom practice.

I described Flexible Studies as a place where I went "beyond the nine dots" because as a team we chose to question even the most formalized structures (the timetable, for example) if we felt they got in the way of learning. The question "What structures do we have to keep and what is negotiable?" may provide an opportunity to articulate the things we do because they are unbreakable rules, such as the number of days in session and the number of minutes of instruction, and what we do because we have always done them that way, such as use bells to indicate class change and divide learning into discrete subject areas. The items that fall into the latter category can then be modified or adapted to meet the needs of all the learners in the building and the staff make a conscious decision to continue or discontinue the practice because *they have made the choice*.

The conversation is then about what we choose to keep and choose to change within the parameters of our responsibilities to the public, and our understandings of what promotes and inhibits learning. This is where our return to the Sullivan Commission recommendations, the *Kindergarten to Grade 12 Education Plan*, and those books and articles that have provided insights about the vision of education become so valuable. When our team questioned the teaching of English and Socials as discrete subjects we asked the following questions. What can we offer as alternatives based on the research and needs of

the students in our program? If a structure is to be changed, upon what criteria will the change be judged? How will we know if the change is improving student learning, attitudes towards school, and utilizing the Principles of Learning?

We can learn a lot from the young people in our school system. If we can share their view of the world as a wondrous place, their ability to be unabashedly enthusiastic, and their understanding of mistakes as opportunities to learn, we begin to become life long learners ourselves.

CHAPTER FOUR: FORMALIZATION

The order is rapidly fadin'
And the first one now
Will later be last
For the times they are a-changin'

Bob Dylan

Chapter Four, the final part of my story, describes the position I now have at the Ministry of Education, a position which directly relates to the question posed in this thesis. Through my work as a Regional Coordinator with Field Services, I am responsible for supporting the implementation of Ministry policy and curricula, and I have talked to literally hundreds of teachers about their own growth processes, and the professional knowledge they bring to the classroom. My role is to connect individuals and organizations (schools, districts, universities) within the education community, in order to bring about meaningful change in the classroom.

Since my thesis centres on the combination of personal commitment and community support required to nurture growth, I have included in this chapter recommendations and suggestions over which I have some measure of control to adopt as a personal growth plan for my job.

Why Did I Move to the Ministry?

After teaching in Flex for five years, I was seconded to the Ministry of Education. Why did I leave a program in which I passionately believed and students who I loved teaching?

The program was in good hands; my colleagues and students were dedicated and energetic, and I felt it was time for me to seek out opportunities to work with other teachers, hearing their struggles and successes and sharing my

own. I wanted to become a facilitator like those who had so inspired me. I felt that I had something unique to offer. The fact that I was a high school teacher who had "been there" and had implemented some significant changes made me credible with my colleagues. I also knew, just like the realization in Chapter Two, that there were many innovative teachers in the province who had much to teach me.

The one major frustration I felt during my involvement in the Flexible Studies program was the feeling of being a "pocket" within a traditional system. I was very happy with my relationship with colleagues and students in the program, but I knew there were other teachers throughout the province sharing feelings similar to my own as we worked to make our classrooms better places for kids. During my years in the program, I became increasingly interested in how other teachers were making a difference for students. I knew our program was not exportable; packaging Flexible Studies for implementation in other schools was not the answer. And yet I also knew that teachers all over the province had experienced frustrations, despair, and breakthroughs as I had, and had tips, techniques, strategies and ideas that should be shared.

Another realization I had come to was that in the traditional "stand and deliver" model, I felt as though I was expected to be the expert, the one who knew all and dispensed information. I found that expectation isolating, arrogant and harmful; isolating in that I did not feel permission to be unsure or seek help, arrogant in that I was teaching in a system that put my construction of knowledge ahead of the learners', and harmful in that the image of student as empty vessel was not only perpetrated, but actively maintained. From the student's perspective, learning would indeed seem disconnected and lacking in personal meaning if each teacher in each classroom helped to fill the vessel with

whatever liquid was the "flavour of the month". From my perspective, the pressure on me to be the keeper of the knowledge was unreal and absurd in a time of information overload.

From the changes I made through my own professional development, through talking to other teachers, and through putting into practice the ideas that emerged, I realized that the ability to change came from being able to admit and celebrate the fact that I did not know everything. Developing the capacities to live with change, to tolerate ambiguity, and to see that black and white are not the only options, are fundamental to curricular and instructional reform for students, but are unrealizable without the internalization of these beliefs in teachers. I saw a need for those who were advocating these changes within the Ministry to have teachers working with them to support the achievement of this goal.

"So What Do You *Do* Exactly?"

With the government's move away from the "Year 2000" in 1993, it was sending a clear message to its critics. Since the release of the Royal Commission's report there had been drafts, response drafts, discussions, revisions and further drafts to the Primary, Intermediate and Graduation programs. These documents were abstract in the sense that they provided foundations, philosophy and rationale without providing teachers with curricula; in other words, this was the destination, but we had not yet provided the map.

Fullan (1991) best expresses the conundrum regarding system-wide change:

> Governments can't win. If they encourage widespread debate during the development phase, the policy gets delayed and the discussions bog down in abstract goals (not on what changes in practice are at stake). (p. 274)

With the release of the *Kindergarten to Grade 12 Education Plan* in September 1994, the Ministry of Education reversed the trend of heavy consultation and began consolidating the findings into a final product. The *K to 12 Plan* is intended as a foundational document, outlining, among other things, the Goals of Education, the Mission Statement of the education system in B.C., and forthcoming policies. For each of the broad areas of change described in the *K to 12 Plan*, there is an accompanying curriculum or policy to support its implementation. Much work is also going into concrete support for teachers. For example, between July 1994 and 1997, 68 IRPs (Integrated Resource Packages), which contain the provincial curriculum, along with suggested instructional and assessment strategies, and learning resources, are being produced for teachers in the school system.

Once these policies, IRPs, support documents and other resources have been developed and published by the Ministry, it is my job to make the pieces fit together for educators. Unfortunately, the implementation does not always follow smoothly from the distribution. Fullan (1991) explains:

> Regardless of what happens at the policy formation or initiation phase, a lot of things can be done or undone when a guideline is introduced for use. There are no studies available that describe the details of what ministry personnel do in introducing and providing for or facilitating implementation. (p. 274)

I would describe my job as primarily one of communication. The schools and districts with which I work are anxious for clarification about timelines, policy, guidelines and support documents that are available or are in progress. They want to plan inservice activities through the school year and the summer that will be beneficial to educators and follow Ministry directions. Since schools and districts are charged with the task of operationalizing a decision (the ability

of students to challenge courses, for example), they need clarity on their responsibilities, as well as ideas from other districts who are working on similar issues. Teachers also want to see the "face" of the Ministry, real people with whom they can communicate. I have spoken to students, student teachers, parents, teachers, administrators, district staff, and board members on many aspects of Ministry policy. I have also been used as the "messenger" when districts are frustrated by difficult timelines or unclear messages.

I am still, in my heart, a teacher. When I read an article about something pertinent to what I taught, my instinct is to cut it out and put it in my filing cabinet. Educational materials, resource binders, and workshops still appeal to the teacher in me. When I look at Ministry policy and support documents, the question in my head is always "What might this look like in the classroom?"

It is this question that drives how I do my job. I remember too well my dealings with Ben, the despair of feeling incompetent and my struggle to change. I also remember, not well enough sometimes, the joy of working *with* students as they made sense of what they were learning. That dual reality of insecurity and pride is a constant tension in teaching, and it is through finding a balance of pressure and support that I can assist in meaningful reform.

How Do We Get There From Here?

Referring back to the question posed and the research quoted in this thesis, I must undertake implementation activities which provide recognition both for the professional knowledge teachers already have, and opportunities to build and extend networks. One of the shifts I have had to make in my move to the Ministry is the realization that I do not, any longer, have direct access to students in their classrooms, and my job now is to support those people who do.

I experienced some frustration trying to find research on the role of Ministry personnel in implementation, especially those who have moved from teaching to working at the provincial level. Instead of making decisions with my students, as I did in Flexible Studies, I must now keep gauging what teachers and district staff need in order to make positive changes in the school system. I no longer can tap into the energy of the students, and get the immediate feedback they will so honestly give.

However, I have gained a perspective much wider than my classroom, school or district; one that, should I return to teaching, will enhance what I do with students, and gives me the motivation to continue what I know is working. The number of dedicated, visionary and tireless educators in this province is astounding, and has encouraged me to see the variety of ways that school is being made better for kids. I have also come to see that although the classroom is where "it all happens" for students, much like any great performance, what is happening behind the scenes can determine whether the show runs smoothly or is brought to a halt. I see the Ministry, school districts and universities as the crew supporting the cast of teachers and students; one is lost without the other. Our combined energies should be directed towards collaborative planning, support and teamwork.

Fullan (1991) has written what I consider to be the best description on the government's role in education change from a Canadian perspective. He suggests "six broad, mutually reinforcing guidelines" to consider if we want our "policies and programs to stand a better chance of becoming implemented in practice". (p. 282) Five of them are directly applicable to my work in Field

Services. Under each, I will describe what we do to support implementation, what work is still needed, and how I can use my experiences as a teacher to inform my current role.

1. Compliance vs. Capacity

The difference between compliance and capacity is that compliance implies doing what is right just to be on the side of the law, whereas capacity entails adopting the principles and philosophy of a policy as one's own and actively working to implement it because it is as a useful idea. Fullan (1991) believes that our "preoccupation with compliance hinders implementation in that it diverts energies and attention away from developing local capacity to make improvements". (p. 283) There are teachers and districts all over the province complying with Ministry policy, but without ownership over the philosophy behind it.

There is often the sense from the field that once a policy or curricula is "out the door" of the Ministry, we remove it from our workplan and move on to something else. Through ongoing, continued support, I hope to show that we do take an active interest in implementation issues and work to provide support that is necessary and useful.

Our primary structure for implementation on Vancouver Island is the Island Network, made up of district representatives from each of the 13 Island school districts, which, it is important to note, was a district initiative, not an organization mandated by the Ministry. These 25 people, mainly district curriculum coordinators and Directors of Instruction, meet monthly to share models, plan regional and Island events and share resource people. Unlike the senior staff at districts who are often preoccupied with bargaining and personnel issues, the members of the Network have been hired specifically to ensure that

curriculum implementation occurs at the district level. Thus, the mandates of the Island Network members and the Regional Coordinators, are in reality, quite similar.

Our strengths lie in our ability to "showcase" teachers and programs on the Island (for example, we include sessions by practising teachers at our Island conferences). Practising teachers seeing other practising teachers doing something well acts like nothing else to empower and encourage. Listening to teachers discuss the implications of an assessment strategy or wrestle with ways to involve more students in activities makes me realize that these important discussions are occurring all over, and their power lies in the fact that although the Ministry may have got them together at the event, the educators are now owning the implementation.

Our major weakness is still with those who are perhaps unsure of their ability to effect change. As when I first attended workshops, I was amazed and inspired by the teacher presenters but felt somehow felt more intimidated than empowered. In our workshops, presentations and conferences, we must build on the professional knowledge teachers bring to the sessions, encouraging and supporting the good things that are happening (however incidental they may seem) and offering ways to build individual capacity.

As one Island Network member said, "We need to walk the talk. If we expect teachers to engage students as active participants in their own learning, to encourage cooperation, to foster critical thinking, those same objectives should inform professional development". This quote best summarizes the need for activities, both formal and informal, to model the Principles of Learning, through offering a variety of support levels which reflect where teachers are in their careers, and their comfort levels with changing practices.

When I imagine the various "me's" attending any given workshop or conference, I realize the variety of options that we need to offer. The "first year teacher me's" needs were very different than the "Flexible Studies me", in terms of what I was comfortable doing in my classroom, what I understood about teaching and learning, and the amount of support I needed to implement a new idea or strategy. Some teachers need a structured "step by step" approach to effective assessment, for example, including time to work on their own lesson plans. Others will be ready to share what they have done already and seek feedback. Still others are ready to facilitate a session. All of these perspectives and offerings are valuable and necessary if I want to model effective classroom practice for teachers.

2. State-District relationships

Fullan (1991) describes the need for governments to spend time interacting with local groups about the implications for implementation. This is where the bulk of our work occurs and where I think we have been most successful. A description of our Vancouver Island organization will help to illustrate this.

For the 1996/97 school year, we presented the Island Network with a comprehensive plan of inservice activities. This plan is a collaborative effort between the Branches of the Ministry (no mean feat), Field Services and the school districts.

These events, along with descriptions, dates and funding formulas were provided to the Island Network who provided feedback and suggestions. The members were very pleased to have a plan, since it gave them the opportunity to organize district events in tandem with regional events. The other success is that districts, allocated money to support implementation, have long criticized the Ministry for putting on events at the last minute and expecting districts to pay

for releasing teachers. This way, the Network has had input, identified priorities and can identify the best people to support the activities.

There are Branches within the Ministry dedicated to those students often neglected in our education system (Aboriginal students, ESL students, Special Needs students and students at risk, for example). My job is to work with these Branches to involve their agenda in all the activities we do. The reality for teachers is they do not teach Math, work with Aboriginal students, and report on students, independent of one another. Teachers of Math, for example, need to recognize the diversity of their constituent groups, and while it is beneficial to highlight support for those traditionally underserved by the system, they must also be seen within the day-to-day classroom operations. In cases where schools and districts may not be considering all their learners, my job is then to integrate these perspectives to make them accessible to educators.

The other fascinating feedback from the Island Network was that, although Field Services had identified priorities for the 1996/97 school year (to answer the question "From everything that is going on in the province, where do we need to concentrate our efforts?") we had not established criteria for success. If we expect teachers to set criteria and evaluate students based on the criteria, then we must also be so accountable. The Network suggested a September meeting with Branch directors to work *together* on identifying the demonstrations of success. Much like in a well-designed teaching experience, this joint responsibility for measuring success is a wonderful opportunity build ownership. The Ministry and Island Network would become accountable together, like students and teachers, and the goals, criteria for success and steps to meet those criteria would be jointly managed. Our respective budgets will actually be supporting the others' activities.

From my perspective as a teacher, seeing those involved in policy making and implementation working together would be a welcome relief. Especially significant to my career would have been the integration of these opportunities with the Faculty of Education, so that, as a teacher new to the system, I would already have been welcomed into the community of educators and been able to see the larger picture of what was happening in the province.

3. Implementation Planning and Resources

Fullan (1991) describes an implementation plan that must be "explicit but flexible" in order to "guide the process of bringing about change in practice". (p. 285) This plan, however, should be built from the bottom up, starting with the actions and working backwards to the formulation of policy based on desired actions. This is not enough in evidence in our plans. We are "top down-ing" in the sense of establishing priorities and inservice at the centralized level and seeking input on how to implement them. Instead, we need to focus on how people become responsible citizens and lifelong learners, and focus on those steps and successes.

Because we are still operating on a broken front, trying to provide support for all the possible types of students and teachers in the province, we will always be engaged in battles. I believe there are a common set of strategies, dispositions, and techniques successful teachers draw upon, regardless of the grades and subject areas they teach. It is those commonalities we need to emphasize as keys to meeting the needs of all learners. This is not meant to imply that *all* teachers must use cooperative learning; however, it is a strategy that has enjoyed much success. How might an individual teacher use some of the principles behind cooperative learning in their Math 12 class? their Kindergarten class? with special needs learners? What knowledge, skills and attitudes might cooperative

learning engender? And how might the skills learned in one class or grade contribute to the success of another?

Although our plan for 1996/97 is still far from this goal, we have tried to be inclusive in our offerings. Our English Language Arts forum, for example, will involve K-12 teachers, so we can begin the dialogue about supporting students all the way through the system. Specifically, high school teachers have much to learn about explicitly teaching reading strategies, and their elementary teacher colleagues have much to offer in this area. In return, high school teachers might offer ways that elementary schools will have more success with male students, who are traditionally weaker in literacy skills. It is my hope that English teachers can begin to see themselves as a team, supporting students throughout their school experience.

When I think about the essence of implementation, I realize I am trying to foster what did not exist formally for me as a teacher--the chance to make connections with other teachers. I want to encourage opportunities for teachers to feel supported, engaged, empowered and confident about what they do that works and what they can do to improve their practice. I also want to emphasize what we have in common rather than our differences. Again, reflecting back on my teaching experience, I remember the tensions between departments in the high school. Partly because of diminishing resource money, each department had to make a case for their need being greater, and the competition began. We talked about "my English students" and "those studying sciences", somehow forgetting they were one and the same, and the student enjoying a new novel was suffering with a Biology text with pages missing!

4. Focus on Second Order Change

Focussing on second order change means that

> ...integration of policies, aimed at basic changes in teaching and learning, will become a raison d'etre of policy formation, follow through, and revision. Such synergy is essential for addressing the complex reform agenda before us. (Fullan, 1991, p. 287)

This is largely connected with the concept of state-district relationships. Somehow, I must act as though I am working myself out of a job. As I identify and acknowledge pockets of success and support ongoing activities provided by districts and schools *for* districts and schools, then new policies can be implemented and supported through these existing channels. The Island Network is growing to become this vehicle for the identification of issues and development of strategies to best explore these issues.

This is where our roles as Regional Coordinators have some limitations. It is not feasible or appropriate for us to go into every class and work with every teacher on implementation; instead we must work with districts to offer inservice opportunities and encourage them to build in mechanisms for continuing the discussion at the school and district level. Many already have such vehicles, so that our work actually supports these existing groups and vice versa.

Ken Dryden, the former goalie, has written a book based on his experiences and observations of an Ontario high school in which he spent considerable time doing research for his book. He spoke at a recent conference, and although I'll admit I was sceptical about his ability to provide insights into the education system, he made many excellent points, one of which I found particularly useful in my job. He described the desperate need to draw a line directly from every policy right to each student in the classroom, so that we base our decisions on what is in the best interests of *all* of the students in the system.

It is only by formulating policy based on the needs of our constituent groups that meaningful change will occur.

The same is true for implementation. A recognition and emphasis on supporting all learners is key, otherwise we will continue to support the "front row" teachers, and continue to neglect those who most need support to change their practice. And through all our planning and discussing, I must ask the various teachers in me what would have helped them most.

5. Combine an Appreciation of Complexity with Persistence and Effort

The fundamental dichotomy between politics and teaching is that politics is concerned about the short term ("What can we do to fulfill our pre-election commitments and win another term?") whereas education is a long term commitment. A government cannot rely on education change to win an election; it can take four years to go from policy development to implementation alone! Our policies and programs are designed to support children incrementally, so their total school experience will be positive and rewarding, both for the students and society. The benefits or dangers in the system may not be immediately apparent, and are not immediately fixable. Changing the attitudes and practices of teachers, students and their parents is a long term and ongoing undertaking. The reality is that much we undertake on behalf of students is in the form of a legacy. Many of my colleagues in Field Services, with fewer than ten years to go in their careers, will not see the results of the Primary Program on future graduates. The findings of the Royal Commission, started in 1987, are still being implemented, and the province has seen four premiers in that time.

If we look at "cost effectiveness", it is to new teachers in the system that we should be devoting our resources. There are curricula currently available which are not necessary for full implementation until 1999; by then several thousand

teachers will have entered the teaching profession. What can we do to support the many "student teacher me's", still planning in a vacuum, using old curricula and unaware of resources available to them? How can their learning be more collaboratively supported by all of us?

One of the projects undertaken by Field Services is to supply, free of charge, IRPs and Ministry resource material to preservice teachers, with accompanying inservice. The project, entering its second year, has been overwhelmingly successful. These are the sessions I like doing the most because the students appreciate the support from the Ministry, and feel as though they are being recognized for investing so much of their time and money in teacher training. Their idealism and belief that they can make a difference is encouraging to me because I know that as these people are establishing themselves in the profession, my daughter will be entering Kindergarten.

The recognition of the complexity of change and the long term responsibility to the education system need to continually be revisited. It is through continuing support, recognizing success, learning from pitfalls and maintaining a clear vision that effective change will occur. The day-to-day frustrations can sometimes cloud the bigger picture of incremental growth. By reflecting on successes, we will renew our energies to continue the work.

EPILOGUE

The purpose of this epilogue is to provide closure and to reflect back on the journey I have undertaken. It is by no means finished. From each "chapter" of my journey I have learned about myself as a teacher, and as a person. I am relieved I found the courage to make changes, but, having said that, I cannot assume that subsequent change will be any easier. Leaving a comfort zone, whether by desire or circumstance, is much easier said than done. Each chapter allowed me to examine a wider scope of the profession, from my early days focussing on lesson plans and Monday morning to planning for large scale implementation.

In Chapter One, I reflected on my teacher training and my first two years of teaching--years characterized by an increasingly uncomfortable dissonance between what I was practising and what I knew to be true about learning for me and my students. How much control did I demand as the teacher? Why was my classroom a battleground for me and my students? From these two questions came my disillusionment and the certainty that this pseudo-war was harming me and my students.

Chapter Two examined the realization that I needed to develop a different relationship between (and within) myself and my students. I explained my catalysts for change, both extrinsic and intrinsic, that fostered in me a readiness to experiment and take risks. It described the series of choices and circumstances that enabled me to see how other teachers had more fully engaged students, and how I could not continue in the profession without making some of these changes myself. My discovery that there was a professional community from whom I could seek support was profound and liberating.

Chapter Three described Flexible Studies, an alternative program where I at last found a satisfying and comfortable relationship with my colleagues, my students, and myself. This is a story of hope, through the discovery that I loved teaching and I loved adolescents. The shift to shared responsibility and mutual engagement reinspired my faith in what education could provide. It was in Flexible Studies that I realized I could give back to the educational community some of what it had invested in me. Examining the central issue of the classroom as jointly owned by its inhabitants allowed me to make changes to my teaching which significantly improved the students' interest and commitment to learning.

Finally, Chapter Four explores how and why I moved to the Ministry of Education, where I now work with teachers, schools and districts on Vancouver Island as they implement policies and make programs "come alive" for students. Through the Island Network's attempts to build a collaborative culture in support of change, I am seeing a recognition and involvement of the essential partners in the change process. Island teachers, district personnel and Ministry Regional Coordinators are working together to move beyond our defined roles as "us or them" to implement educational innovation. In all realms of educational endeavour, I see a growing recognition that learning occurs when new information and ideas are anchored to existing memories, thoughts and experiences.

This thesis, like the stories that are in it, has been a sometimes frustrating, sometimes inspiring, but always enlightening process. Its power has come from the time I have taken to reflect on how I came to believe what I do about education and the possibilities for change. The research has provided both new insights and comforting reminders of things I know. It has also consolidated and reinforced my belief that no matter where I am in the system or at what stage of

my career, I, like every educator in the province, have much to learn and much to offer.

It was my intention to show that universities involved in teacher training, schools and districts, and the Ministry of Education share the responsibility to provide teachers with the knowledge and skills to implement the Principles of Learning. As individuals, teachers share this professional responsibility to challenge themselves and seek out strategies to support the children they teach. I learned this the hard way, by initially succumbing to negativism and resisting what I knew had to be done. To the people who provided me with both the pressure and support for change, I thank you. And to Ben, wherever you may be, I hope, like me, you found a way to rekindle a love of learning.

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Title of Thesis

Building a Culture of Collaboration: Supporting Teachers on Their Journeys of Change

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Kerry Elizabeth Robertson

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