

FALLING THROUGH THE CRACKS

by

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"MERGING CRITICAL THOUGHT WITH DAILY LIFE IS ALWAYS A CHALLENGE. PERHAPS NOWHERE IS IT MORE IMPORTANT THAN IN TEACHING WHICH IS A HUMAN EXPERIENCE FULL OF UNPREDICTABLE MOMENTS...THERE IS NOTHING MORE COMPELLING THAN THE FACTS OF REAL LIFE. FOR ME, THE PRIMARY GOAL IS FOR THEORY TO EMBRACE EVERYDAY LIVING."

Shor and Freire, 1987, p. 3

Dedicated to the memory of the late Caroline Jararuse

Caroline was one of my first students in the beginning of my teaching career who became the centre of my first writing piece in the graduate literacy program at Mount Saint Vincent University (see appendix 1).

Caroline sadly passed away in July of 1988



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PROLOGUE:

Mapping Out My World: The Story of a Teacher's Journey

Trapped...falling through the cracks
Looking through the window of our encasement
Seeing a bird fly by...
A free spirit.

(The metaphor of the bird and free spirit was borrowed from a grade four student, Washington, and shared by Christine McAuliffe - Interlearn '94, San Diego, California.)

I can't help but wonder what it would be like to be free. Certain issues have consistently surfaced throughout my career as an educator. To help me see a clearer vision of my journey, I have begun to write my life as a teacher. This has been a means of reflection. It has also been a strong reminder of how my students and I are "falling through the cracks" of a highly political system. In doing this, I am trying to make sense of where I have been and where I am going. Kitty Copeland (Whole Language Umbrella Conference, San Diego, 1994) stated: "Theory can set you free."...can it? When I feel discouraged and question why I do what I do, I often think of an article written by teacher Daniel Kist (1994). He questioned why he was a teacher feeling frustrated as a result of challenges, problems and resistance. Even though he was exhausted from the years of obstacles, he knew that he had a deeply planted seed of inspiration growing inside that had the power to fertilize and nurture the dreams of students. I think I too have a seed of inspiration, perhaps I just have to change its position so it will get more light to grow.

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To the children of Nain...thank you for being my greatest teachers. This is where I really became a learner. My gained knowledge has carried on with me. To the children of Newfoundland, you are a large part of the reason I keep returning to work in Newfoundland. I have grown so much from you. You are my reason to continue my studies...I want to be the best teacher I can be for you .

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To Patricia, Helen, Bev, Emily, Jim, Debbie, Marie, and Sarah, thank you for

donating your precious time as a part of my thesis data. I appreciate all the conversations on and off the “record”. You have all helped me see different perspectives, and have helped me learn through my writing. I admire your commitment and dedication to education.

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INTRODUCTION:

“FIRST CLASS TEACHERS SEEK TO IGNITE IN THEIR STUDENTS AN ENTHUSIASM FOR THEIR SUBJECTS BY EXAMPLE AND LEADERSHIP. THEY ARE MORE THAN INSTRUCTORS; THEY ARE ROLE MODELS FOR STUDENTS...THE GREAT TEACHER INSPIRES.”

William Arthur Ward

This thesis explores how students, and teachers, including myself are “falling through the cracks” and getting lost in a highly political education system. It is about the obstacles we face in a system where we are often passively without voice. Teacher research being inquiry based, (unlike traditional research) has allowed me to reflect, to learn, to grow, and to reposition myself in a new direction. Through reflection on my journey as an educator, I have come to understand my own practice. There became a point in my career when I was able to name the politics that I am exposed to everyday. Once I recognized the politics, I have been struggling to get beyond it, often leaving me with feelings of frustration and isolation.

The first section is a series of personal reflective stories which have constituted my life as a teacher. These stories deal with many issues - issues of race, gender, class, culture, power, prestige, politics, and the dignity of a profession. All of these issues affect who we are as students and teachers. They lead to further disadvantaging us in the classroom, making it difficult to meet the needs in a system which at times forgets what our real goal is - to provide meaningful and quality education for all. This thesis process has granted me the privilege to step back so I can move forward. I have described this process to others as “therapeutic”. It is a way to “recharge my batteries” and deal with the barriers which trap me, as well as the ones that I myself have constructed. The second chapter in this section deals with the connections I have made with the literature upon reflection or alongside the experiences themselves.

The second section of my thesis is comprised of teacher interviews...listening to the voices of others. Here I listen to the concerns of others and make connections through voiceovers. The interview analysis reviews the concerns other teachers raise, my own concerns, and

the connections to what is presently going on in the system - and what they have helped me think about.. Teachers' voices are not heard in public, within the system itself, and even within our own schools. These conversations have been valuable as it validates the concerns of teachers for their students. From the conversations, more stories evolved as they triggered untold events from the past and helped me make connections. The conversations also provided a means for me to reposition myself as I reflect on different perspectives and experiences of others. It has validated many of my own concerns, and helped me feel less isolated as I discovered that much of what I am feeling is not unique to my own situation.

The last section deal with the analysis of my journey and the epilogue...what I have learned from all of this, and how it has changed my thinking. At times, this process has placed me in an uncomfortable position where I have interrogated myself and the system in which I strive to do my best. As a result, I have recognized and exposed the false limitations I have placed on myself, as well as the real limitations in the education system. In doing so, it has given me renewed energy and hope in being the best educator I can be. I hope to continue to help students and to try to fill the cracks so our students will not fall through.

“WHERE THE DETERMINATION IS, THE WAY CAN
BE FOUND”.

George S. Clason

SECTION 1

CHAPTER 1 - "FALLING THROUGH THE CRACKS"

The churning of my stomach was turning in tune with the propellers of the twin otter aircraft I migrated toward: a brand new teacher moving to a northern Inuit community. Equipped with my fresh ideas about teaching and my white middle class background, I boarded the plane. Thoughts of my journey to this new community - culturally different from mine, roared noisily through my head as the engines soared over the quiet untouched landscape. The engines died and the propellers slowly came to a stop, but the churning in my stomach became more intense.

Spending two years teaching Inuit children in their community was a very valuable experience and one I would never trade. My eyes were opened in so many ways...the one question that kept reoccurring over those two years was "WHAT AM I DOING HERE? - I AM A WHITE MIDDLE-CLASS FEMALE CARRYING WITH ME MY VALUES AND AN EDUCATION SYSTEM WHICH IGNORES THE CULTURE AND VALUES OF THE INUIT PEOPLE." I struggled with this. I realized the curriculum I was given to teach had to change. Some way I had to include these childrens' experiences, background and culture into the large modern institution that was a dominant structure in the community...an institution that the children were forced to attend without any questions about how it conflicted with the views the Inuit people held for education in their world.

The year began, and I was given a set of basal readers at a grade two level for junior high students (these students were segregated from their peers as reluctant learners). I scanned the texts seeing stories about the circus, city landscapes, etc. I remember asking myself, "How can I use this?" These kids had not seen skyscrapers, been in cars, or visited a circus. I spoke to the teacher who had taught these children the previous year. I expressed my concerns. She did not seem to acknowledge the concerns I had and insisted that I had to use these texts. Back to the classroom I went, this time the classroom was filled with my new students. I introduced myself and invited them to tell me about themselves. One girl's opening remark was, "Give me your earrings!" I automatically looked at how I was dressed...questioning how they viewed me. "Are you a virgin?" shouted a boy. I saw myself standing outside of my body distinctly as a white middle-class female and this all became problematic. I was happy to see 3 o'clock come.

The next day I went in with my eyes closed hoping for the best. The mandatory texts were hauled out and then..."I'm not doing this - this is baby work". The churning in my stomach started again. I thought it is only the second day and I have the rest of the year to get through....how will I make it? I had to make a decision. I had to get these students interested and feeling good about learning- not to mention for my own sanity. I packed the texts up on the shelf never to be opened again. "Now what do I do?" Take them out and explore their community...language experience; that would be good I thought. Out we headed and walked down to the wharf. On the wharf was a seal partly gutted. I tried not to purge and quickly became conscious of containing how I was feeling. I did not conceal this well as one of the students said in a defensive voice, "What's wrong with that? Us Eskimo eat that!" Once again I was relieved to see 3 o'clock come.

Having no suitable material to use, I decided that we would try to create our own (at that point I did not realize we were really creating curriculum).When I suggested that we begin to develop our own materials, there were nods of approval. We began by using the community as a basis. We walked throughout the "town" taking photos and listening to the students' stories and knowledge of their own environment. We then wrote about these conversations and developed a book called "NAIN, OUR COMMUNITY". It was the first time I had seen any spark of interest. It was not clear at that time, but what was happening was the development of a community of learners. The children became the teacher and I the learner and with the knowledge that the children possess came the feeling of empowerment. And a lot I learned... I experienced many things for the first time - fishing, ice fishing, hunting, winter camping, and survival skills to name just a few.

Now the book was completed...what next I asked myself? Having little resources to use, I began to feel frustrated. Our Language Arts Coordinator flew into the community not long after. I discussed with him my dilemma. He quickly thought about some plays that had been written by Inuit students in other Labrador communities. I received these plays in the mail shortly after his departure. "At last!" I remember thinking, "Something the kids can relate to, and even in their own dialect." This was the beginning.

"Miss, can I write to your Mommy?" asked a student one day. With excitement in my voice I quickly responded positively to her request. "Well, this is progress," I thought to myself - she had begun to take an interest in writing. This student developed a pen pal relationship with my mother, both exchanging family photos. My family also sent care packages with special treats that were not available in the community and filled requests such as "stick on nails". She had told my mother in a letter that she would like to have nails like "Miss Myers". This was the start for that student to engage in print. Now how do I stimulate the others' interest in print? I did not have to think about this long as the Language Arts Coordinator came through for me again. I received a package of low vocab, high interest novels from him. These novels told the stories of growing up - pressures that teen encountered. Finally, something they could relate to. We began reading these novels together. I think the greatest day in my teaching career was when a student asked to take a book home. I wanted to scream out in excitement for I realized the home environment for some of these students was not conducive to reading, ie. no electricity, heat, or quiet. The students all began to engage in text...what a feeling! Then came spring...

Native families often travel north to fish in the spring, leaving school two months early. Some of the children of these families were in my class. I was disappointed, yet I had to respect that aspect of their culture. I had to try and see what had begun, and hoped that it would continue in the fall. I made it! My first year of teaching was completed.

September came and the only thing that turned were the propellers. Why did my stomach not churn? I think I had developed a sense of community in and outside of my classroom, even though my teaching assignment had changed (Special needs - K to 3). My first day of school was different this year. When I met James (a kindergarten student) I discovered that he did not speak English. I asked him his name. He replied "YEP" with big smiling eyes. Every question I asked received the same reply, "YEP". Well James quickly began to learn English from his kindergarten class.

One cold winter day (-40 o c) James came to class with a t-shirt, pants with the whole crotch seam opened, no underwear or socks on, rubber boots, and over all this was a summer jacket. This was not a rare sight for some

of the children. I went to the office and found a pair of winter boots and undergarments. How can I begin to teach when childrens' basic needs are not being met? I continued on with a breakfast program I had been involved in since my arrival in this community. I realized I could not "teach" until some of the children had warm clothes to wear, a healthy breakfast to eat, a warm and safe atmosphere, and a hug and a smile to top it off. The one thing that always amazed me was the happy faces the young Inuit children always possessed. Hungry, cold, victims of abuse, alcoholic families - it all overwhelmed me!

As an "outsider", I had much to learn. A great part of this learning was from the children and from members of the community. There was little connection between home and school, as the parents felt intimidated by our "white" education system as well as the language barrier that existed. This made the gap even stronger. What had I done to improve this lack of communication? What had we tried as a school community? ...very little when I look back. On parent night we would host an open house, and I would be asked to prepare refreshments (this was seen as part of my duties as home economics teacher). The open house brought many parents into the "learning institution"; however they would eat and leave - some without speaking to any of the teachers. As I reflect, how could I have taken advantage of the situation and begun to invite dialogue?

I was very conscious of this new culture in which I found myself immersed. I began to seek out people willing to share more about their community and culture. I started to spend a great deal of time with a family who taught me so much. Although the woman was a colleague, her husband was native and he became my teacher in that native land. I began to travel on hunting and fishing trips, watching and observing closely in amazement as to the knowledge and respect for the land, as well as the trained eye that was a part of their survival. I camped in -30 o c temperatures, pitching tents in the snow. All of this opened up a whole new world to me...a way of life I had never been exposed to.

With a different culture came a different language - not only the language that the people spoke, but the unspoken language. Inuit people often communicate in non-verbal ways. I recall many times the children being non-responsive - so I thought. I would ask a question, and no response. I repeated the question, still no response. After a few days I inquired about

this lack of response. It was explained that the raising of one's eyebrows meant "yes". Even though I gained this knowledge, I frequently forgot. One day I was working with a student. I had asked a question several times to another child (my back was to him) and when I finally turned around, his little eyebrows had almost reached his hair line. Again this confirmed for me the complexity of a culture that I was not part of...an "outsider" who would never appreciate or understand their world as they could never understand mine. The difference was, I had the CHOICE! I made the decision to immerse myself into their world. Unfortunately, they did not have the choice to become a part of a "white man's world".

The people of this isolated village had been forced to move from other northern areas and relocated south to this one designated area I found myself teaching in. The resettlement program was implemented by the government. The people were robbed of their hunting and fishing grounds, thus their culture and tradition. They were set up in houses and became more and more dependent on the government financially and social problems began to emerge. The Davis Inlet situation is a prime example of the destruction that has been done (Davis Inlet is one community south of Nain) - see appendix 2. When I hear comments concerning the "drain native peoples place on the government", in turn "us", I feel angered for it was "we", the white majority, that have made these marginalized people dependent and often bitter for what they have lost. Then there is the whole issue of what the white people took when we began to settle the country. After two years, the injustices became more and more evident and the question of my existence in that community became even stronger.

It has been seven years since I left, but a part of me remains...every September I long to go back. Why do I have this longing, especially when I questioned my presence there? Upon reflection, perhaps I learned more from the students than they had learned from me. What did I learn? I think I gained knowledge not only about their culture and their ways of knowing, but I also learned more about - or at least my awareness was heightened - the white culture to which I belonged and the hidden assumptions that we make. I believe that education can disempower and repress individuals whose practices differ from the norm.

From Nain I journeyed to Newfoundland...another culturally rich part of

our country. In the past seven years I have taught in four schools - one k-12, two high schools, and one elementary school. Each possessed their own stories. The issues started to change...I began to question my own value as a female high school teacher, teaching home economics (along with other subject areas "thrown" in). Then I began to see the minority group to which I belonged in a man's world of educators. I was one of six female teachers on a staff of 40 and I did not have a voice. I often wondered if I would have had a voice if I had been teaching math or science - curriculum areas highly valued in our society? I remember observing the male math and science teachers and the power they seemed to have in their classrooms and as staff members...was it because they were men, was it because of what they taught, or was it a combination of both?

Standing in line for the photocopier one morning at the high school in which I was teaching; a male math teacher glanced to see what I was copying. In a split second he had made the decision "that's not important" and proceeded to stand in front of me to do his copying. Not only was he pushing me further back in line, but also in how I viewed myself as a female teacher. I did not resist his attempt to intrude and kept my feelings of anger, hurt, and disempowerment to myself. I did not have a voice but I was expected to listen to the voices of others and "fill the orders"...some of those were catering for staff or school functions. I felt as if I was not a "real teacher" for I was a demonstrator of "cookin' and sewin'", repairing parachutes for the gym or stage curtains, even making coffee for a meeting the principal was conducting while I was in class teaching...I was expected to do it all - not only an expectation among my colleagues, but from others outside the teaching profession as well.

Returning from my Christmas holidays, I had boarded the plane. My thoughts were interrupted when a man approached and proceeded to sit beside me saying "Don't crowd me". When I looked up, the tall black man began the conversation by asking where I was going. I responded. He then asked what I did in Corner Brook. I told him that I taught.

"What you teach?" he asked in a black dialect.

"Home economics" I replied.

"You make German chocolate cake or peach cobbler?"

“Yes” I said. (Perhaps I should have said “I don’t know how”.)

He then asked, “Are you catchin' the show tonight?”

Puzzied I asked, “What show is that?”

Disgusted, he repeated my question, “What show’s that?” and looked away. He repeated this two additional times looking away each time.

I responded, “I’m sorry, but I don’t know what show you are referring to”. “The Harlem Globe Trotters” he informed me.

I had no idea who he was or that the group was coming to our area.

“No, I did not realize you were going to be in town,” I said.

“Well, it’s your lucky day...I got free ticket for you and you and me go out after the show”, said the man.

Since school was resuming the next day, I declined his offer as I had to prepare for classes.

“I got idea”, he proceeded, “I come into your class and sign autographs. While I doin” that you have peach cobbler bakin” in the oven...see you don’t need no lesson plans.”

What did this say about the value of me as an educator? The next day some of the grade 12 boys were talking about having seen the show (our school was highly involved in basketball and recognized provincially for their skill at the game). I shared my plane story with them. One of the boys had then shared my story with his father that night. The student came back the next day saying, “My father said you did not go out with him because he was black”. How did he get that message? Having lived the majority of my life in a “white world”, was I reluctant because he was black or was I reluctant because he was a stranger and it would not have mattered what color he was? Had it not been a school night would I have gone? If he had not been a stranger would I have gone? I do regret not accepting his invitation in some ways. Since the school was so involved in basketball - administration as well, could I have gained some points with administration by playing the game? What could have evolved with my position if I had played the political game and brought a Globe Trotter in

the school?

During that same year, I was involved in the graduation committee. I was appalled at the graduation celebration...red carpet, flashy cars, doors opened by a door man with white gloves, tails, tuxedos, and girls flying to the United States to shop for their gowns. What message is being sent I thought? What about the people who could not afford a trip south, or even a bus ticket downtown to the shopping mall (not to mention the money for a dress)? One of those girls came to see me. She was not going to celebrate with the rest of her graduating class as she could not afford a new dress. What were we fostering in such a celebration? These economically deprived students were being further suppressed socially by the educational community and we were allowing it to happen. I spoke to my colleague supervising the graduation and expressed my concerns about such a celebration. He informed me that school money was available to assist students who could not afford to participate. I went back to the student and relayed the message. I felt uncomfortable in doing so as I did not want her to feel embarrassed. No matter how I approached the subject, I don't think there was a delicate way to say "we will give you money for a dress". How did she feel? How would I feel if I had been in the same situation? Should I have even relayed the message? Why have we let graduation celebrations get out of hand? This was not my first or last graduation committee to be on. In this time I struggled for change and in some of the schools where I taught, I have been pleased to see the down play of prom night. Without meaning harm, without awareness, we play into keeping the disadvantaged students in our schools suppressed. Just as the native peoples have been imprisoned by a white culture, having lost the freedom to roam with the herd, the economically disadvantaged have been imprisoned by their own people. What would life be like if we could choose our own destiny? Would we be like a bird...a free spirit?

It's the Labor Day weekend and the phone rings...an invitation to make the transition from high school to elementary. My heart began to beat loudly making it hard to hear the voice on the other end of the line. I quickly hung up the phone and ran over to pack up my classroom. My prayer was answered I thought as I began to fill the empty boxes. Reality hit..."Oh my, only two days before school starts and I'm not prepared...can I do it? I have so many questions about teaching grade one but I don't have time to think of them".

The little smiling faces entered our new classroom. In walked Stephen... bright eyed and full of curiosity. Stephen explored his new surroundings. My own curiosity grew about Stephen. He was an extremely observant child, discovering and uncovering his world with each new day. Why then was he not observing his written world? During story time, the children all gathered moving closer and closer with each page I turned. Not Stephen. He moved further away, rolling around - exploring, demonstrating his lack of interest in the texts we engaged in. Why was he not interested in that form of print? What can I do to engage him? I began by inviting him to choose books for story time. He would listen to the first couple of pages then off he went. Eventually, even though he still roamed, he would ask for the book to look at the pictures after we had finished the story. With each new day the puzzle was getting more complicated to solve and I did not have all the pieces to put it together. Stephen was the most observant child I had ever met. From a new poster, to new shoes, to the hair above my lip, he noticed it all. So why then was he not doing the same with print? Stephen did take interest in one particular book, "The Very Hungry Caterpillar". He learned to memory read this and would read this book over and over(for a year and a half), yet when he saw the title without the picture he had no idea what it said.

Having already established a reputation as a behavior problem in kindergarten, he was well know to the school community. I began receiving calls and letters from parents about his behavior with the other children. The vice principal also received calls. It was suggested that Stephen needed to be tested and perhaps put on medication to control his behavior. Having done research on Attention Deficit Disorder, I felt confident in saying that Stephen was not ADD and even if he was, I owed it to him as a five year old child to work with him before he was "drugged to conform".

I was bothered by the whole issue of labeling, especially with the newest buzz word - the newest most fashionable label - ADD. I was bothered by the quick fix approach...pop a pill for whatever ails you. Why is our society becoming so hooked on prescribed drugs? What gives us the right to determine if a child can only function in society with drugs? What about the other factors that we tend to ignore ie: the home environment. If a child is not expected to behave in a certain way at home, how can we

expect him/her to do the same in the formal school setting? I walk down the halls in school and see the zombie-like bodies. It angers me to see these young children sedated. What messages are we sending? Are we making excuses for their actions? Are the children themselves learning to use this to ignore the responsibilities they have in their own self discipline? What role can I play in discouraging the population growth of children on ritalin, and encourage other means of dealing with behaviors of "true" ADD children. What about other factors -ie. environmental pollution? Stutt and Rotor (1994) reported; it is estimated that at least 15% of our population are affected by this form of pollution. Children are known to be more affected by indoor pollution due to a greater amount of air taken in relative to their body weight, therefore they absorb more toxic contaminants. Their system is less able to eliminate these contaminants. They claim "failure to provide good air quality in schools means that some children lack equal access to programs, services, and many fail to learn to their potential" (Stutt and Rotor, 1994). Currently parents in Lake Echo, Nova Scotia, have been meeting with concern over the poor air quality in their school. Could this be a possible reason for the over diagnosis of ADD? I recently read (in a local Newfoundland newspaper) of how a doctor at a St. John's hospital used his ADD behaviors to enrich his own life (see appendix 3).

Stephen was not put on ritalin that year. Each day with Stephen was a new challenge discovering more pieces of the puzzle I had to try to fit together. He had difficulty in recognizing letters of the alphabet, he did not have any sight words he recognized nor did he seem interested in learning about his world of print. I began to notice an interest developing in Stephen around his classmates' names. He started to recognize the names and letters they started with. He began to develop a routine in the morning...when he entered the classroom he would go directly to the board where I wrote a letter to the class everyday. This letter contained information as to what events might be taking place that particular day - a birthday, music or physical education class, a visitor etc. Stephen's goal everyday was to look for the word "gym" as he loved this area of the curriculum and this was an area that he experienced a lot of success. Everyday I asked myself what I could do to assist Stephen in his learning. My confidence as a teacher began to fade with each day I failed to help him connect with the printed world. What could I have done differently? What will turn him on, I thought day, after day? I sometimes felt guilty as

he consumed much of my time and it was difficult to give all of the children the exact amount. Stephen left my classroom as a reluctant reader and writer. I felt as if I had failed him.

Stephen and I have both moved on...he to another grade and I have since been involved in a new position at the school - resource teacher. That next year I began to see Stephen in the Resource room one period in a six-day cycle. Often there were weeks that went by without seeing him - storm days, school events, etc. It all made it difficult to see what was happening with him in his new classroom. I do not have Stephen on my case load at all this year. He has asked to visit the resource room at lunch to read to me or take care of the mealworms and his requests were granted. He works with another resource teacher. Perhaps she can do for him what I couldn't.

With a new position came new challenges. The role I played now was not only new to me, but new to the school. We implemented changes in how we delivered special services. This became problematic for many of the teachers. They were used to large core group pull-outs for the language arts program. The resource room was only one aspect of supporting students...the in-class resource model is in place as well but people resources are limited with all the current cutbacks. The inclusion model that is now in place has had problems as many teachers have not been inserviced in dealing with so many individual needs. Many feel frustrated because they do not have the time and/or the expertise to meet all the needs. When the Department of Education makes the decision to implement change, they also have to support that change or problems occur - just as they have with the implementation of whole language.

In reality, some children's needs are not being met. Are we really about a philosophy that allows each child to develop where they currently are? How can this happen when we are still in a graded system where many still expect the children to have mastered the curriculum before entering the classroom. Should we be moving toward a non-graded system...multi-aged classrooms? Would Stephen find more success in such a system? I see children pushed on to a higher grade where they are expected to deal with curriculum more advanced than they can cope with. How do we deal with that? Children then become labeled as having learning disabilities when in fact they just have not had the opportunity to develop at their own pace. Like learning to walk and talk, we all did this at different times,

so why would our development in a school setting differ? I see a great deal of potential for our system if we were to move into a multi-aged setting. In the resource room I see the urgency to start from where the children are.

One of my greatest concerns when developing the resource room concept was labeling. How do I prevent labeling from occurring - just from the mere entrance into our room? First of all I felt we had to create a warm and inviting atmosphere. We were given a large room where the centre attraction is a large pink dory lined with carpet and cushions (a reading centre). We also have a sofa, coffee tables, large trees, rocking chair, bean bag chairs, a listening centre, a kitchen centre and eight computers (two with CD-roms) and lots of books and computer software. Next we had to extend the invitation to the whole school population. The resource room is a drop in centre for all students (French and English as we are a dual-track school). Also built into my schedule is time for class visits. This gives students the opportunity to be a part of the resource room at all grade levels. We had hoped that this would keep the labels from becoming attached. Have we done this? How do we know for sure? We felt to seek out the answers to these very important questions we would begin by asking the students...we inquired about how they viewed the resource room, how they felt about coming out. We have been pleased with the students' responses. The children love to come to the resource room with me, in fact, they all want to come - and they do have the opportunity on a drop in basis or in the visits I had previously mentioned.

Dion is a student who comes forefront in my mind. A grade six student, Dion was the first student I met. The other resource teacher had worked with him in the previous year as a classroom teacher. I remember after meeting him we gave him a bookmark with "Reach for the Stars" written on it. My colleague asked him what it said. He did not know one word. In a short time (using a literature based approach developed from his interest and background knowledge), Dion began to read and began to view himself as a reader. He was not reading novels but for the first time in his school career, he was experiencing success in print. I heard the guidance counsellor one day reply to a question asked by one of Dion's former teachers. She had asked about his behavior. The counsellor said his behavior improved a great deal and he attributed that to the success he was feeling with reading. This was great to hear as we have not had much

support for our program. When we asked Dion how he felt about coming to the resource room he responded, "If I hadn't come here I wouldn't be able to read". How did Dion slip through the system for seven years? Why was he allowed to fall through the cracks? Why are so many of our students falling through the cracks? What does this say about our system?

Student feedback has been very positive as well as parent feedback. The principal has had calls from parents requesting that their children get on our caseload. We can not say the same about all of the teachers. We took 90 students on a trip three hours outside of the community. We visited a historical sight as well as the newly developed Hybernia Oil Development Centre. We left early in the morning and returned 8 o'clock in the evening. The children ranged in ages from five to twelve. The children still speak of that trip and look at the picture display over a year later. Most of the children on this trip had little background experiences outside of "downtown" Marystown. For many this was a big day. Some of the staff were so excited for these children - so pleased they were being provided with such an opportunity. Other staff members did not share the same feeling towards the trip...this distressed me for these children were finally getting the opportunity to do something special. In reality, children do not have the same opportunities.

Every day during that first year of the resource room another comment would filter back to me. One comment was about the excitement the children had when they visited. "Do all your kids want to go to the resource room?" one teacher asked another. My colleague responded in anticipation of the point they were getting to, "yes".

"Why is that do you think?" asked the other.

My colleague responded with the answer she felt they wanted to hear, "They have fun".

"Ah-ha!" they replied.

My colleague said she had confirmed for them that they were having fun, but for those teachers fun excluded learning - it was seen as something entirely separate.

Most of the students we see have not been having "fun" and are reluctant to learn about the world of print that surrounds them. So what do we do to change this - to keep them from falling through the cracks? We felt we had to begin by first tuning into their interests and start from where they

were. It sounds easy. Easy it was not with some. Shane was one of those students that kept me searching for ways to support his learning. A grade two student and nothing seemed to interest him. How can I turn him on to print? I asked myself this question over and over. Having the funding to purchase a wide range of resources, we chose literature and computer software around as many interest areas as possible. We rotated book displays so the students could see what was available to them. A large portion of the year had passed. This day was different when Shane entered the resource room. He spotted a display on baseball. Instead of his usual routine of roaming around, he quickly rushed to the display taking every book into his arms. Off to the reading boat he went. "Eureka!" I thought. I went over to him and we talked about the books and his interest in baseball. Shane's puzzle began to fit together. Everyday he would rush to get the books, then off to the boat. His favorite book was "Take Me Out to the Ballgame". As I read the words on each page he would sing along with me. He knew the song and his success he felt with reading that book came out of the song. He not only began to engage in the reading of the baseball book, but began to take interest in writing about it as well. On our way...so I thought. The local radio station confirmed a teacher's strike. With only six weeks left, time was precious for Shane.

Our strike swallowed up four of the six weeks. There was not a day that went by that I did not think of him and the direct affect political issues between government and teachers was having on him. Shane and the rest of the students were the losers, caught in the middle...innocent victims of labour relations.

This was the year I clearly saw the politics of education. Even though I struggled to see beyond, each time I put blinders up, they were knocked down. Why did politics become so visible to me at that point? Why did I not recognize the political aspects of education in my first years of teaching? I think I did but I did not know how to name it or what to do about it. My fears and frustrations grew throughout the year. Working with students who have been falling through the cracks, listening to two powerful men dictate the direction of education, becoming involved in our local professional association...I myself felt as though I am falling through the cracks with the students. The education system is rapidly changing back to basics, taking with it the future education of the disadvantaged.

We are coming into an elitist education system which will only support the strong academic students or children of power. How can I teach in a system I don't believe in? How can I work within an institution who advocates change which will further suppress the already disadvantaged? The on stream of testing, the elimination of "frill" areas of the curriculum causes me to question our concern for students and the quality of education we provide. I see education as a power game that boils down to dollars and cents... a game with powerful knights and kings making the moves and calling the shots. These few knights and kings possess power, but have little knowledge about the education kingdom.

The appointed Minister in Education in the province of Newfoundland is a United Church Minister. What does he know about education except from his own schooling 40 years ago? Where are the real experts? Our voices are not being heard, nor were we invited. In fact we were told directly that our opinions were not valid...the parents held the power. Yes we do need to listen to the parents, but are we not qualified? We have spent years training and then years in the classroom working with students and understanding their needs. I think it is up to us to inform parents as to the implications of this educational reform. Where is our union in all of this? We can't wait for others to make the move. Perhaps we as educators, collectively have to start doing our own PR with parents. I have spoke of this with some staff and administration; however, I am guilty of not taking it further. I think part of it is fear, not wanting to over-step my boundaries. In hard economic times, job loss is real and we don't want to do anything to jeopardize that.

Since the strike, there is a feeling of loss. Loss of dignity for our profession and the pride teachers once held for their profession are gone. How can we allow this to happen? What are we as individuals doing? What is our association (union) doing? How do I fight the feelings of hopelessness, the feeling of disempowerment? How can we empower our students when as teachers we are not empowered? How do we resist the medicine being prescribed for all students...that being the academic stream, the high value being placed on math and science? What will happen to the students who have a reaction to this new medication? I don't think we have to ponder that question for long. They too will fall through the cracks even earlier and more rapidly than before. What about teachers? How do we prevent ourselves from falling through the cracks?

Where do I go from here? Not all teachers feel as I do. Some want to go back to the way it was. Teaching is easier, dealing with the three R's, workbooks, teaching the group as a whole while the others experiencing difficulties are out in another classroom. In the last ten to 15 years (especially in the last five years) I think the resistance to change goes back to the increasing demands on the classroom teachers and the lack of assistance and support from the Department of Education and to some extent the school boards. Some really feel that our education system is in a mess. I do believe there are problems because there are large discrepancies in our philosophies... again, because we were never given the time to learn, to understand, to grow together. Whole language is a curse to some. "Kids don't know how to read, write and spell anymore" echo parents, teachers and the general public.

I have witnessed whole language as being problematic for many teachers, administrators and school boards and I did not understand why until I began to inquire about the implementation and introduction. I discovered when whole language was first introduced in the schools it had been handed over as something to teach, not a philosophy...a belief in how children learned. With the one day inservice, and the "handing over" of whole language, many myths developed and still exist. I have the same fear about critical literacy in our classrooms...it is not a lesson, but something we live. I have the same concerns with multi-age classrooms. With any change, we need a great deal of time to reflect, rethink and support. This is often not the case. It took me one year as a full time graduate student to begin to understand and grow to believe in the philosophy of whole language. I still have much to learn and am constantly rethinking and reflecting. This is why I feel I need to continue my studies. For me, the Mount has been a turning point, a source of support within a community of learners who allow me to question, to rethink, to reflect on my practice as they do the same. We all need this dialogue to create reflection and awareness. Unfortunately, in the "real world" this time is not built in. There are some schools in the United States who are working extra time at the end of each day and spending an afternoon a week sharing. I think this is a wonderful idea and I have shared it in hopes that it may be seen as a worthwhile effort by people in the positions of power. We need to come together to share and discuss our ways of thinking. If not, we are fostering further division within

ourselves. What does this say about the value of our conversations? Some say teaching gets easier as you go, but for me (and many of my colleagues) it is becoming more difficult and extremely frustrating. Why? Is it because I am questioning my practices and beliefs and looking for connections between the two? Is it because of the disempowerment I feel in a highly political system where I feel no control? No hope? Is it because I can't capture the students who are falling through the cracks? How will the Stephens and the Shanes survive in the "adjustment of the course" when the actual "ADJUSTING THE COURSE" document is implemented? How will I survive? I feel like a child in a candy store when I see someone who has just stolen candy. They threaten to do something bad to me if I don't go along with them. I guess that sums up how I feel with the current educational reform. What do I do? As I sit here and write I hear a young boy cry out, "Every man for himself" as he runs into the pool. Is that the direction we are heading?

Another year has begun. I look forward to this year in which I have the same position. It is the first time in my teaching career when I have the opportunity to build on what I had started. The past year has not been an easy one. The actual teaching has been wonderful, but the stress of political change and the resistance to change in the school community has made it difficult to maintain strength in my convictions. Quickly into the school year the political plate is already overflowing. The Department of Education is coming on strong with testing; talk of a Canadian curriculum; throwing together a full day kindergarten program, cuts in funding and programming; elimination of school activities as they take away from "instructional" time and on top of this a large group of discontented teachers.

The first staff meeting of the year, and at the top of the agenda was the loss of inservice days for primary and elementary teachers. The days allocated by the board were at the secondary level for "important" curriculum areas. I was very concerned with this decision made by the board. Teachers felt left out of the picture and felt devalued for the contributions they make in our children's education. After the meeting a group of teachers and myself were discussing the loss of days. I approached the principal giving him feedback on how we were feeling. I had asked permission to write a letter to the school board to convey the dissatisfaction with the judgment call they had made and to advocate the

importance of the early years of schooling. We have no longer representation at the board level for primary as the position was just recently cut. (In fact the french coordinator's position was cut as well. It was interesting to note they were the only two women at the board level and now they are gone).

The principal gave us the freedom to express our concerns; however he did not want to be involved. This gave me an uneasy feeling. I did not want to create problems, but I felt the board had to know that we needed support and perhaps if more attention and time were granted in the early years, we would not have the crisis we seem to have at the secondary level. I made an announcement for interested teachers to meet. We met and I noted the concerns. I then turned to the research to support our plea, and sent the letter (see appendix 4). We signed it as "A GROUP OF CONCERNED EDUCATORS". The majority of us were apprehensive to sign our names to the letter as there are some major changes coming and with that is job loss. I then faxed the letters to all the elementary schools in the district and asked that they express their concerns and show support. To the best of my knowledge, there were no additional letters sent by other schools. The superintendent acknowledged our concerns in a response letter. The justifications he gave did not satisfy us, so we accepted his invitation for suggestions. We met once more and outlined our concerns once again as well as a list of suggestions which came out of brainstorming (see appendix 5). The board decided to have a two day workshop for all primary and elementary teachers in the district. The date was set for the first week of school in January. Unfortunately I missed it as I was on leave, but I did get word that overall teachers felt it was worthwhile and useful. The board also sent around a list of topics to inquire as to the interests. I was very pleased with the input we were given. I continue to be disappointed over the loss of individual conference choice...there are no days for this.

I have continued to send articles to the school board staff..food for thought, in areas such as curriculum, testing, and the effects of the educational reform. I must confess, I have not attached my name to them, however I am sure they are aware of where the "resistance" is coming from. I guess I now am resisting change, but I truly believe that this change is not in the best interest of our students. How can I support change that does not allow all children an access to quality education? I am thinking the worst

about the reform, which becomes problematic. I need to overcome it, and think about the direction I want to go and how I will get there. Maybe I should be thinking of the possible implications of such change. This is difficult to do when the education reform is eliminating programs that some students find success. It is directing teachers to the “nuts and bolts” of education, excluding rich learning experiences. Instructional time is seen within the classroom environment only, and field trips etc. are seemingly viewed as a waste of valuable time. We recently took a group of grade two students to a heritage house in their community. The information given was a historical journey to the past...a part of the children’s culture and heritage. I learned a great deal that day! Is this a waste of instructional time? How can a few individuals (the Minister of Education in particular) make that decision about what the children should and should not learn about? Is there no value on an outing exploring a nature park or a skating trip?

“Stand back and take another look” is what my journey is all about...to make sense of my world. It is like looking at myself in a rear view mirror, seeing where I have been and where I am going. We need to reflect on who we are and question why we do what we do. Sometimes we become too involved in searching for what others are doing instead of exploring ourselves. I’m guilty!! Reflection can be painful and it can also be messy. Something that I realized through my journey is I like things “cut and dried”. I want to know “how to do it” and then get on with “it”. I find uncertainty very uncomfortable and confusing. Perhaps I do not go deep enough, I see things - or want to see things simplistically. Why then do I long to learn more? Is it to validate my thoughts, my views? When I attend graduate classes I realize just how much I don’t know, leaving the class with heavy feelings of insecurity as a professional and little confidence in myself as an educator. “Am I adding to, or eroding the children’s educational opportunities when they are with me?” - I often ask myself this question. Am I getting caught up in what I believe whole language is and what I am discovering?

Resistance to change is perhaps a result of our lack of understanding. I believe this is the case with whole language, and I fear the same will happen with critical literacy. I am beginning to see more clearly as to the uncertainty in our direction, and this is what is leading me in my state of confusion. Gathering with graduate students who have been studying in

the area of literacy for a number of years, questioning what whole language and critical literacy are, has left me question what I am doing and why. If we are not sure, what about the teachers who do not believe or have little knowledge in the area of literacy? We are being held accountable for what we do, and have to be able to articulate what it is that we do. Is this what lead to the negative outcries about our current education system?

A common thread that I see occurring in my life as a teacher is communication - or the lack of. I stated we need to articulate what it is we do; I don't do this well. A part of the problem with the implementation of this new program I am involved, in I think, stems from the lack of communication - with teachers and parents. In the first year of the program, my time was consumed by the mere development and setting up. I neglected the communication end of it. I was aware of this and my main goal in the second year was to improve communication. If I had done this initially, maybe the problems would not have escalated to where they are now. I have difficulty in dealing with conflict both professionally and personally. I want to run away from it! This year I began to pursue my communication goal. Parent night only allows me to meet with the parents who choose to see me, so I wrote a letter and addressed it individually. I invited them to a meeting where we explained the program that their children were involved in (see appendix 6). We shared with them the resources we had and allowed them to look around on their own. We took them for a tour throughout the school and invited them back to speak with us on parent night or to drop in at anytime -during or after school hours. We were surprised but very pleased with the turn out. The teacher communication took the form of inviting them in to look at the general things we were trying to do with the children and an anecdotal assessment and progress report. I shared this with them and invited suggestions. I asked if they were in agreement with my approach and if any changes were necessary. They all seemed to feel that everything was going well (or this is how I perceived it to be).

Through communication, I realized that some of the approaches used in the classroom were philosophically in line with mine. I was surprised by one of the teachers - until we began to talk, I thought she was very traditional in her approach...I was wrong. She has gone to great lengths to take her kids from where they are. She has shared some of her frustrations

confidentially with me - she needed someone to share with. When I think about our working relationship last year, it felt so good to be there to provide some support. One of the other teachers I work with is a former primary coordinator whose job at the board office was eliminated. We lost at the board level but gained in our school as she is now a grade two teacher. We had developed a professional relationship over the last three years. She is someone I highly respect and value. She has been good for the school and has been a great support for me. When she was at the board level, she, along with three other coordinators (and myself), began a support group, meeting for breakfast at the board once a month.

The conversations around testing have changed recently. CTBS scores are being used to compare our school to smaller schools in the district...the scores suggest possible problems with our teaching. How can we begin to compare different communities, different social and economical factors? Why have some of the conversations around testing changed? Is it the game that individuals are forced to play? With the onset of the reform, many job losses will occur...could this be a factor? A colleague had once said to me, "I could never go against my principles, I just could not do it regardless of the consequences." If she or I were in the same situation, would we compromise our principles? I would like to think we wouldn't, but if it means putting food on our table what would we do? It is very easy to sit back and observe everyone else; it takes a great deal of time and effort to evaluate ourselves.

Just when I thought the waters were beginning to calm down, the questioning of the program and the rapid implementation of testing had made our gains seem insignificant. Along with this came a letter by a grade one teacher (see appendix 7). A meeting was called for the three grade one teachers. This turn of events happened so quickly, just after I accepted a study leave out of the province. This letter came just days before I was leaving. The letter and meeting questioned why the grade one students received resource help from the kindergarten teachers (in and out of class) rather than from the resource teacher like they did the previous year. They questioned the value of the program, the time and enrichment. Even though I did not work with their students this year (for additional support), based on last year, they were concerned with the lack of communication, testing, assessment, and objectional goals. I admitted to the problems and indicated my strive to improve in this area...my goal for

the year. I explained to them what I had been doing and invited suggestions. I did get some good suggestions from the meetings. The principal attended the last two meetings. They wanted to know why he took the grade one resource room time away, and how he had planned to “fix it”. There were different concerns for the individual teachers. I had asked that they discuss what they may like to do and we would come back as a group. It was the last full day of school - I was catching a boat the next day. We met after school. After the meeting they joined the Christmas social taking place in the staff room while I ran around trying to juggle my schedule to accommodate the grade one children in some way - even if there was not much time. Laughter filled the room as I entered the festive gathering. I ran frantically looking for teachers who would be able to juggle their schedule around me so I could make these changes. As I would migrate towards one, another would be pulling on me to sit down and relax. At that point relaxing was furthest from my mind...here I was leaving for four months and this still had not been sorted out. I wrote letters, distributed new schedules, and made detailed notes for the new teacher about the changes that happened that day (we had spent the last two days going over everything together - the hiring was left late). The letter I received was from a teacher I respect and admire a great deal. We worked closely together in my first year at that school teaching grade one together. She was a great source of support the year after when the new program started. When we spoke, I asked her views as to what changes needed to take place. She said she could not articulate it at that time, she would have to take time to think about it. I felt useless; how can I make changes when I don't know what direction they want to take?

Why did this come up so quickly and so close to the end of the term? I wondered about this and had my own speculations as did one of my colleagues who was aware of a grade level meeting that had taken place. It was confirmed for me in the second last meeting. One teacher said “We thought we all had different concerns until someone helped us see that our concerns were really the same.” It has been indicated by some that perhaps we need to start taking larger groups of students and focus on skills more... perhaps this line of thinking is a result of the endless feelings of frustrations. Teachers have never been given any formal inservicing and support from the department to cope with inclusion. Or maybe the approach we are using is all wrong. If so, what is “right”? Why do the children enjoy coming if it is “wrong”? Why have some

teachers noted increases in self esteem, attitudes and interest in reading, and improvement in reading and writing? Why is it when I tell children that they won't be coming out to work with me (only for class visits) are they disappointed? Recently, I was working with a little girl who showed rapid progress. Her teacher discussed with me the progress she had made and we decided she should no longer be on my case load. I wrote a letter home to the parent explaining why we had made this decision and informed them that we would be closely monitoring her progress. When I took the little girl aside to tell her that I was really proud of her (she had been doing so well that she would only be coming out for class visits) she beamed from ear to ear, until she heard the part about only coming to the resource room for class visits. Her smile turned into a quivering lip saying..."But Miss, I don't know all of my words". I responded by saying; "But you are reading so well now and I'm really proud of you. I'm going to come and see how you are doing. I know you are going to try your best". My fear was she would give up trying in order to get back on my schedule.

I have been wondering about her progress as well as all the children as I write about my journey. Taking leave in the middle of the year was a difficult decision to make. I started to see so much improvement in the children's growth, especially the ones who had seemed to be making such little progress at the beginning... children like little Christopher (Shane's younger brother) and little Justin who now rush in with book in hand eager to read to me. I can't help but wonder how they will do in my absence.

I have felt isolated in my thinking and thus needed to explore the literature as a source of support. In the next section, I have used the literature to help me question, reposition myself, rethink and direct my journey.

CHAPTER 2

A SEARCH FOR CONNECTIONS WITHIN A TEACHER'S JOURNEY:

**“FORBIDDEN ANGER; WOMEN COULD FIND NO
VOICE IN WHICH PUBLICLY TO COMPLAIN;
THEY TOOK REFUGE IN DEPRESSION OR MADNESS.”**

Carolyn Heilburn, 1988, p. 15.

I don't think I stand alone in feelings of frustration, anger and despair. Being without a voice, I think, has resulted in the low morale being expressed among teachers. It was important for me to write about the issues surfacing daily in my educational world; affecting what I do as a teacher. The political realities of education have become more recognizable and intense as I gain more experience and confidence as a teacher. My conviction and commitment to equitable education for all of our students has caused me to strive for what I believe in and rebel against what is not in the best interest for our students - the educational reform and the back-to-basics movement.

The back-to-basics movement evolved over a hundred years ago out of fears of growing illiterate, and the need to place blame when the economy becomes shaky. The movement gathers evidence such as test scores, snippets of misspellings, and an increase in support services. This then becomes a national panic and the “experts” agree there is a need to return to the fundamentals: drills on spelling, grammar, punctuation etc. It is like a fashion pendulum swinging back and forth throughout the years. Statistics often are used to show educational deterioration, yet throughout the last 200 years the percentage of people attending post-secondary institutions has increased considerably.(Rose, 1989).

It is not to downplay the problems that exist within schools - “the way they are structured, financed, the unevenness of their curricula, the low status of their teachers, the dreary records with the poor and disenfranchised. But what a curious thing it is that when we do criticize our school, we tend to frame our indictments in terms of decline, a harsh, laced-with-doom assault stripped of the historical and social realities of American education - its struggle to broaden rather than narrow access, of the increased social as well as cognitive demands made on it, of our complex, ever-changing definitions of what it means to be

liberate and what a citizenry should know. How worthy of reflection is it that our policy is drawn so often by a yearning for a mythic past or by apple and orange comparisons to countries, past or present, less diverse and less educationally accessible than ours “(Rose, 1989, p. 6). A caring society creates conditions to help children learn and develop the importance of learning and education (Weiner, 1994). I agree that societies who highly value education have greater success, but whose education system is valued, at whose expense, and why is it deemed to be the most important? Weiner continues to say that the families who value education, regardless of culture and class, who encourage and support academic achievement and excellence, are likely to achieve a level of success in schools that is higher than average.

We are not much different than the American education system and the argument Rose(1989) presents is a good one and can be applied to what is happening in Canada. The literacy crisis has been with us for sometime and we have not been able to have all students meet academic standards in the past or present. Yet, we think things were different before - that we have lost something along the way and we look to the past...the one that never existed.

The politics of education are real. The changes due to political moves are being implemented rapidly. We know that change is gradual, or at least it should be. Then why is there a rush for change. Does this not have dangerous implications? Why are we, as educators not doing more to slow down these changes, to inform our parents, and our public of the consequences of such a rapid shift? We should be evaluating and reflecting on “what is right in our schools” and build from there. Sitting amongst a group of teachers in a graduate course, I could not help but wonder why we were discussing certain issues when they are about to be “thrown out” . Maybe it is a part of articulating what we do, so we can then be accountable to the public. Is it not time that we all become more political? Frank Serafini (1994, p. 34) certainly thinks we should. He is encouraging educators to “get political...again”. Serafini is stressing that it is time to “WAKE UP” and realize the politics going on around us - the negative press on whole language. He implies we need to get ourselves organized and do something about it - “they are”.

A colleague suggested to me one day that “teachers are a passive bunch - they were the good students who bought into the teachers’ game. They never wanted to buck the system”. When I thought about it, I had to agree. I think this, along with the frustration level, has led to apathy, which has compounded the whole situation. “Not wanting to buck the system” hit home for me. This was the reason for the apprehension of signing the letters sent to the board. I agree with Serafini - we need to get political collectively and now! He says we do not want to remain “reactive, but need to also get politically proactive”. He states: “Education is political and politics are educational. We need to become aware in the political aspects of education. We need to be able to articulate our beliefs and practice. Then we will be able to find avenues to foster change and growth for the education of our children “(Serafini, 1994, p. 34). I would like to add that as educators we need to bring our philosophies together - to come to a general understanding as to the direction we should take in providing meaningful and quality education. People are placed in the position of authority without much reference to the schools or board’s philosophy. When our philosophy is not made clear, the result is chaos. The school is perhaps the only institution which brings all branches of society together. I think that too many of us are teaching to the extremes and the children are suffering the consequences. Could this be part of what the public is seeing, the outcry for “back to basics regime”? So how do we bridge the gap between our own philosophies? How do we break down the barriers? I believe we do this through conversation. But how do we keep them on going when we are at different ends of the spectrum? I have difficulty in keeping the conversations on going when I am out of my supportive learning community. I think this has resulted in the feelings of isolation and why I keep connected with the Mount... a place I yearn to be when I am not in a safe risk-taking environment. I think this is where the emotional comes in - the tunnel vision effect. I have to be a willing and supportive listener to understand other’s experiences. I have to accept colleagues from where they are and continue to be cautious not to impose my values, beliefs and experiences on them - as we try not to do with students in our classrooms. We need the time to build conversations so we can develop rapport, share ideas and learn from each other...to balance our views so we keep questioning and repositioning ourselves as learners.

Perceived shortcomings in education and competition on an international level have caused our schools to be under attack. The public is holding us

accountable and indicating that we are not doing a good job educating their children. Hurd(1994) feels this is an unfair deduction. School and society have changed over the years. She states: "Teachers have no authority and are targets for malicious attacks against their integrity and character. Teacher morale is low "(Hurd, 1994, p. 12). Is it realistic to think that going back to "the way it was" 20 years ago will become what it was? Everyone wants input into reforming education. I question for what and for whom? Everyone seems to know what is best...but it is interesting that teacher input is last on the list of priorities - actually we have not even made the list. Yet the same teachers are the very ones who must carry out the new ideas for reform without consultation. According to Hurd (1994,p.12), "As long as parents are not being held responsible for their child's behavior and academic achievement, educational reform will not succeed." Hurd stresses the importance of the home environment and how education must be nurtured from birth... that "decent class size, support staff and parental involvement, help address some problems. Government can't be trusted to make education a priority" (Hurd, 1994 p.12). If we want education to become a priority, it is up to us as parents and educators to make it happen. ...reform and change can only start in the classroom with the teacher. Do teachers have room for another portion on their plate?

The challenges teachers face today are real and overwhelming to many. Students are suffering from economic hardship, abuse, addiction etc.. How do kids cope in classrooms that are much more complex and not at all sheltered from anger and pain? How do we shelter them? Can we? How do we cope? How is their learning affected?; do they really get full periods of instruction because the teacher is dealing with so many other things besides teaching? Schools can not do everything...we need support. Issues cause concern in our schools; - "issues exemplified by the lack of hope attitudes that are so often projected by our leaders who tell our children that tomorrow won't be better...tomorrow will be worse" (Reid, 1993, p. 5). I wonder how these children survive as long as they do. My journey has been inspired because of my struggle for solutions to problems that I can not solve alone. Reid (1993, p. 7) indicates : "As teachers who spend so much time in the classroom, who live with the pain, anger, uncertainties, and problems that our students live with...we know that time for learning and discovering must be given back to the classroom. By having others in society share the responsibilities maybe then we can allow young people

to be young.” How do we do this if the “powers that be” are working in isolation...not working together to find solutions to improve the quality of education for each and every student?

Teachers want support and recognition for their work. Substantial rewards in terms of salary, power and benefits are reserved for those who achieve promotion out of the classroom. (Even things such as inservices are fully funded by the school board, whereas classroom teachers have to incur the expenses themselves...inservices that benefit the classroom teacher. When board personnel return from such inservices, often times this is not shared). Those of us still in the classroom are expected to do as we are told. Teachers are told they must keep current, and attend sessions where there is little opportunity to voice their values and they could be “fined if they act out of compassion for kids “(Ledger, 1994, p. 32). Ledger (1994) hopes that teachers would be innovative; self reliant; that they would break away from dependence on the texts and develop materials that works for them in their own classrooms. I believe with this reform, what progress we have made in this area will soon come to an end. How much more effective would teachers be if the authority structures were reassessed? When we have people in the position of power who are there solely for the “power trip” and not for the betterment of the students and teachers; in turn, the quality of education, we then have lost focus of what we are all about. When I think of my friend and colleague being charged with insubordination because she and a group of teachers on her staff chose to drink their coffee (during break times) in a place other than the staff room, then I have to question the authority structure of our system and why and how people are placed in such positions.

Government restraints on staffing, educational materials, and the increasing demands on schools have left teachers feeling fatigue, general disenchantment with the profession and teacher burnout (our stress leave rate is on a rapid incline). Political and social conditions have left teachers with a great deal of responsibility. According to Lennon (1993), teachers are expected to report accurately and reliably on performance, provide continuous parental input, and continue to be concerned with the legal and professional ramifications of those decisions. She thinks “all of us are happy,sad, and distressed about our profession” (Lennon, 1993, p. 5). I think she is right. A study by King, Warren and Pearl (1988) reported after surveying 6000 teachers the following to be the most stressful

aspects of teaching (Lennon, 1993, p.5):

- Lack of administrative support and/or poor administration.
- Colleagues' negative attitudes and incompetence.
- Working conditions, lack of materials, and low budgets.
- Lack of security, redundancy, being forced into areas where they do not have expertise or grades they did not want to teach.
- Large class size.
- Ministry directives or change for the sake of change and classroom decisions made by administrators with little background.
- Lack of parent and public support for or the understanding of the problems of teaching.

I think these are very real concerns for teachers. I recall turning on the radio and listening to open line callers (the public) "bash" teachers during our strike. It certainly did not leave one feeling good about one's chosen profession and the job we are trying to do with all of the increasing demands and cut-backs. With regard to change - yes, many decisions are being made by people with little background in education - not to mention the actual classroom. It is critical that those who propose and mandate change understand the problems of teaching, and understand what it is they are trying to change and why, and examine what works. Rosenholtz (1987) reports that teachers' uncertainty and a low sense of teacher efficacy are recurring themes in the dilemma of low teacher self-esteem. Lennon indicates, "teachers feel unsure about what they should do and powerless to break the defeating cycle (Lennon, 1993, p. 6)." I think this is what I am struggling with.

The political game over resources -ie. funding - heightens the illiteracy statistics. According to Street (1990, p. 5), "government and agencies still make great play of figures that show, say, 25% of the UK to be illiteracy or 25 million people in the U.S. The National Literacy Secretariat (1994, p. 5) states that 38% of Canadian adults have difficulty with reading and writing; 1 in 3 Canadians lack the essential literacy skills needed to find and keep work (I question how "essential" is defined); and 39% of Newfoundlanders' between 16 and 69 can meet most everyday reading demands. "In a complex society, those who read and write with difficulty find themselves excluded from a world they haven't the tools to understand. Good reading and writing skills are absolutely essential in modern life. Literacy is important in involving people in the social, political, economic and cultural life around them"(National Literacy

Secretariat, 1994, p. 5). Again I question how “literacy” is defined and for what purpose. Recent research questions the level of job acquisition, saying that literacy is less important than issues of gender, class, race etc. Street (1990) suggests that government uses illiteracy as an excuse or a means of “shifting” the debate away from the lack of jobs rather than peoples ability of job performance. A U.S. researcher has shown the bartering of literacy, ie. trading a skill for a writing task. Literacy teachers sensitive to the need for particular types of literacy dealing with skills they use in their everyday lives have abandoned traditional exam oriented literacy. If our education system takes the full swing back to the traditional teaching of literacy and the continued elimination of hands-on/skill oriented curriculum, we will be further disadvantaging our students. The illiteracy rate will be higher than ever before if we define literacy in a narrow framework. If we think of literacy as reading and writing the “western” way and ignore local literacies, we further compound the damaging effects socially and culturally. The education reform is advocating the “western” type of literacy and is ignoring the individuals who do not fit into this literacy world. Literacy varies within the context of one’s life, yet literacy is defined according to a particular criterion objective. Street (1990) suggests the political task is “to develop strategies for literacy programs that address the complex variety of literacy needs evident in contemporary society. This requires the policy discourses on literacy to take greater account of people’s present skills and own perceptions; to reject the dominant belief in unidirectional progress towards western models of language use and of literacy “(Street, 1990, p. 12)....So how do we stop the current movement in the other direction? It is not uncommon that we take a cause and make it work to our advantage as in the whole literacy issue and even within our schools. Testing for purposes of labeling children so they fit a certain criteria for funding is still on going in our schools. I was recently speaking with a colleague whose child was a part of such testing. Reluctant to sign the report, she went against her feelings in hopes that her child would be provided with assistance in the classroom. That request was denied and the child is on record with exaggerated disabilities to the extent that his teacher initially refused him entrance into her classroom at the beginning of the year after the report had been read. The mother has had to fight for her child’s rights within the school she teaches.

If we are going to make changes in our education system they should be

for the “right” reasons...to foster success. How do we begin to do this for our “disadvantaged” or “at-risk” students? I think this gets back to communication again. Parents understanding of the school system allows parents to help children adjust to school and improves their ability to make educational choices which are best for them. With understanding comes demands - ie. middle class parents are more likely to blame the school for problems or turn to outside experts or private schools...we see this happening now with the rise of private schools across the country. Working class parents know less because they spend less time visiting and volunteering in schools than “better educated” parents. Parents do not have the access to information because they have less time to become involved and also they have less time to socialize and learn from the middle-class parents who do have access to the information. The “better educated” parents have the skills necessary to successfully participate in the educational process...they actively monitor performance, have more strategies for assisting in homework, for solving both academic and behavioral problems than working class parents (Vacha and McLaughlin, 1994).

Baker and Stevenson (1986) were able to demonstrate that “parental involvement was related to success in schools even when social class was held constant. This is true for high school drop-outs as well. Lowered participation in organizations as well as lack of informational sources of information about the school will increase the likelihood that students will drop out even when the variable social class is held constant. Involvement in “high culture” (art, music, drama, and literature) may be related to school success (Lieberman, 1994, p. 29).”

How do we begin to overcome all of this? Perhaps we need to develop creative approaches to knock down the barriers which are problematic for some of our students and parents. Our parents need greater contact with school and other parents; what schools are trying to accomplish; and what strategies are available to improve performance and behavior. PTAs may be effective for middle-class parents, but involving parents from lower working class families will require new approaches. In our school we have had great difficulty with keeping our PTA on going. In a school population of 800, we have had two parents involved. When they decided it was someone else's turn, our PTA collapsed. In the resource room we have tried to create an opportunity for parents to bring their preschool children

in for “story time”. It starts a half hour before the school day begins; therefore, parents bringing children to school could drop in with their children while we read stories. The intent was to allow for a non-threatening environment whereby parents felt comfortable, and provide an opportunity for their children to be read to. For some children the amount of time spent reading to them is low or non-existent. Our project did not go as planned. We had five children who came on a regular basis...all of which come from professional families who read frequently to their children. How do we get the children from “less opportunity” families? Perhaps it could be the time frame...would it make a difference to have it another time during the day? This is something to consider when I return. Many low-income parents often lack the resources, time, and energy to become involved in the schools and have little access to “high culture”. Working more than one job; lack of transportation to school; limited academic skills; lack of flexibility in work schedules; make it difficult for low-income families to become more involved. School programs may be able to serve as alternatives for families that lack the opportunities to connect with the schools, ie. tutoring programs, free or low cost academic and recreational summer programs, etc. Our particular school has identified some of the barriers and thus have implemented some alternative programming. We have a home reading program whereby a volunteer from the community (a retired teacher) meets with preschool and kindergarten parents to discuss books and reading to children. There is a kit which each parent receives; this contains a variety of children’s literature and it is exchanged after a certain time period. We also have a Shared Reading volunteer program which takes place after school. It takes place in the school and at a centre in the low-rental housing area. Our summer school program was implemented last year and we have been granted funding for the coming year. Researchers have noted school wide intervention programs have had dramatic improvements in students performance. We hope that our efforts will do the same.

Similarly, children who have different background experiences could be enriched with field trips, and a curriculum that supplements exposure to art, music, literature, etc. that upper and middle class children receive at home. This is why I become frustrated when people in the position of power want to put a halt to culturally rich experiences such as field trips, etc. The curriculum and pedagogic practices that characterize our schools

should be re-examined...unfortunately they are being re-examined for the wrong reasons, thus taking giant steps back from where we have progressed. One of the functions of education is to pass on our rich heritage - art, music, drama, but not in a way that penalizes those with little exposure, ie. change the way we teach and organize the curriculum so it does not become a handicap. Even things like homework; homework could be examined to ensure it is necessary and able to be accomplished by children who do not have the parental support and environment they need. Administrators, with support from the school boards and the Department of Education, can “reduce the importance of parent’s ability to understand and manipulate the school system (Vacha and McLaughlin, 1993, p. 10).”

Decisions on the direction education will take are based on money and politics. The current changes are heading towards improvements of measurable results in education. It is felt that generic testing of basic skills could be used by the parents and public to determine skill levels. What does this really tell parents and the public? I recall my principal saying how difficult it was for him to interpret CTBS scores and what it all meant. How then can parents gain knowledge from such testing? I think it is a dangerous game that we are playing. If our government is really concerned about the quality of education in the classroom, should they not slow down and at least look at other countries’ initiatives, ie: New Zealand (Ledger, 1994)?

With restructuring and downsizing we must develop a vision of schools that are willing and able to meet the needs of all students (Shukyn and Krull, 1994). If reform is to come from the “bottom up”...from the true experts...we the teachers, then we have some serious work ahead of us. How we do this I am not sure for our voices are silent in the reform movement. If we don’t find a voice I fear the new direction will involve losing kids, while others will benefit. Ledger (1994, p. 32) indicates, “In looking for solutions through which the students of this country will achieve maximum success, there will be many points of view, but self interest must be set aside and exposed for what it really is. Ethical issues involving the future of our nation are at the core. The extent to which they are ignored will be the measure of the extent of the loss to all.”

Unfortunately, with increasing demands we are seeing a downloading and

cuts in funding which perhaps may be the cause for the finger pointing. Conway (1994, p. 3) says, "The back-to-basics lobby wants schools to focus on the three "Rs" and cut out the "frills". The business lobby wants schools to do more with less. Senior governments cut grants while imposing more demands on the system. Meanwhile, we all know that we must invest more and more in education at all levels if we are to ensure the future of both our children and our nation." At the same time demands are increasing, Canadians are demanding more and more from the system, along with educational excellence and social responsiveness, from less and less. In the past 25 years spending budgets have declined sharply. Conway (1994, p. 3) indicates, "This must change despite the continuing economic crisis, Canadians will have to find the political will to commit more public resources to education. If not, special interest groups will seek educational advantages at the expense of others"...I'm afraid he is right.

I think it is crucial that we remember a school's reason for being. According to Schlechty (1991) it is to "invent forms of schoolwork that will engage the young and cause them to invest their talents and resources (energy, enthusiasm, wits) in doing the work (purposeful activity) in ways that satisfy the students themselves and from which they will learn things of social and cultural value (Jonasson, 1993, p. 18)." Schlechty points out that test scores and other measures of learning are not the results by which schools must be led and that education is about "helping children grow up to be vital, significant, self-aware, and reflective adults capable of living useful lives in a democratic information-based society" (Jonasson, 1993, p. 18). Teacher growth (personal and professional) is strongly related to student growth.

If our goal is really to promote student learning in schools then we must collectively invest time, energy and money. Boyer (1983) observed "where the achievement was high and where there was a clear sense of community, they found that the principal made the difference...creating a school where teachers as well as students learn calls for strong educational leadership (Jonasson, 1993, p. 19)." I believe this to be true based on observing and working with my own principal. He invites others to share decision-making and expects those who accept the invitation to share in the responsibility as well. It is trusting in each other - something the leaders of the educational reform have not allowed for. Participating

leadership is not only a “democratic right, but it promises to yield better decisions and better results. This type of leadership allows for everyone to work together as a team. All of us involved in education must be prepared to introduce, accept, and embrace change...The key is the capacity to conceptualize and articulate the nature of change” (Jonasson, 1993, p. 19). I think this is why I am resisting the proposed changes in the educational reform...they have not done this, nor have they granted leadership and empowerment to the schools.

For positive change to occur, it is important that everyone becomes a learner, teacher, and leader -”change will occur most readily when those whose energy, commitment, and goodwill are needed to support change, believe in it, understand it, and support it” (Jonasson, 1993, p. 19). This is where our current system is becoming problematic. Changes that are placed upon people without participation or consent almost always ends up in failure...can we afford to risk this? Shanker (1990) indicates that change means commitment from top down (department, board and school levels). It must focus on staff development...there is a link between professional development and student learning. If we want to improve the quality of education, we must look to the continuous education of educators - that is staff development. So how can we do this if our inservice days continue to be cut?

Joyce (1990) points out, “The future culture of schools will be fashioned largely by how staff development systems evolve” (Jonasson, 1993, p. 20). I strongly agree with Jonasson (1993, p. 20), in that, “The development of people, and the creation of an environment in which people feel free to express themselves as creative individuals and feel supported when they take risks that could lead to failure is important. There is no doubt in my mind that staff development, school effectiveness and student learning are closely linked...a climate that shares leadership encourages risk taking, trying new ideas and creativity.” We need interaction among teachers that allows for discussion, observation, and analyzing problems together - this is necessary if we are to generate the kinds of practioner-based knowledge needed for improvement of practice. If teaching is to be a true profession, and effective schools in place in a information-based global economy, then we must become a community of learners and leaders (Jonasson, 1993).

If we live in a democratic society would this not already be taking place?

Do we have a democratic education system? According to Johnston (1992) democracy is a “system where there is genuine negotiation of societal goals and meanings” (Edelsky, 1993, p. 252). Shannon (1993) adds, “It is participation among equals, negotiation among equals, not participation where a few are more equal than the rest” (Edelsky, 1993, p. 252). I think we are seeing this now with the reform - even if we think we are having input, it is really tokenism. The direction has already been determined “behind the scenes”. This has been quite obvious as I look at the number of committees set up, giving the impression that teachers are having input when in fact the curriculum and/or the educational agenda or shift has already been determined. How can we have a democratic system when the decisions being made by a selected few powerful people, affect the lives and livelihood of our students? The system now gives power and privilege to selected individuals. The reform will compound this...”unequal influence over who gets what”.

Edelsky (1990, p. 253) sums it up by saying “Politics is about who gets what, where, and how - who gets money, who gets jobs, who gets diplomas, who gets good health care, who gets high quality literature in the classroom, who gets turns to talk, who gets listened to, who gets valued socially (because resources are not just material - they’re also social; and political isn’t just about what’s public - it is also about what’s personal).” Edelsky (1990, p. 253) indicates that “re-theorizing will help put critique at the centre of language education”. We need to do this together with our students...to use critical literacy, but how do we do this effectively so it does make a difference without putting certain groups under the microscope? How do we educate for democracy? We need to seek support from fellow educators to find direction... to pool our real classroom experiences together. Is it possible to ever change a system of privilege and domination? We can’t give up - we need to find a way to act and keep our jobs...every act or risk we take can have its consequences. In a very shaky economy, few of us are willing to take the risk.

Rosenholtz (1987) suggests we begin by working together individually and as small groups to consider the issues which concern us. We then need to decide how to use our energy in changing undesirable conditions, whether this is created through pressure on the government institutions, request for administration assistance at the local level, a school working together, involvement of parents and students, in planned change or small groups of

teachers working together. We must know what it is we want to change; how we want to change it; and what direction we head...I think together we can make teaching a better profession for teachers and the students we serve. Duncan (1994, p. 14) reminds us that, “when teachers really believe that the learning needs, the interests, and the experiences of their students are their touchstones for decisions about classroom resources and teaching approaches, they have grasped a powerful idea.” I believe this is what we must keep in mind as we join forces and move forward together.

This may be our initial focus in attempting to provide education for all members of a vast pluralistic democracy... we need a philosophy of language and literacy that “affirms the diverse sources of linguistic competence and deepens our understanding of the way class and culture blind us to the richness of those sources” (Rose, 1987, p.238). We need a pedagogy that lets us step back and consider the threat of the standard classroom. Once we have stepped back, we have to extend invitations to students “across the boundaries of that powerful room (Rose, 1987, p. 238)”. Then we need to revise images of excellence in education - once that is in place, “embody the reward and turmoil of education in a democracy that celebrates the plural, messy human reality of it - that encourages us to move closer and understand the richness of our students diversities” (Rose, 1987, p. 238).

The literature has indicated the silent voices of the teachers in the reform movement. I have also felt silenced. I want teachers voices to be heard; they need to be heard! This is the reason for the next chapter... it deals with listening to the voices of others. They too have images of excellence in education that encompasses our students’ diversities... in their own way, they are all striving towards that.

SECTION 2

CHAPTER 3 - LISTENING TO OTHER VOICES ...TEACHER PROFILES:

The reflection of my journey and the literature I have been reading, has led me to listening to the voices of other educators. I thought it would be of value for my own reflection to explore others thoughts and views on the current education system. I interviewed (informally) eight teachers. There was no set agenda...I wanted to create dialogue, however I found myself at times prompting to get the views on particular educational issues. Some of the teachers I interviewed were connections I made in the Masters program at Mount Saint Vincent University. The new connections were with teachers I met in schools during my study leave. It would have been interesting to have had a cross section from my own staff in Newfoundland; however being in another province made that difficult. The names of the teachers in the interviews are ones I assigned. I assured them at the beginning of the interview that their names would not be disclosed. Of the eight teachers interviewed, seven are currently at the elementary level and one at the senior high level. Three of the teachers have had previous teaching experience at the junior high level and two teachers with administrative duties. Of the eight teachers interviewed, five have a masters degree from Mount Saint Vincent University and one person is presently completing a masters degree.

INTERVIEW 1 - Patricia

Patricia has been teaching for 11 years, nine of those years has been spent in Newfoundland, while the last two years with the Halifax County-Bedford District School Board in Nova Scotia. Patricia holds a Bachelor of Arts (English major), a Bachelor of Education, and a Master of Education (Educational Psychology). She has been involved with School Counselors Association of Newfoundland as well as the Newfoundland and Labrador Teacher's Association (Political Action Committee and the Vice president of a local branch). She is currently teaching resource at a high school in the Halifax County area. Previous to that, she spent two years as a guidance counsellor.

INTERVIEW 2 - Emily

Emily has been teaching for nine years. Two of those years she spent teaching in Queen's County, and in the last seven years, she has substituted with the Dartmouth School Board and the Halifax County - Bedford District School Board (grades P - 12). In the last five years, Emily has taught in 3 schools with the Halifax County - Bedford District School Board (primary, and grades 2,3, and 6. She holds a three year Association of Education from Nova Scotia Teacher's College and has received a Bachelor of Education from Mount Saint Vincent University. Emily has been involved in various school committees and a primary committee formed when the cut in the primary program was announced. She is currently teaching grade two in Halifax County.

INTERVIEW 3 - Bev

Bev has spent the last 10 years teaching primary in Halifax County. Prior to this, she taught in Alberta. She holds a Master of Education degree from Mount Saint Vincent University. She was active in the primary committee for keeping the full day program. Bev has also been involved in leadership workshops. She is currently teaching grade primary in Halifax County.

INTERVIEW 4 - Helen

Helen has been teaching for ten and a half years. She spent three and a half years substituting while in the last seven years she has been a classroom teacher with the Halifax County - Bedford District School Board (primary and grade 2). She holds a Bachelor of Science degree (Biology) and a Bachelor of Education degree in Elementary Education. Helen also received a Master of Education degree in Literacy from Mount Saint Vincent University. She is currently teaching grade 2 in Halifax County.

INTERVIEW 5 - Sarah

Sarah has been teaching for 18 years with the Halifax County - Bedford District School Board. She has taught in three schools during her career (grades 2, 3, 5, and a 5/6 split). Sarah holds a Bachelor of Arts in Education degree, a Master of Education in Literacy, and a Master of Arts in Education (Teacher Research) from Mount Saint Vincent University. Sarah has spent much of her time away from school keeping professionally updated and has continued her studies beyond her two master degrees.

She is currently teaching grade 5 in Halifax County.

Interview 6 - Marie

Marie has been teaching for 12 years. She spent 3 years teaching in the Northwest Territories and nine years teaching with the Halifax County - Bedford District School Board. Marie has a joint degree in Special Education. She has taught ESL (grades 1,5,7 and 9), grade 3 classroom teacher, resource (1 - 6), Art (grades 1,5, and 6), and Grade 9 english. She is currently teaching elementary resource in Halifax County.

INTERVIEW 7 - Debbie

Debbie has been teaching with the Dartmouth School Board for 20 years. She spent the first eight years as a junior high Home Economics teacher and spent five years as a Home Economics Supervisor at the school board level. Debbie has spent the last seven years as a grade two classroom teacher in Dartmouth. She holds a Bachelor of Science degree in Home Economics and Education. She also received a Master of Education degree in Educational Psychology and a Master of Education degree in Literacy from Mount Saint Vincent University. Debbie has continued her studies beyond her two Master degrees. She is a member of Canadian Home Economics Association, Nova Scotia Home Economics Association, Nova Scotia Reading Association, Nova Scotia Math-Science Association and an active member of the Nova Scotia Teacher's Union. She has been involved with conference development, inservicing teachers (i.e., science, using computers as a writing tool, writing workshops, parent volunteers).She has also been on the Department of Education Task Force for Home Economics curriculum. She is currently teaching grade 2 in Dartmouth.

INTERVIEW 8 - Jim

Jim has taught for 13 years. He spent one and a half years with the Dartmouth School Board, while the remainder has been with the Halifax County - Bedford District School Board. Jim spent two years as a junior high department head and the last four years as a teaching vice principal (grade 6) at an elementary school in Halifax County. He holds a Bachelor of Arts degree in Education and is working on a Master of Education degree in Literacy from Mount Saint Vincent University. He has been involved in

provincial projects in the area of literacy (spelling) and curriculum projects at the board level. He has been a part of an administrative team providing support and inservicing to his staff in the area of professional development (literacy).

THEMES:

From the interviews, particular issues or themes were reoccurring. I have identified those themes as:

- 1. Site-Based Management**
- 2. Leadership**
- 3. Job performance and Professional Wellness**
- 4. Parents**
- 5. Union and Unity**
- 6. Politics of Education...Falling Through the Cracks**
- 7. Where do we go from here...Seeking Solutions**

LISTENING TO OTHER VOICES...

SITE-BASED MANAGEMENT:

Site-based management has been inching closer and closer to our system as we know it...a system which is currently controlled by the Department of Education and the school boards. Strategic planning has been in place for many schools, which has been the lead up to site-based planning and/or management. This was one of the largest reoccurring themes in the interviews. Why? Perhaps the reason for this being forefront in the minds of many Nova Scotia teachers is due to the recent release of the "White Paper Report" on education. Many teachers have some concerns with site-based management, mainly the role of leadership. I think that most will agree that with good administration or leadership positive things can come from it; however in the hands of the wrong people, site based management can be explosive as there can be a lot of power and control gained by individuals. Out of the eight teachers I interviewed, only one identified site-based management as a possible solution in providing quality education to all.

PATRICIA begins by saying "I don't see site-based management as an ideal solution, but I see it as an improvement in what we have which is, I think the first step. Right now we have people at upper administration levels at school board offices who are not even at the school and are not in touch with that aspect. Their job to me is primarily political - PR, keeping the budget afloat; but a lot of decisions impact individual classes. By the same token with regards to the questions about a leader who may not have the best interest of the children. That case is at the school board level, that's why there are school boards who are very successful - because they have that kind of leadership - leadership that allows growth and development. You have other school boards that are archaic because they don't. Within our structure now, although you have administrators at the upper level with a lot of power, you have your administrators in your schools who yield a quiet power and if an administrator in a school wants to go against the grain he can. If an administrator does not operate in the best interest of the student, he can right now. All those fears you would have for site-based management exist already,

only it is more hidden and that's why there are some schools that are

I agree - we have administration now who are not acting in the best interest of their students or teachers. I have recently received a copy of letters of warning sent to a colleague and friend who is a caring and dedicated teacher. She has gone against the grain of a power-seeking administrator and now she is paying the price.

HELEN feels site-based management is derived from a business model..."schools can't be run like a business model - we are not a business. As a teacher, I can't even compare an education with making money. That's sort of what you are getting at the very end of the journey - an education, whereas a business it is making money - is it not? How can you compare the two? Politicians think that site-based management is the way to go...they can't just tell us this is the best way to go, but they know teachers will do the best we can and that is part of the problem."

As teachers, we are a certain breed. In the past as students ourselves, we were always the ones to do our best and not create waves - we still are.

Site-based management creates concerns for SARAH as well in terms of "How much equity is there going to be? Is it going to improve it or create any greater discrepancy? The conversations around site-based management is not including teachers - it is all somewhere else. The only thing that I've heard about it is what I've read just in the restructuring document that was put out - which states very little except about the models that could be taken and I am not sure if there is a specific model that will be followed or not, but I mean it worries me. When you are working with people you can't treat them like commodities. We are here to educate the children, to try to take them from where they are. I suppose the potential is there that it could be a positive thing, but I think that depends on who is in the leadership and what is within that community and what their goals

are. The potential is also there for the opposite. Depending on the leadership you have in the school, you have power shared amongst all the educators in the school or unequal power distribution where the principal is in control and the teachers just do. There is also, I know for me too that one of the other things that we also play a part in that, like I think for a long time I didn't see what it was I could do to help make changes so it is almost like coming to understand your own position and learning that you can have an effect in some ways - maybe it is only a small way...one step at a time I guess, but how far you can take that I don't know unless there is a certain support, circle of support in a school. I don't know how you can support change without the support of administration. I don't know how easily that happens".

I think for me, I have to settle for one step at a time. This is often difficult as I like to arrive at my destination quickly. "To travel hopefully is better than to arrive and true success is to labor."

Robert L. Stevenson

MARIE feels "If you don't have the leadership, the concept of site-based management scares me to death quite frankly. It scares me to death because I think that you know you want to think that you would be able to go to a school and receive the professional development because I think it is healthy for you to move. I think it is healthy to be put in situations that continues to challenge you so that you continue to grow and are not going to stay stagnant and that the activities and techniques and stuff that you use from one year to the next will change, so that you're not in a rut sort of speak - so you don't have the same class for 12 years and I think that's a really good thing. But the thing that scares me in going to another school where you may not have that administrative support, would allow good people basically be on their own or to become disillusioned by the whole educational experience, that they give up or find themselves in a rut - where they don't have administrative support to lead them and help them grow. I speak from experience by coming from a situation where I know I would be scared to death to think that particular school was going to go with site-based management. The concept would not fly and it just scares the b-jeepers out of me to

think that that person would be in control of that particular situation, because the person didn't have a lot of social skills with staff. That would have been a nightmare to think that you had no place else to turn other than that individual for conflicts. The other thing would be that there was not a great deal of inservicing. That person didn't pull together a whole variety of resources - just even community resources that you could have tapped in order to get people coming in to get the staff on line, to get them interested in what they were doing. I guess in essences, that site-based management - I believe in the concept if you have the people and resources there to support it, but what scares me is that in Nova Scotia right now they are talking about amalgamating our school boards and talking about changing the whole face of what we know as education and the process that we go through in terms of receiving monies for even our school board and stuff. That scares me to think that who then is going to distribute those monies to those schools. Will they be equitable splits, because Halifax County in particular has had a devil of a time to get the Nova Scotia government to see that we are probably the only school board in the whole of the province that for years and years and years are a growing population, as opposed to a decreasing population and our student money ratio never really added up. We were always really behind the eight ball and the government could never really understand why. That was because they were not really understanding that every year that passed, we would have additional students and our populations were growing, but the funding wasn't growing with it. It makes me wonder as to the talk about putting that money back into education. Is that really where it is going to go? If you are not paying all your superintendents and all your other people at those levels, is that exactly where that money is going to go? We should be able to, at the school level, if you are talking about site-based management - we should have funding to have the resources available in order to make sure that those schools fly. But is it really where it is going to go or are we going to put it back into financing our provincial deficit? Who out there is actually going to see that stuff? It sure won't be us at the grass roots level."

I too have the same concerns as Marie. Presently I am working with very supportive administration, but this has not always been the case. In fact in all the school I have taught in, and there have been several, ownership has been a whole new experience for me in my present school.

DEBBIE's concern is the government is not taking the time to look at all the plans that they are making..."**They just want to implement. Site-based management with good leadership as a principal, at a school, could be a good thing, but most often we don't have those good leaders, and again, those leaders are going to be political - and political not to the extent that it is going to help children and the teachers. They are going to be 'yes' people for the government and because the government has a representative that will approve or disapprove of the principals, they are going to want 'yes men' and 'yes women'. The school council is a part of it, and I'm not sure how that would work. That says that you have a say - community, children, parents and teachers, but I think again with the governments interference, with this person involved representing the government is going to have an affect on - again the government is going to have their own way because they are going to be involved. The superintendent is going to choose the principal based on the government's requirement and it is a business model, not an educational model. The people they want in, if they want the Masters in Business Administration for the principals, will they want an education degree also, or are we going to be turned into a business? If that is the case, then we will be even more dollars and cents, and the needs of the children are not going to be looked at or considered. The government leaders are uneducated as far as what happens in the schools.**

In times of fiscal restraint, the reality of job loss intensifies. If we want to be employed in a certain position, our only way to maintain that position may be as "yes" people. Can we sacrifice our principles? If it means providing bread and butter for our family, maybe we would. I don't think the government leaders understand the education system and what happens in classrooms. If they did, I don't think they would make the decisions they do.

JIM sees the uniqueness of schools being improved by site-based management. **"Site-based has some real credence and value in involving the kids and parents and community that you serve - how best we make sure that people from this area are successful at school us the big picture of here is the curriculum and throw it down and everyone does the same thing. There are some issues here and I go back to things like social studies. Paying attention to just the french and the english and the establishment of Nova Scotia at the exclusion of the black population and the large percentage we have here at the school - that is a real insult. We may have, and this is an opinion, administrators in a building that perhaps were assigned to buildings or administration years and years and years ago and I think the whole philosophy of administration is changing drastically - but I'm not sure if the people in those roles are changing drastically. So site-based on paper may look great, but unless we have a significant difference in a person running the show, it is not going to be very successful. You know, if you are a very authoritative kind of person who needs complete control of everything, you are going to struggle with site-based and site-based is going to struggle with you. That's a clear cut issue of power there. The whole idea of site-based is that it's the notion of power is spread out - it is not controlled by one person at the board, it is not controlled by one person at the school level either. I think there are some huge, huge ramifications of that whole area that will have to be worked out before we can truly say - yea, this board is doing site-based. I really think that's a major issue."**

Will it be a similar situation when we implemented whole language? Years after, can we say that the majority are teaching in a truly holistic way? Are we rushing again to implement something before we have developed an understanding of it?

According to a statement released by the President of the Nova Scotia Teacher's Union, John MacDonald on February 21, 1995, the "White Paper Report" claims...Schools will be given more autonomy through site-based management. The union wants an evaluation of the eight pilot schools completed before implementation. "Equity of student opportunity appears to be a problem in other places where the concept has been tried...We do not wish to see a situation where advantaged schools continue to increase their advantages, while disadvantaged schools become more disadvantaged."

The question is: who will be given more autonomy? In many schools, it will be one individual - the "manager" equipped with their MBA. I do not believe there will be more autonomy for teachers and students in the majority of the schools.

The whole issue of a business/efficiency model is not only being discussed within Nova Scotia and Newfoundland. This has been implemented in England and in other countries where cuts and cries for accountability have flooded the newspapers. (I first saw this in 1992 when I visited some schools in England). Ball (1990) points out that management is now being seen as the "one best way" to run educational institutions. Management training is becoming the necessary requirements for anyone who is to reach leadership management positions. It has been mentioned, here in Nova Scotia at a union meeting, that principals may be required to have an MBA. Ball states, "But the profundity of the effects of management on the practice of teachers and other educational professionals is rarely fully appreciated. Management plays a key role in the ongoing process of reconstructing the work of teaching (Ball, 1990, page 153)."

LEADERSHIP:

The role of leadership is a major factor in the direction our schools take. I think it was quite clear in the discussion of site-based management that teachers felt that leadership can either “make or break” a school.

BEV feels if we want shared leadership we have to be willing to accept the responsibilities that go along with that. **“I work on a staff that is very much involved in decision-making. Rarely are decisions made that we don’t have some input - whether it is the goals for the school, what inservices we are going to have, who will be involved and what we are going to do for lunch on inservice day. All these things, there is input from the staff. Some people love it and some people, because you have to be willing, if you don’t want to be involved in it, you have some people who choose not to be involved and every decision that is made - that inservice day, wasn’t that awful? But they don’t want to have any input, but they are the first to complain. A principal can ask for everyone’s input and leave the room and someone will say ‘why doesn’t she just tell us what she wants us to do’. They don’t want to be part of it and it is the same people of course. If they were told what to do, they would say ‘how come she didn’t ask me?’”**

My current position has me working with the majority of my staff. I can relate to what Bev is saying. It is difficult to please everyone...is it even possible? Sometimes the invitation for input is not accepted until after the decision is made, leaving complaints lingering through the halls. I think it is important to talk it through so everyone at least understands the rationale, even if they don't necessarily agree with the final decision.

HELEN claims, **“I think for me, how I feel as a teacher in the classroom in terms of support of my principal...I find we are getting a lot of support from the principal, just in terms of maybe verbal discussion. But when it comes down to it, just getting things organized and the time to do it...like for an example, we have been told we can get together all these science kits and there is money for science kits. However, we put in all the requests and still it is not done. It just seems like it takes so much time to get things into the classroom. To**

me it is frustrating – you go out and you make your own purchases. It is just not here for you – what you need. That is one of my beefs right now...what they say and what they do is something totally different and what gets done is sort of up to the teachers – and where are we going to find the time and the energy?

I think teachers are running out of time and energy. I don't think the public realizes the time, energy and money teachers put into their work. A neighbour recently said to me, "You should never have to put in your own money to do your job - and you should not be doing it". Maybe so, but do we have much choice?

MARIE has experienced the positive direction a school can take when teachers are supported by good leadership. She says, **"I have been here at this school for one and a half years and I find the procedure for addressing the needs of the kids has changed considerably – and I pretty much helped that process along. I didn't quite agree with the way it was done when we first came here. In consultation with a very supportive team of administrators, which I think really, really, does help make a difference in terms of where you want the direction of the overall school to go. They were just dynamite! They helped a tremendous amount to workshop with the staff in showing them that this is not just a direction that we are going, we really actually have a rationale for trying to get there. They were great because they had the inservice time set aside, like maybe an after school workshop, or curriculum talk at staff meetings, whereby we could address the concerns of moving in a certain direction. When I came, resource was kind of like a dumping grounds for a time, or a warehouse, if you will, for those kids.**

I think this is where the resistance is coming from in my job – in the past it has been a "dumping ground" and this is what helped teachers cope. Now it is not there and the classroom demands are intensifying in many ways. Teachers are feeling the effects.

I came from a school where I didn't feel that my talents were being utilized or valued. What I did on my own was pretty much a make-

work project, because you didn't think, anybody is going to ask me for that, but maybe in a couple years time - when I get out of here, I'll be able to use those particular talents."

DEBBIE does not feel the same type of positive support as Marie. She feels, " **It is important to have good leadership in every way -in staff management, in curriculum...a leader who wants a really good learning atmosphere for kids and really gets out to do the best - whether it be to make the best use of funds or whatever, but in consultation with the staff and children included. So often in our school, staff is left out. Decisions are being made and that's it. They have even asked for staff meetings this year because there aren't any being held. The principal doesn't want to deal with any of the concerns, thoughts, or desires of the staff."**

It is unfortunate that more teachers are not being recognized by administration and their own colleagues for the talents that they have. We have a lot to offer each other by sharing just within our school communities.

JOB PERFORMANCE AND PROFESSIONAL WELLNESS:

If one was to ask a teacher today about the feeling they have as an educator, you might hear “all of us are happy, sad, and distressed about our profession” (Lennon, 1993). HELEN has similar feelings...**“it is a wonderful profession. If you love children it is really a wonderful way to spend your day and work at your career. But it is getting harder because we are getting less and less of a lot of things. One of them is the support from the parents. I think they are mixed up now with the way things are going. Teachers are not quite sure what is going to happen with the curriculum. I think the teachers have different ideas than the parents in terms of education - what is important - what their child should be learning. The thing right now more than anything is we are not really sure about how we feel with salary cuts and curriculum and there is a lot of uncertainty in this profession right now. I sort of feel like a puppet. Somebody else is pulling the strings and making me say and do whatever...it is unfortunate because I am not a happy puppet - although we do have the happy face on.”**

There is much uncertainty in our profession and teachers are feeling the effects of cuts, in programming, job loss, low morale, and a lack of voice. This creates the puppet-like feeling for Helen and many other teachers.

PATRICIA sees her role as a teacher becoming more challenging in providing education and services to her students. She continues by saying, **“We are doing a disservice to students now and that will only be expanded by cutbacks. In the counseling aspect, I refer to outside agencies and I seldom refer anyone because they were not being seen. The calls were not being followed up - two to three month waiting lists to see a counsellor in Social Services etc. So they fall back on your lap and you are being pulled in 50 directions and are not giving them the services they need. It tends to be band-aid...it is all band-aid - How can I get you through today because I don't have time to help you make some real changes in your life. As a counsellor you become like a recording - 'yeah, life dealt you a hard blow - are you going to whine about it, or change it? Well get up and shake yourself off and let's make some positive changes here.' You just don't have**

time to go through all the components.

These are serious issues that are not being considered. I really don't think the decision-makers understand the implications of cuts in programming. "The case for spending cuts rests on the dubious claim that Canada can no longer afford to keep its people health, well-educated, and gainfully employed. (Chorney, Hotson, & Seccareccia, 1992, p.17)."

With the resource aspect of my job, a lot of my students have repeated grades and courses. One of the things that happened is that they end up getting passed in a number of courses because teachers feel bad for them - like they work hard and try. a lot of students are getting credit for effort. My program - one resource teacher for over 50 students - research shows it is way too high a ratio for it to be of any value. But I am managing to help kids through courses, so everyone assumes I'm doing a good job. I don't feel I am and I feel threatened in my position. Not that the program will be cut - I don't feel resource or special services will be cut back because that is not politically correct at the time. I don't think the public will allow that to happen. I don't think teachers want that to happen because teachers see resource or learning centres as keeping these kids out of their classrooms and allows them to teach. I don't think teachers, parents and the general public wants to see it.

I think you would have a lot more success in schools if people had some ownership of the decisions, rather than having them placed upon them. I find that some of your less cooperative people become more cooperative when they are defending something they have developed themselves. The whole idea of ownership to me is the valuable thing and right now I find that no one has any ownership of anything anymore. Teachers feel like they are not the masters of their classrooms because they are told they have special needs students integrated, they have to have certain things in the program they can't offer because it is not politically appropriate. Teachers have to be careful not to offend their children. a lot of teachers feel like they are mummified...that they just can't do their job anymore. That all the restrictions, all the every things really take away their power in the classroom. Teachers don't feel powerful in their

classrooms. I don't mean that in the 'kill of the hunt' kind of way, I mean it as having some control over what they do, and having a voice. They don't feel like they have that anymore. They feel their students can abuse them and get away with it without repercussion. They feel that the parents totally support the student in both good and bad behavior - and right now, most teachers are not happy with the way things operate in the classroom. They don't feel like they have ownership and as you go up, no one feels like they have ownership. The superintendent is doing his job, and his job determines what the supervisors do, and what the supervisors do determines what the specialists do, and what the specialists do determines what the administrators do, and it goes on and on. Until the time it gets down to the classroom teacher - the teacher has no ownership of it anymore...just feels like he is told to keep people happy, keep the world happy, and if you keep everyone happy - you keep your job and you are seen as a good teacher. That is the change. You are no longer a good teacher based on what your students learn. You are a good teacher based on keeping people happy. I have seen terrible, terrible examples of teaching where students score high grades - no one fails...because it is a type of situation where you keep everyone happy and no one will question what you are doing within your room. There is never a complaint because parents are happy because the kids have passed, students are happy with a pass, the school board is very happy because there is no backlash - no flack and these kinds of things continue. That's another, that's not a crack, it is a chasm!"

No one likes things messy, but we can not improve on meeting students needs by "sweeping away" the problems that exist for the contentment of all concerned - no one wins in that case.

EMILY has a great deal of concern about the obstacles she faces as a classroom teacher..."I just feel I could talk five hours on all of this. Money is an issue as well as class size increasing consistently and consistently. I don't see it changing. I am a grade two teacher with 30 students in my classroom - one in a wheel chair. The room makes it impossible to set up centres all the time. When I was a primary teacher, I had centres set up all the time. It all comes back to the school board not getting as much money from the province. One thing

with our school board is for a number of years we were the only growing board east of Montreal, but yet our school board was increasing in student population, but we were not getting the additional funding to educate these children. So I find it very frustrating that I'm faced with 30 children who have 30 different problems and I am not given adequate support to meet the needs of my students. I find that very stressful. I find it very hard to divide my time between a child in my class who I find very needy and needs a lot of time, attention, care - but I also have to realize there are 29 other children that I cannot ignore for the sake of one child. I do not believe I have enough support as in resource teachers, support teachers, program assistance. They are spread so thin that the kids are not given adequate time. What I am falling back on is my mother, who is a retired school teacher and comes into my class two to three times a week. That's where these children are getting some extra attention - because I don't have the time to do that in a class of 30.

The demands of society and education are different today. It is very difficult to meet all of the complex problems that can exist in our classrooms. We are doing a great disservice to our student's education with large class sizes.

I have also asked for volunteers. Another problem - here I go with another problem - I feel with 30 children, I want them to work together and discuss things - but the noise level in here gets so loud that I can't think as an adult, so you can just imagine how distracting it is to students - especially those easily distracted. One of my biggest beefs is truly class size. Disciplining takes up so much time. We might be given assistance for children who are weaker academically, or children with specific needs - we may be given a program assistant, but behaviorally, we are not given any support. For a 45 minute writing period, I may spend half the time disciplining instead of sitting down with a child and conferencing and going through their writing piece. I guess there are a lot of classroom problems - class size and support. The support teachers here are tremendous professionals and a great deal of help, however they

have ten other classes they have to deal with. I would like more support, not better support.

I don't think Emily is alone in her feelings. There are many cries from teachers for additional support.

I feel helpless. I feel that I have all these frustrations totally out of concern for the kids. I could go on and tell you different stories about the children in here, and I feel helpless to do anything significant to change their lives or to enrich their lives or to help them because of the sheer number. I just feel I come to school - I'm here very early in the morning, I do not take a recess break, and I am here quite a while after school. I do school work in the evenings and weekends and I feel that I'm really not making a difference! I remember when I graduated from university, I was going to change the world. I thought I was going to make such a difference. I wanted to grow with them, teach them, listen to them, marvel in their accomplishments and I just feel I am so drained. That enthusiasm for making a difference in somebody's life has weaned as a result of all these obstacles that I am constantly coming up to. I don't feel I have the equipment to overcome those obstacles.

I guess in some ways I too want to "change the world". I want education to be meaningful and to have a purpose and provide independence for children. I think this is where my frustration lies...when I hit the obstacles that does not allow for this. In reality, I know I can not "change the world" but I struggle against the system so they don't change the world of our students to further disadvantage them.

On paper I agree that every teacher should meet kids where they are and that's what should be happening. Maybe I just don't know how to do it or maybe I need to learn, but I see 30 kids - I can't have six different levels of a math lesson going on because I'm only one person. As soon as I turn to work with group number one, groups 2, 3, 4, and 5 are gone. If I had a smaller number of students I would be able to have that ideal. As far as I am concerned, that is an ideal. That's where we should be and that's what we should be doing, but reality does not allow that. I've tried different things in this classroom. I'm so frustrated because I see all these different levels

and I'd love to be doing one lesson for this child, something else for this child, but I can't do it with 30 kids. I simply cannot do it! I have modified the reading program as it is to help those students who have difficulty reading at a certain level. I do try to meet the need in that way, or lower expectations and that kind of thing.

In many cases, teachers have not been supported in change such as inclusion. This is not uncommon when introducing new ideas, concepts, beliefs and programs. They seem to be thought up one day and implemented the next. In my first year of teaching, I taught K - 3 resource. I had a high school background and I did not understand what whole language was. I was confused, for teachers were teaching to the extremes. I wondered how the students coped. I was never provided with any inservicing or guidance.

I would never say I don't want a child in my class, what I would say is I don't want 10 children in my class - take 10 away, give me 20 students and let me do my job - and let me do it effectively and the way it should be done! The alternative is you don't have the chance or opportunity to affect the lives of those students and I feel that I have something to offer these children - the alternative is I get out of this political hairy money situation. But if I do what good am I? At least I've come here Monday to Friday and close my door and damn it, I do what I can with what I am given. And I feel it is the only thing I can do. I am keeping track of money I've spent for the classroom. It has added up to a great deal - well no more! The government is cutting my salary and I refuse to buy anymore. I send a letter to the parents saying what we need. If we don't get it, we don't do it, and I tell them that.

I sometimes wonder if I can survive in a system of education I do not believe in...a systems whose concern is saving money regardless of how it affects the quality of education.

Kids are coming to school without food - the drugs and alcohol and the violence and the home situations...we are expected to be social workers, we are expected to cloth these children, we are expected to feed these children, we are expected to work out every little problem that comes up. When you get through all that, if there is any time left over then you might actually teach these children. If education is the key, and educators feel that way, because we believe in it and support it, then why is it constantly that we are expected to do more each year with less money? I mean for the school boards - yes, I had my salary cut this year as well, but, as a school board there are 5 million dollars they have to cut this year - yet most people feel education is the key, but the money is not being put into it. So am I going to have a class of 35 next year, and then 40 the year after, then 45 the year after that? Well the only way I am going to be able to teach is I guess to have all the kids in rows and bang my little metre stick and say two plus two is four, two plus three is five, two plus four is six. I mean what kind of education system is that? I don't feel we can find a way - I feel helpless. I got all those parents to write those letters to the board and parents brought them in last year and showed me. What did it do? The primary program got slashed anyway. So I feel I can't speak out as a teacher. I can ignite anger in my parents and they can write, but they still were not able to do anything. So if I as a teacher can't do anything, and my parents as current parents of kids in the education system can't seem to do anything, what is left? What is left?"

The feelings of helplessness are real for me as well. I think the survival comes out of keeping the hope alive. Hope I think prevents apathy.

BEV senses that the cuts and politics have had an affect on teachers and the program quality. "I think teachers who used to give a lot more are giving less. That is because of politics and cut backs. Teachers who were here to six and seven o'clock, are saying forget it - I'm not doing it anymore. I think some people are feeling very defeated in how far their voices are being heard. I think some of the ways political decisions have been made have made people feel that way. Even with the primary program, teachers left here in June not knowing what was going to happen. Now a lot of people that are

teaching the primary program are just doing it until they get a full-time job. So in that respect it is affecting the program. People are not looking at it as this is something I enjoy and am going to do for the next 10 years.

I have heard many teachers saying "I'm not doing it anymore - I'm not giving anymore". These feelings are understandable, but the unfortunate part is the children are the ones who are suffering.

One time we were measured in how quiet our classrooms were. We have a population of children now who are uncontrollable sometimes and come with a different set of needs in a lot of situations. We have to be willing to say I can't cope."

I think in some cases, classroom management is still being used as a measure of a "good teacher" - especially at the secondary level.

SARAH feels, "The present climate that is on going out in public - the kinds of things the media talks about in terms of education and a lot of it is not very positive. That certainly affects the morale of teachers and how you view your own job in the system. The way things are going now, it almost turns people against one another in some ways - like I think teachers look at each other differently because it has become much more competitive. You know, the whole thing about you only hire someone now with a TC5 or whatever. They are looking for paying lower salaries - there is that issue too, and that's really unfortunate. I think it changes the attitudes of some teachers.

This really "hits home" for me. By continuing my education; to strive to become the best educator I can be, I have essentially worked my way out of a job in my home province.

There is only so much you can do. I know I've felt like that sometimes too. I've put a lot of hours in over the years and you feel like you are

still putting in as many hours, but you wonder where it is all leading to, or if it is even being useful. It just seems to be getting more difficult. I think people feel overwhelmed with the amount of what they are being asked to do. These are things that have to be dealt with, and looked at - but it adds to the daily load a teacher carries. I think a lot of the time we don't know what children are coming with and what you assume they are coming with in terms of basic needs - it is not always visible.

In Nain, it was visible in some ways, yet I was still sheltered from their world. I lived in the "outsiders" section of the village. I heard about the living conditions - not only did I not live their experiences, I did not even witness it. According to Weiner(1994, p.7), "The changes in family structure has had a profound impact on society in general and especially in children...we need to develop a national culture and societal commitment supportive of learning for all Canadians." How could we do this without people's culture being short changed? Would we want to do such a thing? I do know we need to find a way to meet our children's needs without devaluing where they are coming from.

MARIE's concerns are a little different from the average classroom teacher. As a resource teacher, she works with the majority of the staff. "What I find now is we have a handful of people at the older levels in this school that find it difficult to integrate the needs of their students and you know that a certain system has worked with the kids as they have come up from the lower grades. For some reason the upper elementary grades find it more difficult to adapt and to change, and to integrate for the needs of those kids - so that their programs are not, not to be unprofessional, not inclusive. They are not stimulating those particular kids. A lot of what they do sometimes is rote paper and pencil stuff. They do not have a lot of integrative community sorts of activities that deal with sharing and talking about hands on kind of stuff...where they can explore and predict and make inferences as opposed to reading and writing on something where you answer questions basically on what you have

read - not where you have formulated the questions yourself and you are going in pursuit of answers. That is an obstacle for me right there, because I don't have people open-minded enough to try some of those other things. For the most part, this whole school has been inserviced on using a reading/writing workshop approach with kids so that you can cater to the needs of your most advanced child and your most needy child in the one room. You don't always have to use the same set of reading materials in order to teach your lesson. Here at the four, five and six level, we still have a lot of basal kinds of approaches. It limits the extent that you can involve some of those kids. What I find most is, that for some kids in four, five and six, reading and writing have all of a sudden connected for them - but the instructional time that has connected with that still has to be in place. Just because they have entered a new grade level does not mean they will be able to assume a reading level complementary to the rest of the kids in the class. For some, they still need formal reading instruction to be able to bridge that gap that has been there since day one. But we don't have the services being available to them, by the means of the classroom teacher. So when I'm absent or supporting someone else, if the classroom teacher is not doing that one on one, or I'm not doing it, they don't get done.

Marie's concerns are very similar to mine. I understand her obstacles in helping bridge the gaps for students. It is not an easy task to bring together different teaching approaches and beliefs when the openness is not there.

So much of our self esteem is wrapped up in what we do. Our own image is wrapped up in what we do. We have a political system that does not value our input. We are the people carrying out the job - you would ask yourself - 'why wouldn't you out there want to know what it is that we're feeling?' I don't know - they seem to get the sense that we are grippers or complainers or chronic trouble-makers, or whatever. If they would only sit and actively listen to what we are doing or more importantly, come in and trade places with us. If you are not feeling good about what you do and somebody has not acknowledged it and recognize it, then it is very hard for you to impart that to your students."

Ruffo (1994) feels that teachers must feel good about themselves so they can better meet the needs of their students. She asks, "How many teachers don't like to teach anymore? We need strong and sensitive politicians who remember they are there to serve and have a stronger voice(Liberman, 1994, p.29)."

DEBBIE feels there is little respect and understanding for the teaching profession. **"We are looked at as babysitters on the most part - yet we have to handle all the problems. Today teaching is so much more difficult because of society and the environment children live in. We have to be social workers; we have to be parents; we have to be not only the teacher, we have to be the nurse. We have to feed children and sometimes clothe them. All the needs that should be met by the parents often times it is not there, for whatever reason. Instead of getting more help with all these difficulties, we are getting less.**

It would be a terrible thing to downplay the problems which place children at risk. According to Liberman (1994) these problems are cyclical in nature - poverty, racism, abuse, and social injustices. How do we treat at-risk students? He indicates that we must hear the their voices and focus on such issues as "how do we grow kids so only a few are at-risk?" How do we prevent kids from becoming at-risk is my question. He goes on to say that schools play a key role in the develop- mental system for students and their families - more than anyone else. Liberman (1994, p.29) indicates the problems within the family forms a cycle where the links are strong and difficult to break. "The well being of children is inextricably linked to the well being of their parents." Weiner (1994, p.7) agrees. He adds that families, religious, political, and social institutions should all have a role in ensuring that children come to school ready to learn. He feels, "Children are what we have collectively made them - no more - no less. What children observe and live at home, and in their environment will have a profound influence on their schooling and experience." Our North American society has some ways to meet those conditions but not enough. Weiner (1994,p.7) states: "Children who come to school hungry are not ready to learn. Children who come to school abused are not ready to learn. Child- ren who receive little or no support are not ready to learn. Yet more than a million Canadians live in poverty today." This became real for me in Nain.

As a profession, we have to remember we are professionals. We are educated - we are the ones who know what's best for those children

that we teach. That is part of the problem with the government- not coming to us like they do in other instances - they go to outside professionals and bring them in to fix a problem or help with a solution...they don't do that with us. I think a big part of it is we all have to stay strong inside ourselves and know who we are and what we stand for - not to lose sight of the fact that we have to have the self confidence in what we are doing. One of the big problems is we feel like we are alone. Every individual teacher, in a lot of cases, feels I'm just me and I'm in my own classroom? So often, because of the differences in philosophies, you don't get to share a lot of what you are doing, your beliefs, your assumptions about teaching and learning. When you feel alone in your own profession, it is hard to stand united as a group to fight the government.

I think the fact that teachers have not been consulted has concerned me the most. I feel an extended invitation may have prevented some of the negative changes we are beginning to see now.

As teachers, we are not united in our philosophy about teaching and learning. We don't have enough teacher meetings with some good leadership - everything from curriculum to how kids learn to dealing with issues involving the community. Everybody is almost off in their own direction. As a staff, certain things have to have a common ground. I think there is a lot that is missing and that's why people can't get together. We need those good leaders in the schools to start with. You are lucky - you have one, I don't. Discipline is not dealt with, there has to be some uniform way with staff involvement, parents involved, kids involved, and saying let's look at this and get rid of something that's interfering with the learning. All of these things get in the way and I think that's what makes teachers so disheartened, low morale, unsettled, whatever - so they can't get on with the other issues. I think some of the reasons they don't get involved in taking a stand is they have so many things at the school level to deal with, that they can't see beyond that.

I am lucky to have good leadership. This allows for a common vision to begin to work together. It does not happen easily, but it is a basis in which to start. Jim and Marie's school is an example of what positive leadership can create.

Maybe teachers should find out what is happening at the grade level before and the grade level after. There are good things that happen because of this sitting down and having these meetings. I would get rid of the grade levels, that comes back to one of things about multi-aged classrooms and grade levels. A lot of teachers are not ready to handle something like that, but yet with everything that is happening, how can we take every individual child in our classroom from where they are to taking them to where they can go? Many teachers find it easier just to go back to teaching from the text and use workbooks again - because they are too tired, they can't fight the system any longer and they've given up. Some, of course, have never had any extra training or got involved in their professional development, and they are just continuing what they've been doing. There are other teachers who have tried and I think have just given up. I think if you don't have a staff that works together on a daily basis, that's where everything has to start as far as a group. If you don't have any support system, you don't take a step in that direction. Teachers don't get enough pats on the back. They get their individual satisfaction from the kids they work with.

We need support to take risks - from the risk taking we grow and learn.

As an administrator, JIM has some different concerns. Perhaps he sees a different angle when he is teaching in the classroom. **“One of the problems I see is the whole notion of accountability. Higher above, when we talk about standardization and what does that mean in relationship to our work in the classroom and given the types of standardized testing that they are talking about. If we look at the grade six language arts assessment that the province does, it is a fairly good example of what we should be doing in our classroom. I don't feel the same way about the grade five math one. I know a lot of teachers trying to teach to the test. I think that's a draw back and that affects what we are doing in our classrooms. The strain we are under, because of the times, when we hear of numerous teachers out on stress leave, I think it is a profession that right now is sick. That's the way I would describe it. Sick from a point of view of just feeling always under the gun from administration, or from parents, or from government - and there is no way to get around that at this point - no**

outlet or release. I think that is fairly stressful.

Testing creates much concern for me. I think it is more destructive rather than helpful. What does testing really tell us? How can we analyze results when the validity of testing is questionable and when other factors like different ways of knowing and social worlds are not considered?

I think if you really really try, you can put a lot of that behind you and do a good job in the classroom. I think sometimes that some people use it as a bit of a crutch - I can't do what I really want to do because...but the bottom line is that we do have a fairly open system where we're allowed to experiment and try things and feel pretty confident in being supported. I guess if I had to say one big thing, it would be this big worry about accountability from above. As far as a classroom teacher, I don't really have a whole lot of difficulties doing what I want to do in my classroom. I think part of that may be because I know or am a little bit more aware of the big picture maybe than some other people. I know when people at central office are talking about standardized testing that they are not saying let's see what this teacher is doing in their class us let's see what the program we're putting out is looking like. Teachers were frightened at first. Once they were able to see that the tests are looking at the program collectively, they felt a lot more comfortable and the fear of standardized tests and accountability lessened - but I don't know how many schools are doing it. I think we would have a better profession if there was an element of accountability in there. I'm doing some evaluations for primary, well I don't even call it an evaluation so much as - what areas do you want to work on, what things do you want to tackle together with the help of somebody? Then we'll sit down together and evaluate - Together whether we were successful or not. I don't think it should be - I'm on my own and this person is coming in to see whether it worked or not. That's that whole issue of how safe you feel. It is like the kids, how safe they feel in the classroom in attempting or trying something different. It is the same thing with teachers. There has to be a feeling of safety there - that if this doesn't work, I'm not going to wear this forever, it is on my report, but we'll try again from a different angle. It has made a big difference in what some teachers are attempting in their

classrooms. Feeling quite safe about the fact that there is someone else with them to talk them through it and work with them. If it doesn't work, it doesn't work and we try again. I can tell you schools that are not doing anything because they know if they try something and it doesn't work, they are going to hear about it and so is everyone else in the school. And I can tell you schools where there are wonderful things going on because people feel very safe and secure in knowing that they are trying it together. Together we swim, together we sink. I don't think it is a matter of sinking as it is learning from it.

When we try new ideas and they do not go as planned, I think that is when the real learning occurs - for teachers and students.

There is a need for some central figure so we don't have 82 mini school boards doing different things. There is a belief that this is the best way to teach math, or to teach language, or to teach science, and I think we need someone there to insure that those kinds of issues are being addressed in schools. That may or may not be the principal or vice principal in the schools. There is a need to have someone above that. I don't think we have a whole lot of administration in buildings that know how we should be doing things in some of these subjects, and I think that's the downfall. I think curriculum is suffering in a lot of schools. Curriculum is not an issue in a lot of schools. To me why are we here? Well we are here to teach kids and we are here to get that curriculum across to kids and have them learn. The approach we take to doing that is important. A prime example is in the grade six social studies program. The whole book is out of date and for kids to be aware of that - this is just print and how valuable is print and do we accept print at face value? We spend more time at looking at what's wrong with the book and learning from that. Those kinds of issues need to be addressed in schools. There needs to be someone in the system or schools that says, let's be aware of these kinds of issues.

A school like this that has a very mixed culture versus a school perhaps on the other side of the highway that doesn't - and not to be aware of the issues that comes with that, how kids are spoken to at home, what's expected of them at home, what does school mean at

home on this side of the tracks literally, compared to the other side. We sort of have a tendency to force what we believe is right on the kids in school. Some scary things out there.

A number of studies have found a strong link between social class, school failure, and dropping out. "Schools are powerless to change family socio-economic status, but the impact of family social class appears to be mediated by factors which can be influenced by schools (Bianchi, 1984; Stevenson and Baker, 1986)." Vacha and McLaughlin (1993, p.8) suggests that if schools can develop ways of dealing with these factors, they can make a difference in the lives of their students. They add, "Research concerning the way a family's social class influences school success and dropping out has identified 'cultural capital' as an important mediating factor. Cultural capital refers to a complex of characteristics most commonly encountered in middle and upper-class families that appear to contribute to their children's school success." Cultural capital does not mean values - indications are that parents from all social classes want their children to succeed in school. The lack of it does not directly interfere with learning...it reduces schools success because presently schools are educating students who possess it.

From an administrative point of view, as far as problems in trying to get the job done - there are a few. One is a teaching Vice Principal - it is the whole area of release time really and the lack of it. To me it is an insult that elementary UPs of five to six hundred kids teach full-time and junior highs with 300 kids are completely non-teaching. There is a message there in how important administrative positions are. It is a very clear message, The rationale that junior high kids are harder to control is a crock. In a lot of ways they are easier to control - they are into sports and into all sorts of things that take them away from the school. There is a lot more petty things that comes up at elementary schools that if not dealt with grow very quickly into major problems. I know people in schools of five to six hundred kids teaching full-time - they are burnt - they are burned out. They are completely disillusioned with the job, they don't really know if they want another administrative position. It may be easier to go back and teach. I had more time off as a junior high department head and less responsibility than I do as an elementary

vice principal. To me the whole issue of subsystems is, we have been given really mixed messages - don't let anything go passed the subsystem, don't come to the board with problems. Yet we have had obvious difficulties getting in touch with people within the subsystem. We had a problem and contacted the subsystem and nobody would even take the phone call - we had to leave a message with the secretary. Those kinds of issues really bother you. On one hand they are saying make a decision, and on the other hand they are saying wait a minute. So there is a real inconsistency in some of the messages that we are getting. I think the two biggest things from my perspective are the messages you get and release time allotted....it's tough, every night there is work, weekends there is work."

I think there is a mind-set at the department level that the important years in education are at the secondary level. I feel the crucial years of schooling are the early years. This was the message in the letter sent to the school board regarding inservicing. I think we need to dispel this myth.

PARENTS:

Parents in general have a stronger voice than teachers in the direction education takes. The role of parents has changed somewhat over the years. Teachers have different views about parents and the role they play. HELEN thinks, **“parents are a little bit nervous of what is going to be happening when it comes to the education of their children, and what the expectations are. What is going to happen here?”**

EMILY feels, **“one of the obstacles for me is lack of parental and community support - and general respect. I can contact parents and say what I’m doing and what they can do at home. I’m trying this and that - can you suggest some things to me - what do you want me to do for your child? How can I help your child? It is basically ‘OK, yeah, I’ll help you and then they go home and don’t do anything. Education is not seen as important. Teachers are not being respected! Maybe because are seen to generally make heaps of money and have summers off. I have met some incredible parents that would do anything for you and the child, but that is not the majority. I feel I try, I do my best for these kids, but slipping through the cracks - I guess they do because they are not getting the home support.”**

We need to extend more invitations to parents. Only when they become involved in our schools will they begin to understand the complexities of education and teaching.

BEV has some concern with children being disadvantaged because of the home environment. **“I know communities where the better educated the parents in the community are the more that push is. You have kids who are going to reading camps in the summer before they even enter school and the kids that are coming in that don’t have those experiences are being further disadvantaged.”**

In our school there is a growing gap between the experiences the children bring with them when they enter school. How do we begin to bridge that gap?

SARAH thinks, **“we need to do more PR with parents. I know even this**

year when certain things have come up in conversation with parents, and how they'll come out with certain comments about the kinds of issues that are brought up in the media. I just have to say something - there is another perspective you can look at this from and try to talk about it more that way."

I think dialogue is important. I also feel our views on education are not represented enough through the media.

DEBBIE sees the need for parental involvement in the classroom. "I think we need to get parents involved in our classrooms so that they are on our side and for the benefit of the children. I think we have to encourage those who do not open the door to parents. We have to encourage others. I was a member on a panel at the Teacher's Resource Centre talking about using volunteers in your classroom. Many teachers came to that - and some parents. It was very positive. I think a lot of teachers did go back because they came to me and said, 'I do have volunteers now'. So it worked. So that was a little PR bit that helped a few teachers. In my own school, teachers see parents in and out of my room all the time and I try to encourage people to get to know the parents a bit then choose. You don't have to take everybody in - you can give them different jobs. If you are a little leery that someone is too controlling as a parent, then maybe that parent can do something like help you as a teacher's assistant outside the classroom - by photocopying, getting books from the library, or other things. I think teachers just don't tap all the things parents can do to help."

The possibilities for parent volunteers are endless and with the increasing demands on schools and teachers, we need to tap into the resources available to us.

JIM feels, "Once we open our doors to parents, what do we do with them? We go everything from class helpers to safe arrivals - these kinds of things. Sometimes those things are just surface. How much are we involving them in the real dynamics of the school? There are expertise out there within each community. The first and second year

we were here - and we need to do it again- we sat down with everyone looking to be a volunteer in the school. We set up stations in the gym...what does it mean to be a volunteer? We talked about the legal issues of volunteers and how to help out in the classrooms. We had a station about these are the things you're going to hear...where do you go with them - disclosures. It was a real eye opener for a lot of parents. They really didn't think that a teacher would be uncomfortable with a parent in the room. It was really good. It made a big difference. We met with staff and said 'how do we use volunteers in the school?' The best PR! You want parents to get an idea of what teachers are putting up with - that will do it.

This is a great idea. I think this alleviates the fears teachers and parents have. If the roles and responsibilities are clear, it makes for a more conducive working relationship.

UNION AND UNITY:

There are many mixed emotions, at this time, regarding the unions representing teachers. EMILY thinks, **“In this province right now, for a lot of teachers, I’m not speaking for all teachers, but a lot of teachers don’t feel the Nova Scotia Teacher’s Union is worth anything right now anyway. So, we are not going to respect anything that the union tries to do as far as PR anyway. So, I can’t imagine why the community or parents would either. We have to do our own PR within our own schools.”**

BEV feels it is a part of our responsibility to get involved. **“The number of people who will be vocal are still out there, but there are only a few and they are getting fewer because some people have been banging their heads against the wall long enough. Once the decision has been made, it is only lip-service that we are paying. I think we need to do more organizing. If you look at just the union, we are all a part of the union and if we don’t attend meetings, then we can’t complain about what happens. Last year I thought we would go on strike, but people are just too comfortable. They were not willing to do anything quite that drastic as to go on strike and the way this government is working - there is no backing down. It is terrible, the union has been broken. It is making people really just sit back and say - and I hate it when people say - I’m lucky to have a job. It is not the job that is being affected as much as the education and the quality of education that the kids are going to receive - that’s being affected”.**

Action and involvement is the only way we will ever come to resolve issues of concern. I believe we all have a role to play.

SARAH states, **“I suppose ideally, if we spoke as a more solid group that would have some effect, but we are not very unified.”**

MARIE continues, **“I don’t think we do a good job at all in informing the public about what we do. We pay high union dues, and for what we get, for what we can actually see in terms of what goes out to the public - the odd piece may appear in the newspaper, but it is usually around conflict times - it is not during times when the public is open and willing to listen. It is often at times when the crunch happened and the government has usually got their two cents in first. So then it**

looks like a rebuttal. It looks like we are the bad guys. In the way in which it is presented always looks like the teachers fighting for something unjustifiably. I don't think enough goes out in terms of proactive - it is always a form of reactive with us. Unless you have walked that mile in those other person's foot steps, you don't understand. It is really aggravating!"

We often do not carefully consider things problems evolve, and then it often does become a reactive response. I think Marie's point is a good one. I too think I have reacted to teachers concerns with the resource pro-gram. Proactivity may have lessened the strengths of the concerns and the feelings of isolation for me

DEBBIE is a teacher who feels the union is doing the best they can. "I think the union is trying in some cases with PR - in some of the things they've put in the paper, but again too many people sit back - teachers and parents included - and not getting involved in finding out what's going on. I think it comes down to - teachers have to unite; they have to stand up for beliefs and convictions for the children and involve the community - educate them in turn, hopefully, they will have a lot of voice that the government will listen to. The government is not going to listen to teachers, but they have to listen to the people they are supposed to serve. We have to stay strong inside ourselves and know who we are and what we stand for, and not lose sight of that.

Do they really have to listen?...listening did not work before, and I am skeptic it will work now.

We need to keep teachers informed as to what's happening at union meetings. I don't know if as human beings we are creatures of habit and don't like change, and if change means I have to get involved in my union or I have to sit down and write a letter...I think it almost takes something to happen - you have to have chaos and confusion before you can grow and learn from something. Sometimes that's what it takes. But not everyone will get involved. They have other things in their life and sometimes I don't know if it is 'I can't be

bothered anymore' or 'it does not involve me' or it's 'I can't do one more thing'. Do things have to be mandatory, like union meetings? If people would make an effort, maybe they would see that it does involve them and they can have a say in a lot of things. It may not go far, but our union is our one way of getting involved in politics away from the school as a teacher organization. Not everyone is happy with the union here, but I feel the union is doing a good job. I've been involved and know they are working hard. There are some things, sure, that have happened that you can question and maybe you don't agree with. I voted 'no' to our last contract proposal, so those people who are complaining about what's happened now it's their own problem - it's not the union's problem. The union put it out for us to vote. They voted 'yes', so if they have problems with that, they should look at themselves - not at the union. Until you get into a job, you don't know what that job's like and what you have to deal with.

The union may be our political stepping stone, but only if the union representatives are there for the right reasons. I have concerns with my union...it is often used as a stepping stone for individuals who have a self interest in entering politics.

When it all boils down, it has to come back to the individual teacher first - that they do the best job they can possibly do in the classroom - then, as a group, collectively - then the union, and so on. It all starts down at the grass roots and we can blame all the mistakes on the government, but I think basically it has to be turned over to ourselves - we are not together.

I think unions need to help their members become political....teach us to be a player because we have never been taught. It is like a mind-set, and we need to teach our students how to be political as well."

I strongly agree! We need to be taught how to be political. But why would anyone encourage teachers, students and the public to become political. Politics breeds power and power can create resistance. Do they really want us to "educate to liberate" as some educational leaders have us believing?

JIM sees a triangle of conflict which is not helping anyone. “For so long, union and board have been at each other at such opposing views, that now when perhaps union and board really need to come together, it is not happening. There is such distrust there and I really honestly don’t know why that is. I have never, from my perspective, have seen the board do anything real nasty. I’m not saying it hasn’t happened, but I have not been privy to it, and I haven’t seen the union do anything that’s been really terrible. It is always a ‘we’ ‘them’ thing. Now we throw in a third one – government and it is a vicious triangle and nothing gets accomplished...nothing.”

HELEN feels “we have to have a goal and the same views. I don’t know if we are united. United we stand, divided we fall. They can do whatever they want if we don’t stick together.”

I think we are “falling” fast!

According to the statement released by John MacDonald (NSTU President) on February 21, 1995:

The Nova Scotia Teacher’s Union has been reviewing the “White Paper Report” and have invited dialogue by its membership. A written response will be forwarded by April 5, 1995. He feels teachers favor constructive change when it is for the improvement of teaching and learning conditions in Nova Scotia. The concern is that “Education Horizons” falls short as a final blue print for change. MacDonald states, “Since the document may effect considerable change in their lives, teachers require a great deal more information about how and when such changes will occur before they can be comfortable with the proposal.”

There is a move towards advisory councils. The duties and responsibilities outlined in these councils are substantial and the concern is the additional stress placed on teachers to meet commitments of councils plus an already heavy workload. The document is not clear on : What time provisions will be given for extra commitment or how it will effect teacher workload and job performance. How will amalgamation, accountability, and contractual terms and conditions affect the lives of teachers? They feel the role and responsibilities leave many unanswered questions (MacDonald, 1995).

POLITICS OF EDUCATION...Falling Through the Cracks:

Education has always been very political in nature. How and when we name it, as teachers, varies depending on our experiences.

PATRICIA feels the **“system is political and I have become a player - I am less likely to be the one to fall through the cracks...I fight my way and claw my way back up. As a consequence, you gain a lot of those political characteristics yourself - how to survive in the political thing. There are a number of colleagues who don't feel comfortable playing the game. Jobs are not based on skill, ability or talent - they're based on seniority. I don't have have the opportunity to do the best - somebody knows someone. There is so much hypocrisy...everyone looks out for number one. I know that my principal makes a determination if I stay in that school, and you bend over backwards to be what he wants you to be. I know that I have manipulated (in a good way I hope) in such a way; he will keep me in that school and it is not based on my skill or talent, it is based on what I am willing to do extra...how I play the game with him, how I don't cause any interference, how when he wants something done he will ask me - I'm his buddy. That's unfair, but you keep a job because you are somebody's buddy. Those same things have worked to my advantage. I'm knocking the political, on the other hand, I would not be working here if it was not for political. I came here and went to university, made connections to the school system. I was in Newfoundland working and in contact with people here, moved here and within three days had a job, while there's people here who don't. Those back room clubs worked to my advantage. When they work to your advantage you don't knock them, you accept them as a part of life. That's the way it is and you have to play the game. You want to stand up and say this is not fair, I'm being lost here - contradiction for me.**

I think it is sad, but true...it is not what you know, but how you play the game and who is on your team.

As far as students, we are doing a disservice to them now and that will only be expanded by cutbacks. There is just not enough manpower to meet the demands. I don't know how anyone in their right minds say we can cut that back and still offer the same service

because you can't. With the resource component of my job, kids want a pass, parents want them to pass, they want a course, they want their high school diploma. Your school board wants to be seen in a favorable light, so they want these kids to pass. Then you have done a wonderful job, the school has done a wonderful job, and everyone is happy. The kids are leaving illiterate and going into the work force where they can't cope. They are not literate enough to be successful and don't have the necessary skills to begin working in a number of jobs - but they got their diploma, so everyone is happy. The real pressure is, instead of trying to provide some solid remediation for a problem, to smooth it over and get the kid through the course - and these are all falling through the cracks.

Our school is mostly directed towards academic which unfortunately only makes up 15 to 20 percent of the population. So we have a majority of our students misplaced in the school system to begin with...which is why in the past we had such enormous drop-out rates - because a lot of the students (in Newfoundland 44%) drop-out before they finish...the school was not meeting their needs and they were not successful in it as it existed, and they left. Fortunately at the time - or maybe unfortunately, I don't know because it allowed it to continue - the work force was such that these people could go out and find employment....problem solved.

In Newfoundland, there has been much work done to prevent high school drop out. The unfortunate part of all this is when they publish the testing results of this new educational reform, they will have the results they want for they will only be testing the "cream of crop" - the survivors. Where will the other students go when they have not found success in the system? A depleted fishing industry, high unemployment and technology taking over many of our jobs - will there be light at the end of the tunnel for these students, our future generation? I believe we are creating an elitist society where social class will become more visible and defined...with the erosion of the 1950's constructed middle-class.

Today, schools are still designed to meet primarily academic students.

Efforts have been put into other programs like industrial programs, shop programs, WOW - any number of special programs that we have adapted, but still in all we still have a number of students in schools who can't adapt to the school because they can't meet the academic requirements.. My view is they should not have to adapt - it is not the student that has to change, it is the school that has to change. You can't take a student with a limited academic ability and expect them all of a sudden be transformed into having that. So that may keep students in school for a longer period of time, just looking at the end result of the type of student we are graduating from high school today demonstrates that we are not really turning them into academics. They are staying there longer, but not necessarily learning a whole lot more. The courses get watered down and students get a false impression of their abilities, which I think is unfair.

Lowe and Ashton (1992) speak of "what's right about Canada's schools". They refer to the Canadian system as a "cafeteria" style of curriculum which gives students a range of academic and vocational subjects and programs to choose from. They claim that the Canadian system has been leading in this approach to schooling and as a result, has brought about a commitment to the value of education - even for high school drop-outs who hope to return to school. But this is quickly changing as well with all of the restructuring. Many of these programs are being cut, and even our vocational schools are no longer. The new Community Colleges have a grade 12 requirement for entrance.

The system still wants to have the view as an academic institution, and it is for that percentage of people that can handle the academic environment - that is not meeting the needs of the rest. It is not meeting the needs right now and it will meet them even less if they cut some of the programs available. It is when you try to take these students from the programs they may be successful in and place them in areas that they can't cope - then you run into problems.

Criticism of the education system is strong. There is a growing concern that Canada will not be able to compete globally unless we "tighten up our belts" and move back-to-basics. As a nation we are moving full speed ahead to compete provincially. Low and Ashton (1992, p.13) state: "Before rushing to the conclusion that Canada's education system is in crisis and must be overhauled, it is useful to stand back and take another look." Canada historically has placed a greater emphasis on the value of equality of opportunity. Equality of opportunity is not easy to achieve, and perhaps it can never be achieved. I think we need to strive for opportunities for equity. Lowe and Ashton claim the Canadian system could encourage economic advantages, flexibility in careers, continual up-grading and the acquisition of new skills. Is this negativity of our education system a direct result of dollar and cents, and not what would provide the best opportunities for our our students?

One of the things about all this change and how you deal with this reform - and it has a lot of quiet opposition...that does not mean non-powerful... just the fact that we are sat here - two women - two well seemingly highly educated women talking about reform in education, when really in the whole scheme of things, we don't have much of an input. It is the boys' club...the further up you go, the less impact we have. So we are not only changing- like, making reform in the school and dealing with reform, and how do we offer our best programs - we're back to the age old issue of women trying to have a voice. In our situation, and tackling that one is...the fact that you or I would go out and say this won't be taken very seriously - just because in the political scheme of things, we don't have that strong of a voice. I think the big thing is getting the people with the strong voice on side. You can have all the PR you want, you can have all the networking, but unless you get the people with the voice on side, it will be a major, major struggle.

Women have struggled for centuries to have a voice. We have made inroads but we still have a long ways to travel yet. I think this is where the mind-set evolved with the issues of importance between elementary and secondary schools. Elementary schools have always been made up of women, and still are except for the administration. High schools are still dominated by men. Often our voices are silent - especially in a profession that is highly represented by women.

I feel for me personally, I am where I am because I play the game...and because of my personality. I'm a very forthright, strong kind of person - sometimes that can be called overbearing...I'll use strong as a positive adjective - but because of that, I can play the game successfully...which is why I am where I am - I believe. People attribute it to luck and people attribute it to being at the right place at the right time. I attribute it to playing the game, and winning and making the compromises that I've got to make in order to get a little further...to make it to the next inning so to speak. I don't think there is anything wrong with that, as long as you don't lose yourself in the game and as long as you don't become one of the real players. I've seen people from less empowered groups - I hate to use the word 'token', but I've been on committees where I was the token female. I knew I was there because I was the token female, and I accepted the fact - it didn't mean that once I got there I had to be the same as everybody else. Once I got there, regardless of how I got there, or how I played the game to get there, I could still have my own impact. Now, if I became like everyone else there, then I lost it. Maybe that is why whole language and critical literacy are currently taking a beating...because the people involved do not have powerful voices.

*"Power is the ability to take one's place in whatever discourse is essential to action and the right to have one's part matter"
(Heilburn, 1988, p. 18).*

You'll never get anywhere if you don't take care of yourself. For everything we do, we get something out of it."

EMILY is concerned about the kinds of decisions being made..."Last year, I was worried about the primary program being cut. The primary teachers in the county have taken great pride in the program developed. Kids would come from other provinces and come into grade one here and could not deal with the work because it was not what they received in their primary program. The program was cut because of money. The school board made the decision - and they are elected officials - two school board members who are appointed by the provincial government for a term of office and the rest are elected. A lot of of these people should not be there. If they are not a current educator, or a past educator, they have no business being there. It would be like me going in and running a hospital. I know nothing about medicine. I've spent so long complaining now, so I really try not to say too much. I don't believe anyone who is not an educator should make decisions about education. I know one school board member in particular - a colleague taught his daughter - he never graced the doors of the school. Parent interviews...he did not go. He, as a school board member did not even attend his own child's interviews and these are the people making decisions that are not only going to affect students this year, but most likely going to affect all the students in future years. Generally speaking, once a program has been cut, it is going to take an awful lot to get that program back. Parents come to me and say I have a child starting primary next year - 'I'm just devastated that it is going to be a half day program because I look at the progress that so and so has made all year.' They kept coming and complaining. I said, 'To be quite honest with you, you need to write to the school board, you need to call, go to a school board meeting, you need to make your voice heard.' The decision was going to be solely based on money. They had 'x' number of million dollars that they had to cut out of the budget and this was the easiest way to do it. If you cut primary, you are only angering a certain number of parents. If you cut phys ed. or music, you're angering every parent because every parent's child would have phys ed. and music. They take the least number of parents that they can annoy and that's what they did. They choose to ignore all the studies that said it was beneficial. I think the students that are going to be falling through the cracks, are going to be those students that have a very limited background before they come to school - that their environment is very narrow in scope and they have never been to a

circus and don't know how to talk about it. Their experiences are very limited, their general knowledge is very limited; their exposure to books would be limited. Pencils, scissors, erasers - we have kids who come to primary who have never held a pencil; that have never cut a piece of paper; that have never used a glue bottle. What you have happening now, is it is going to be those kids in a half day program that are going to lose. They will then be put into grade one. They will be starting grade one without the background of some of the other students, so they will get a little further behind. They go on to grade two and are even more behind. What happens to these students? They end up dropping out or falling through the cracks. Where does it stop? What alternative do you have?

Our current philosophy says we will take kids from where they are, so they can continue to progress through the grades. This is not happening for all kids. Some children are expected to know the curriculum from the previous year, and automatically labeled by some teachers when they do not know it. Our philosophy and the graded system clash. With the current demands, teachers are getting even more frustrated. I think we need to consider multi-age schooling. Age appropriateness of learning curriculum is restricting during the early years of schooling. I believe, in our graded system as we know it, when we push a child on who is expected to have mastered the previous years curriculum, I strongly believe we are doing them a disservice. It makes me think of Dion...I think this is how he fell through the cracks - it is a crime that a grade six child experiences so many emotions about himself as a learner, as a result, his own self worth because he can't read a simplistic text. There are many more Dions in our system and the rate is increasing rapidly. This has also a reason for the cry to go back-to-basics.

The primary teachers formed a group to get together to brainstorm ideas of ways that the school board could save money. We came up with some pretty innovative ways to save money which were all presented to the school board - which were not even considered. We invited school board members, we invited superintendents, and the high ups in the school board. Not one ever came! No school board member ever came, no school board member ever came to hear - not to be attacked, but to save a program that we felt was very

worthwhile. I have never, in my nine years of teaching, have had a school board member in my classroom... never, and I've taught with three different school boards, so it is not just a problem with this board. I rarely have a principal in my classroom, let alone a school board member or superintendent of personnel or a sub-system supervisor. It seems when they come to the school, they don't come to the battleground - I don't feel that's what my classroom is, but I mean where the real work is being done. No, I don't see any of those people.

I struggle with the same concerns - how can these individuals make such important decisions when they have no idea what happens in a classroom? Maybe it begins with teachers extending the invitations.

I speak up at staff meetings, but nothing is ever done about it. I just feel that it does not matter what I do. I could write to the school board, phone the school board, I could tell my principal. I can do all these things and nothing is going to change for me personally. You know the feeling of hopelessness, I look at it as helpless. It does not matter what I do. When it comes down to it, it is a money thing. I don't know, I think retired teachers, or any type of educator - principal, vice principal - anybody who has spent any amount of time, should be the ones on the school board or current teachers. Then, I guess they would say that was a conflict of interest, but people who have not been in the school situation - they might have been in school 40 years ago and not have been inside a in 40 years and have no idea what teachers face now-a-days. Kids coming to school without food, the drugs and alcohol, and the violence and the home situations. These people are saying 'when I went to school, I had to walk 40 miles through blizzards and everything to get to school.' Society has changed big time!"

Society has changed, and you can never go back. I can't understand why anyone would want to go back. They had the same concerns about education for hundreds of years. So why are they doing it?...economics, that is why.

BEV feels, "Whatever happens in education, it is always political -

whether we are aware of it or not. It all has to do with politics, and the bottom line is money. If you look back nine or ten years ago when I first came to work with the Halifax County board, the big change then was whole language. Everyone was going into whole language - it was a money save. Basically, there were thousands of dollars saved on whole language. If you look at what happened, we did away with readers and workbooks, and all those things. For the most part, money was not available to buy new things you use in your whole language program. A lot of teachers were just on their own to supplement, to build their own units and it has been a very long process for some teachers. I find after nine years I've acquired the things that I need, but it was a new expense on teachers because prior to that, we were not used to having to buy as much. Now we should be able to get a tax write-off for the things we have to purchase. We have a good PTO in the school for fund raising, but you can only nickel and dime a community to death so much.

So now that we are going to be on a business model, does that mean we will get a tax write-off for what we spend...I don't think so!

I think the back to basics is a - I don't know about a political thing, but some of the research finding from what I've read - what our kids have learned are not very good. We don't look very good in the big picture - sometimes in how our kids score. The back-to-basics is coming from parents as well, who are concerned about kids being in junior high and can't spell. I think the reason that happened is going back again to whole language - how it was implemented. People were given a bag of tricks of how they thought you taught whole language and no one understood the philosophy. You know, to understand the philosophy of whole language takes you a couple of university courses, not an inservice day, and a lot of sharing with teachers to understand the philosophy of it. To tell you the truth, I don't know any whole language classrooms, not really. Some of it is because there are 20 different opinions on what whole language is. I thought I was teaching in a whole language sort of way until I went back and did some courses. Having a true whole language classroom is a lot of work - it is a lot of preparation.

I think we have a lot of work to do in this area. Jim's school has taken the step in the right direction. They inservice staff individually - they work together as a team to support staff in professional development in the field of literacy.

The county has hired someone this year whose job is to look at the P to 3 change. Until this point, and it is mid February, there has been no direction given for any change in the program. So, the primary program has been changed from 100 to 60 percent and as far as we know there has been no change in program. So what's getting lost? Something has to go. My kids, I'm not saying they are suffering this year, but they are not getting the same program. They are getting a program less in time and then I have to prepare for them. The whole idea with the cutbacks last year is there will be no change to the program - kids are not going to suffer. I'm doing the best I can with the time I'm given - but there is little change in what is being offered to them and was sort of hush, hush. They say they are not losing that much which I sort of have a problem with. They are losing a lot more of me than that. The grade one teachers are getting children next year who have less time in school, who have been in the half day program, and have also been given no direction as to how the program is to be changed. You have to give something away, and we are not all going to give up the same things. The consistency in the program has to be affected.

The parents that organized last year were only paid lip-service by the board and really they were listening to them when the plans and wheels were rolling - and the primary program was changed. Even when we came back in September, parents were saying, 'there's still a possibility after Christmas for a full-time program.' I said, 'bull, they can't do it now.' What will they do with all the people working 40 percent in the afternoon. They can't hire all these people to fill in 40 percent jobs. You can't do that, but parents were still being lead down the garden path and told that was a possibility.

Parents are still being lead down the garden path by government...with all the reports within the different provinces, to restructure the education system. They are having a masquerade...disguising the movement in the name of education instead of exposing it for what it really is...saving money. I agree changes are needed, but to improve upon what we have - not to tear it down.

A couple of years ago, if some one told me that the changes that have happened in the last two years were going to happen, I would have said, 'no, those things won't happen'...break our contract, cutback our wages, cut the programs - people won't stand for that, and here we are. I don't know what's going to happen or where it is going to end. Getting into money saves - integration, another area where political changes for integration was the same way. You broke up special ed. classes and put kids in the classroom with some support. Where is the support now? - It is dwindling - you get minimum support. The disadvantaged kids are being disadvantaged even more by a system that is set up to see them as, 'he is weak', but when you sit down with those children - I see some of them for resource - and they don't know the alphabet, or how to print their name, but boy, they can tell you who has milk in their fridge on their street, they can tell you which yard there was a police car in last night. They don't know much about books or authors and all those things, but that has not been their reality at all. When they come to school we are very very narrow as to what we value, really. If kids come to school and they can read - and I should know better - you automatically think, 'boy, is he ever smart', and we know that intelligence and learning to read early are not related. That really bothers me because these kids then never catch up because they are never given the opportunity to. They are always weak. I thought a good teacher would say, 'I treat everybody in this class the same'. You know you really have to realize that that's the worst statement you could possibly make as a teacher - that you treat them all the same. That only works if they come the same. You have to look at them differently."

SARAH thinks "we have already been affected by the cuts, in spite of what the Minister says. I think programs have already been affected. I think we are headed for larger class sizes and a lot of things that

are certainly going to affect the quality of learning. I don't know how we can really counter that because I think it is happening everywhere. Even the supports are no longer going to be around or it does not appear as if they will be. They are already cutting back psychologists and so on. Certainly, elementary schools don't seem to benefit from those kinds of things as much and they are not often considered the place where those supports should be - they wait until junior and senior high.

I try to express my opinions now more than I did in the past. I don't always feel they are heard. I guess the point I'm at right now is I'm still sort of in an angry stage - just even in terms of figuring all this out. It is like, what do you do with this anger? It can cause you to move. I guess that is why I have been speaking out more this year.

Maybe this anger that most of us are feeling could be productive and benefit us... if it ignites all of us to move together.

I was doing some reading on policy making and the complexity of the different levels, and how they work, and the dynamics of power and which group have effects on different things. This particular article talked about how economics, business and the education world - that how intertwined these are and how they play off each other, and how because economic recession creates a crisis, which then is directed towards education. It talked about the different ideologies that each of these have - a business model. When you are working with people, you can't treat them like commodities. We are here to educate the children and try to take them from where they are and bring them further. The whole idea of looking at it from a business model - efficiency, productivity - that's frightening and it will have an effect on what we do as teachers.

I think we are going to see full time business managers instead of educational leaders. Eventually schools will be operating on their own, advertising for customers - students, paying school fees, and raising funds. With all of this planning who has time to guide the education in the school. How well will we be able to serve our "customers"?

I don't know, maybe listening to Heather Jane Robertson speak on her book 'Class Warfare' - her suggestion was that we have to make allies. But who are the allies that we make? I guess it is in the educational world that we make allies and try to promote another perspective on it - I don't know. I guess my mind is still boggled with trying to sort out even how you have influence. You have to have influence on the people who are making, or you have to be part of the decision making somehow, and maybe the only way you can do that is being in a position in the system where you have space to use that voice to have that influence.

Does that position involve playing the game or at least pretending to? I think it does.

Part of the dilemma for teachers - and maybe this is why the whole reform can come so quickly, is because you are already putting in so much time just to do your job...but to try to do these other things become overwhelming. I don't know if we can entirely step away from the emotional. I'm finding it difficult and for me it gives me the drive. The incoming business model is frightening and it is going to effect what we teach and the decisions about what we teach will not be our decisions. I think somehow we have to maintain some hold. I think teachers in Canada have had a fair - some autonomy at least in terms of what they teach and how they go about it. I think we are losing it...the kinds of curricular decisions being made and where they are being made."

I agree we have had a fair amount of autonomy, however, some guidance and a common vision needs to be in place...that was not often there, or at least enough of it.

HELEN feels it all comes down to dollars. "It seems like it is all the amount of money that we have - money makes the world go round...I know that but I think that all these changes - it is not for any other reason other than the money. I feel it is very monitory. It is unfortunate."

Money means power, and power is political.

DEBBIE thinks there has always been education reform. **“The government has its own agenda and it is dollars and cents, and it is control. I think the difference is our philosophies and the way we teach children has changed over the years. I think this is what’s making it so difficult for us as teachers. I think a big problem is of course we are not political enough, and our voices are not heard when we speak – because we are not together as a group. As a whole, I think that is one of our biggest problems.**

Even some of the government leaders are teachers – even the Minister of Education. He seems to have lost sight of what education is all about, and for him it is cutting and funding, and trying to make a few dollars go further, and telling the public everything is going to be the same. Things have changed already with the cutbacks, but parents don’t seem to be aware and I don’t know if we as teachers just aren’t doing a good enough job telling them.

I think it is easy to lose sight of classroom realities. During my two study leaves, I start out seeing the obstacles before me, with time, they do not seem to have the same force because I am removed directly from the situation. The realities of classroom life are returning as I am drawing close to the end of my leave. This is why I believe non-teaching administrators, board personnel, and department people should be required to return to the classroom after so many years. I also feel it is why classroom teachers should be involved in decision making...I know from experience how easy it is that we forget.

There is no doubt there is no money. There’s cutbacks and we have to deal with that, but I don’t think we are being consulted – probably from a board level, district level, and government level. With the amalgamation, all we can do is hope we have leaders who are well educated – whether it be the superintendent, the principals or the government. We vote them in, but they can make lots of promises before hand and not keep them. So, we go on good faith, and right now we have to get Savage out. I think our job now for all of us in Nova Scotia is to oust Savage out of the government. He is doing too many things too fast – not thinking it through. It is unfair some of

the ways the money is spent. He is giving money to businesses. There are certain companies that make profit that are not taxed and this tax money - if they were paying it - could be put into education. Now they say this is going to save eleven million dollars - the amalgamation, and they say they are going to put it right back into education. I don't think they are going to do that. I think we'll see eleven million dollars cut and it is not going to be given back to education. There is no way you can do all these cuts and still maintain the level of service, quality of education and meet all the needs of the students. We don't have enough teacher assistants - we have children mainstreamed, teachers who need inservicing...they are not given the time nor are they given the help. We have less materials, supplies - in some cases, teachers have always spent money out of their pocket and never complained, but when the morale is so low because of everything that's happening - the economic climate, the government stance, and everything else - teachers are starting to refuse to do things they might have before...maybe extra curricular activities, maybe spending money out of their own pocket, maybe doing field trips and extra things for the kids. They don't want to hurt the kids; they still want to meet the kids' needs. There's a limit because they want to show parents that things have been cut, that things have changed and if we maintain the status quo, and keep doing and working all the harder, parents are not going to see this, therefore they are not going to become informed. They are going to think nothing has changed. Most teachers are very dedicated - they work long hours after the school doors are shut; they take their work home with them; they go in on weekends; they are not paid for any holidays, nor are they paid for the summer. I agree teachers are well paid, but most of us certainly deserve the pay and we work very hard for it. When you think of our responsibilities...to mould the minds of the children and to help them grow, develop from where they are to take them to where they can go as future citizens that will be able to cope with all the demands that life will put on them - I think dollars and cents shouldn't even be looked at.

There is going to be a cut in social workers, speech pathologists...I'm sure with all this 'White Paper' with the cut in funding - back to the basics...cut out the 'frills'. Already I have to teach my own music. I'm not trained to teach music - I have no idea, and I think the early

years are very important for things like that. I don't think parents realize the importance of such things as music, home economics, industrial arts, art - whatever it might be...it is all to develop the whole of the person and any talents that are there. This is the time to tap into it and see what can grow.

It is unfortunate that society places high value on math, science and technology. Those things are important, but they are not for everyone. As Harste would say, the cuts are not allowing for exposure to "other ways of knowing". We are depriving kids of a rich education.

Politics has been around for ages, and it will always be around...but to become political in the school, you are endangering yourself. You are putting yourself at risk. That has always been the scary part. Teachers like when it is safe - like most people do. What recourse do teachers have in trying to change what's happening at their own school level? There is a group of teachers at my school who all feel the same, but they're frightened. They are frightened to take a stand and to take a step...some of them are ready and some just won't go for it. That's when change will take place - if everyone is together.

For most of us, to take a risk, we have to feel safe and supported...teachers are not rebels.

To 'educate to liberate' is what politics is all about, or to liberate to educate, and that's too scary for the government. If we start getting active politically, we undermine the government...we threaten everything they stand for, therefore they do everything to repress any kind of political action that can be taken. That's why as teachers our voices aren't being heard at all. That's why they are trying to break unions too, because the unions are trying to become more political. 'Educate to liberate' reminds me of what I saw in Africa. I went into schools and they know their only way to have a better life is to become educated. They have to pay for education and they can't afford it, so many children don't get to go to school. It is hard for me to even think of what's happening here when I've just come from a situation where children appreciate - value education. They respect

their teachers. They would do anything to be able to have an education, and so would their parents. Their parents will go without food if they can pay the school fees so their child can go to school. They have a vision and see that by being educated, their life will change. Here children, parents and government don't value education the same way. A lot of things are taken for granted - teachers aren't respected, there's a lot of waste. When you think about the politics of education over there, there is no voice for anyone. We have so much to be thankful for...and the government should be thankful for all those wonderful teachers out there that work so hard to help educate the children.

Like the general public, I don't think the government understands what we do.

People realize that you can't say anymore that education leads to a good job. You can't say that - kids, they know the difference and it is pretty scary because there aren't any jobs. I still think the 'educate to liberate' still comes in here - helping children with their self-esteem, their self confidence, and trying to find ways to deal with all the conflicts and problems that are in society today. It may mean that they have to make their own job from their own skill and talent - that's what we have to do now as teachers. We don't say the jobs are out there; the jobs may not be out there - the jobs may be from within. What can you do, what can you add to society? We can't change the situation their in, but we can help them in whatever way to make them feel worthwhile. If you can be that one teacher that made the difference, maybe because of what you did, you have helped them. I'm sure there are lots out there that can talk about the teacher that made the difference.

I think this is a good point - we still have a role to play in try to help our young people feel good about themselves and make them feel they can contribute to society...to think other wise leaves little hope for the future.

Coming back to kids falling through the cracks...kids have always fallen through the cracks and that's a part of the agenda of the government...that the upper-middle class are to control the others. What the government is doing - the cuts in funding, educational

reform or whatever you want to call it, it is making a larger number of children fall through the cracks. We can only do so much to help a large number of children in our classes. We are not sure how far we reach sometimes. I guess it comes down to accept what you can't change if there is no way possible, and change what you can. As far as change goes, what the government does and what the school boards do - they always put these things into effect too quickly. Nobody has anytime to understand the philosophy behind the decisions, or to ask questions and everything gets lost in the shuffle. We have always been apolitical in general. We haven't been taught how to be political. It is probably something we need to do in the classroom from day one, but it is something that's not going to be accepted by a lot of people - especially government...because again that's educating to liberate. I think I was exposed and could put the name to politics when I became supervisor. I never knew anything about the politics of education until I went into the administration office - then it hit me straight in the face. I didn't like it. I learned a lot. I was not a 'yes' person and I refused to be; therefore I felt that I was not important to the system as far as an administrator...the old boys network is still there."

JIM feels the boards have invited input. "I think it depends on how involved you want to get first of all. I think we have been consulted if we truly want to get involved. Within our board, they are looking for people to get involved in various ways - if you want to call it strategic planning, but they put out requests from people to get on committees of some pretty important issues and they don't get a huge overwhelming response. It is hard to do your job. Every year there are cutbacks."

When invitations are extended, are they listening for what teachers have to offer, or is it tokenism? I think in our current times, most often the decisions are already made. It gives the appearance, however, that teachers and or parents have had a voice in major decisions.

WHERE DO WE GO FROM HERE?.....SEEKING SOLUTIONS:

PATRICIA feels solutions do not come easy, nor does change.

“Unfortunately, it is going to be very difficult to make any real change and I guess that has always been the case. Change is painful and time consuming. By the time you actually get the change established, you probably don’t agree with the change anymore - and probably want another one. It is a constant evolution. I think the big thing is getting people with the strong voice on side. You can have all the PR you want, you can have all the networking and impacting you can have, but unless you get the people with the voice on side, it will be a major, major struggle. You have to keep struggling on and keep working and fighting. I think it is unrealistic to think we will change soon. I think the battle for you against the feeling of helplessness and hopelessness will be a lifelong thing and for me it will be a lifelong thing and for anyone who wants to initiate change in the system as it exists, it will be a lifelong thing. If anyone is looking for change to happen faster than that in such an ingrained thing, it won’t. That’s the first thing. I think you have to start to be a little more manipulative and looking at where does your power exist? - how can I infiltrate that? - how can I gain that power for myself? - because unless you gain that power, you don’t gain the strength of your voice. So then you can have all the people who are experts in education coming and speaking at seminars, but they do not have the power to initiate any of those changes.

Change is important if done for the right reasons. Change is also messy, uncomfortable and sometimes painful. I think we initiate positive change through a combination of things, such as, PR with parent and public, strong positive leaders with a voice, honesty, and a vision...a common goal shared. So why do some feel they have to play the game to get ahead...to become visible? Why is it that the people who play the game are often the only ones who make it?

You look at people who have made an impact in change - particularly with women. Women who have advanced are the women who have played the game and once they got there, tried to haul out their own bag of tricks. You do what you have to do to get there so you can make the change. Unfortunately, what happens in a number of cases

is, in the process of getting there, you become like everyone else - you assimilate. That's where that is the crux of it - getting there to where you have a voice, but without losing your voice in the process."

I think people who enter into bureaucracies, politics, big business, and large government departments start out as fair, honest and good people but some get caught up in the whirlwind along the way and they lose their voice and direction.

EMILY thinks perhaps parents are part of the solution. "One thing in this school now, that has helped boost our image in the community, is school has so many parent volunteers and the parents are so involved in this school that there are parents who will say, 'Oh my God, how do you do what you do?' They are appreciating what we as educators are facing. One thing that's got to happen is parents have got to become more involved in the school. I don't mean coming into the classroom and judging a teacher or a student, or a class. I have a large number of parents who work with me and they come in the mornings. I'll say this student didn't have the chance to do this particular activity. I don't expect parents to be an educator and take the place of me, but it is to give them some one-on-one that I don't have time for. Especially for those kids who do not have the home support from their parents. Every single parent that comes in on a regular basis says the same, 'How do you do it?' I think that is a very effective way and a very effective tool for change. That they see, they come in, and their child might be a very good student or not have major difficulties, but see the fact that I never get around to their child because this one had a fight with that one, this one is screaming and yelling and this one is sitting daydreaming and all those sorts of things."

We validate experiences when we become a part of them.

BEV also sees parents as being part of the solution. "Parents have a lot more voice if they would organize. It is amazing what parents think that we decide. They think we decide program changes, school times. We don't. We are not in on that decision-making. Some of it I don't want to be in on, but they need to be more aware of what our role is

and how much we are involved in decision-making. They have to organize and realize that they have a lot more power than we do. Any administration is more likely to listen to parents – because that is the community's voice where they have to work – than they are to a teacher who is on staff. Whether you like the situation or not, this is your job and if you choose to look for a transfer next year, go for it.”

SARAH is another teacher who feels parents could be a part of the answer to our problems. “I consider parents in the school as a kind of PR. If they are in the schools, they see what you do, and they are happy with what you do, then I think there is a more positive look at schools. If it is sort of always a mystery and there is a distance there, then they don't really know what is going on. I think it so important that they be in the schools.

We need to become more creative in the way things are structured. I think maybe that's a part of the solution. That we have to be more creative in ways of structuring things that maybe aren't the way things have always been. What that might be, I'm not sure. I don't think solutions are easy. I think for me, what has helped me is sort of realize in one sense, I mean, I still get very frustrated about things. I try to express my opinions now more than I did in the past. I don't always feel they are heard. I've been trying to think about what is it we can do, and I don't know if you can do it from without the system. I guess you have to do it from within.

Maybe becoming more involved politically is the only answer. Or one answer, or do you lobby? Do we have to become lobbyists? I think you have to start from where ever you are and do what you can – a small step at a time. I guess it starts with the classroom and the parents that you're involved with. I think that's where it has to start. Maybe part of what we have to do is demyth the whole idea that education leads to jobs because that is part of the hope...if we get a good education. There are a lot of people with good education and don't have jobs. But then do we disillusion? I think we do have to demyth some of it, or at least put another perspective on it. I think the next step is acceptance of the reality of the situation, then trying to find ways to keep what we have.”

MARIE identifies good leadership as part of the solution. “For us, we have begun to identify some of the issues. We have been involved heavily in inservicing now, with respect to site-based management. I think it is because we have a very dedicated administrative team here that knows what has to be in place. They have been where it hasn’t worked. They come with a mission in mind of where they would like to see this school go and be at the time they leave. They have done everything above and beyond the call of making sure it is there for you to be able to understand. Before my coming here, the administration did a tremendous amount of work in the area of literacy and taking a whole look at every facet of it...what it is; how do we obtain it; what do we do with kids that can’t achieve it? It has been so great for me coming and being actually asked to think about those kinds of things.

I think the part of the solution that we can try to strive for is the guidance of our leadership and parents becoming involved in our schools. Good leadership can do many great things for education in our schools and communities.

This school in particular is noticed by the board at a level that it had not been noticed before. We have people coming through our doors on a regular basis to check out certain teacher’s classrooms to get a birds eye view of what is going on - before that didn’t happen. This was looked upon as a average school, but since the administration coming here, it has been a real eye opener for people to know that we are apart of the cream that is at the top. There are not a lot of schools that have - a) that sense of community among their students but, b) among their staff.

A good school has to have a sense of community between staff and students. It is the basis of a positive working relationship in which good things evolve. Marie is right, they are being noticed. The school was mentioned by a professor at the Mount for the good work being done there.

Another part of the solution is becoming involved. Maybe your opinions were not valued, but you have had maybe one other listener in that group whose voice was recognized by other people in the

group. So, that's whose voice picked your voice up. It does not do much for the self esteem when it comes to the fact that you think - well I'm not saying it any different than that person is, so why aren't you listening. Should it matter who says it, as opposed to the what is being said?"

DEBBIE is not so hopeful in finding solutions. "I don't think there is any solution to the problem. I think the first step is in the classroom, and that is to be opening the doors and welcoming all parents as volunteers, visitors, or whatever...making it an inviting place, making sure communication and dialogue takes place between home and school. I think all you can do is try. As a union rep, encouraging people to go to meetings, having regular meetings about what goes on at the union council meetings. Every individual person who has a concern has to try to do something about it. That could mean writing letters to the government, it could mean going to the principal with an article that he/she feels is something important to the school and global perspective. How you get that large collective group on the same track to help make the changes - I don't know."

I think solutions are a combination of the things discussed by these teachers. It starts with the individual and grows into a collaborative movement. I think the one thing we must have is the shared vision of what education is.

CHAPTER 4 - INTERVIEW ANALYSIS:

**“WHO EVER SAID SILENCE IS GOLDEN NEVER
HEARD THE LAUGHTER OF A CHILD”**

-Anonymous

Teachers want to keep children laughing and learning. They want them to grow in an educational environment where learning is meaningful and enjoyable. The teachers I interviewed are concerned with the present situation our education system is facing. One thing they all felt strongly about was that no matter what happened, they have to do the best possible job they can do with whatever they are given. The issues differed somewhat depending on their position in the school - classroom teacher, resource teacher, guidance counsellor, administrator, elementary level, senior high level. Each of these positions has its own uniqueness; making the issues diverse somewhat. Currently, site-based management is creating concern for all these teachers. They generally felt it could be a positive change, but only if it had an essential element to make it work - good leadership. The model that site-based operates from is a business one, which the teachers felt does not fit when we are talking about educating children. It was not until I began to write that I realized that the first school I taught in was a form of site-based management. (The principal controlled the budget and I was the only specialist teacher who did not receive a budget to operate my program...interestingly, the others who received a budget were male). Schools are being transformed into managerial and bureaucratic institutions. The amount of control is increasing by techniques of management - it is headed towards productivity, efficiency and competition. With this goes a call for standardized testing, accountability and an elimination of any part in the decision-making process - a loss of any voice we may have had (Ball, 1990).

Ball states, “Political ideologically - loaded decisions are choked by bureaucratic-administrative systems and attempts are made to displace issues of moral and cultural identity with the imperatives of administrative efficacy. Our point here is that concepts like efficiency are treated as though they are neutral and technical matters, rather than being

tied to particular interests. The question of 'efficiency for whom?' is rarely asked. The cost involved for workers in achieving greater efficiency (intensification, loss of autonomy, closer monitoring and appraisal, non-participation in decision-making, lack of personal development through work) are rarely considered (Ball, 1990, p.154)."

The interviewed teachers are feeling the effects of what Ball stated. Already Helen feels like an unhappy puppet who has someone pulling her strings to make her say and do. The recent education report proposed speaks of more autonomy - for whom? The question of "efficiency for whom?" is an important one...there is a great concern that many more students will become lost in the system and fall further through the cracks - at a quicker and greater rate.

Ball goes on further by saying, "The training and professionalization of specialists managers structurally excludes others from decision-making process. These others are to be managed...In this assertive process influence over the definition of the school is removed to a greater extent from the hands of teachers. I am not suggesting some kind of complex conspiracy against teachers, but rather taking account of the overall effect of the concatenation of initiatives, constraints, changes in control and decision-making and changes in conditions of work that are having their impact on teacher's daily lives (Ball, 1990, p.154)." Patricia discussed the importance of ownership to make change possible. The current move in education takes any ownership we have away and the teachers I interviewed are feeling that. Jim and Debbie spoke about the importance of a safe environment to allow for risk-taking - whether it be in our classrooms or in becoming political. Students need that type of environment to take risks and so do teachers. Many of these teachers are feeling defeated. They are feeling the lack of ownership in the decision-making process. Some feel there is no voice for anyone - teachers, parents, unions. They felt the decisions being made were based on money and not based on improving the quality of education. I question this as well for I have continued to formally educate myself so I can be the best possible teacher I can be for my students, yet I can't get a job in Nova Scotia (my home) because they are hiring new teachers who hold TC5 certification. Bev stated the back-to- basics move was derived from research indicating that students are not performing well. Some research has not looked at societal changes over the years. Many of the teachers I interviewed have

great concerns with children's basic needs not being met at home. Much of the research does not look at this major factor. The political realities are a result of the public backlash in education. We need manoeuvring room to get outside of it (Newman, 1995).

It is easy to state your case and then find research to support it, while ignoring other research to the contrary. Emily discussed how Nova Scotia chose to look at the research to support half day primary program. They did not attend to the research supporting a full day program. It is ironic that in Newfoundland, the Department of Education is doing the opposite - they are looking at the research supporting a full day primary program. So it really depends on what perspective you are coming from and what your mission is...in the case of the government, it is money. Do we really look at the consequences of these decisions and how they effect children - especially our at-risk students? Debbie says the government has to listen to the people they serve. Bev and Emily see differently. They indicated parental involvement in trying to save the primary program was useless. The voice and the power was not with the parents either. These teachers feel the government has an agenda and it is no use trying to fight them.

I did not sense the same frustration and feelings of defeat from Patricia and Jim as I had with the others. I questioned why this was so. Is it a part of the strong personalities they both possess? Patricia identifies her aggressiveness, "playing the game", and fighting instinct as a part of her survival. Are they playing the political game or pretending to, to stay afloat? In Jim's case, does it have anything to do with the fact that he is male? Does it have to do with his position of power in the school as an administrator? He indicated he has a better "picture" of what is happening then a classroom teacher would have. He has seen the invitations extended for input that the other teachers interviewed didn't. Why? Perhaps it is a combination of all these things. Sarah and Jim felt that there is less emphasis, support, and importance placed on children's learning development at the elementary level versus the secondary level. I too have felt this with the schools and boards I have worked with.

All teachers interviewed agreed that parental involvement is important in our schools to assist us with the many classroom demands, as well as to develop a better understanding as to what we as teachers do and the complexities of education. If parents are uninformed as to what obstacles

we face as teachers in the classroom, where do they develop their ideas about the teaching profession and what is happening with the direction of the educational reform movement? Most often it comes from the media, and their past education... much of it is not from a teachers perspective. We have to learn to work with parents in a different way. Teachers feel we need more positive PR such as feature articles in the newspaper. I was reading an article from the newspaper - it was entitled "Providing Better Education for N.S. Children". I could not help but think as I was reading it - if I were a parent and did not know the difference, I would think that what the "White Paper" was proposing was wonderful and I would be very supportive of it. They indicated that the 11 million dollars that would be saved from the amalgamation "will be pumped directly back into the classrooms to pay for technology, special education and other things our children need" (The Mail Star, March 15, 1995). Services and programs are being cut now and more are threatened to be cut - like special services. Patricia feels the public would not allow special services to be cut. It all goes back to parents and how uninformed they are as to the decisions that are being made as indicated by Bev and Debbie. I think we have all learned what the government says and does are two extremely different things. Marie, Debbie and Emily were all very skeptical that we will see any of this money.

With the cut of the primary program, children are not receiving the same program because 50 percent has been cut out. According to Bev, there has been little communication and direction as to what should be cut across the board, so the children are receiving a similar program. The missing communication link is not uncommon in education - I'm guilty of it myself. Helen, Bev and Debbie discussed that our philosophies are not coming together and it has become problematic. As Bev stated, "There are 20 different opinions on what whole language is." No wonder the research is indicating problems. As Debbie indicated, the government moves quickly in implementing change. We were never given enough support and inservicing when whole language was introduced. Even as graduate students in literacy, we are still looking at and redefining what whole language really is. So how do the teachers who have not kept professionally updated cope? How do the students cope in their classroom - or do they? Are we losing more kids through the cracks because of our inconsistencies in our philosophies and teaching? The teachers interviewed feel with this issue of differing philosophies, the current

efficiency model and all the cutbacks, the quality of our programs are certainly being affected. As Helen said, "United we stand, divided we fall" and teachers agree that we are not united enough. Could our lack of unity be adding to the number of students getting lost in the system? Most of the teachers feel we need more sharing time and inservice time to help us deal with these issues.

Marie discussed the issue of philosophies and inservicing in great lengths. As a resource teacher, she works with the majority of the staff - as I do in my position. I could identify with her frustrations as a resource teacher. In working with many different teachers, it becomes difficult when philosophies of learning differ. Marie found the older staff in her school had the greatest difficulty with change and keeping professionally updated - even with support in the school. That seems understandable, however in my school the staff closest to retirement have done a great job in general keeping abreast of current education trends.

I was a substitute teacher in Marie's school. I was in a very traditional grade four classroom where there were two students who needed a tremendous amount of support. In the few days I was there, Marie and I planned for these students around what the rest of the class was doing. This allowed them to take part and be a member in their learning community. I think it was the first time these students in that classroom were engaged in this way. It was rewarding to see one of those students light up when he participated in the discussion - he felt his voice had meaning and it was heard...he felt good about himself! I think the opposite is happening for teachers. The teachers are feeling that their voices are not being heard and that is affecting the whole morale of the teaching profession. As Jim said, "Our profession is sick". If teachers are not feeling good about themselves and feeling empowered, how can students? Marie in particular felt very strongly about teacher wellness and self esteem.

Sarah and Debbie felt the first step in seeking solutions begins in the classroom. All the teachers felt leadership played an important role in looking for solutions collectively. Unfortunately, only Marie and Jim felt the support of positive leadership. In Marie and Jim's school there is excellent leadership! I could feel the warm sense of community when I first walked into their school to substitute. There has been a lot of work

done in providing support and inservicing to their staff, so in turn they can better meet the needs of their students. In that school there is ownership, a safe environment for risk-taking and teachers seem more content than other schools I have been in...they are not puppets and they do not seem unhappy in general. I too can identify with the empowerment and support of good administration; however the sense of community is not the same. Jim and Marie's school is smaller. They have done a lot of collective and individual in-school inservicing. We have had staff inservicing as a group, but not individual inservicing. My principal did extend invitations for anyone to take school time to engage in current professional reading individually. Not many have taken advantage of this invitation. Perhaps like in Jim's school, it needs to be more structured - a team approach with a few other members as facilitators - sharing, working, and learning together. It is quite visible from being in Jim and Marie's school that so much can be accomplished when we work together towards a shared vision.

The interviews were very helpful in looking at my own educational journey. They allowed me to see different perspectives as well as confirm some of the feelings I have that others share too. I realize that perhaps I am getting too caught up in all of these issues and as a result I am becoming tunnel visioned. Do I have to step back from the emotional because it clouds my vision? Do I have to look more logically at the issues? Do I have to play the political game or pretend to - to survive? I'm not sure if I have found any answers. As Sarah said, "I don't know if you can remove yourself from the emotional - it is a driving force." I tend to agree, but perhaps I need to create a little distance from it without removing myself all the way so my vision is clearer. As far as playing the game, I think I have to reflect on this further. As I board the plane once again to return to school I must remember - If I play the game, I must not lose myself along the way. I also must remember to reflect on a quote I discovered by Leo H. Bradley (1985)...

A THOUGHT ABOUT IMPROVEMENT

"A healthy state for individuals as well as organizations is to be in a state of being and becoming - in other words, a state where you feel positive about what you are but you are still trying to be better."

SECTION 3

CHAPTER 5: JOURNEY ANALYSIS:

**“EDUCATION IS THE DEVELOPMENT OF A PERSON TO
BECOME ALL HE OR SHE CAN BE, ACCORDING TO HIS/
HER OWN ABILITIES”**

Written comment, Public consultation

Education should lead a person to become all he/she can be, but does it? Was it ever meant to? If our current efforts are to develop a learning culture as stated by the Nova Scotia Department of Education...”an environment where education and training are valued, achievement is celebrated, and learners are provided with the opportunity and tools to make their learning experiences both rewarding and successful. This learning culture must be developed in our homes, in our educational institutions and in our workplaces and in our community” (p. 1)....If we are to have a role in creating a learning culture collectively, then why have teachers in particular not had a voice in the decisions being made in the current education trend? I question a learning culture for whom? The Nova Scotia Department of Education claims educational opportunities will be broadened, learning outcomes improved and a more flexible learning system - is this really what they aim to do? How can this be possible with all the cuts and an emphasis on a business type of approach to education? Their mission is “to provide excellence in education and training for personal fulfillment for a productive and prosperous society” (p. 2). What do they mean by productive and for whom? If they are demanding excellence, are they not demanding failure as well?

There is an attempt to redefine teaching as we know it, as we head towards industrial management. Ball, (1990, p.154) indicates there are three basic elements of classical management:

- 1. Decision making is controlled by the management team.**
- 2. Quality control - teacher accountability, comparisons, and the use of cohort testing.**
- 3. Pay and promotion linked to performance.**

Where does this lead us? Ball indicates that alienated workers emerge, feeling no control over their own work situation. He states that management is “practical applications of power. They embody very

specific mechanisms, procedures and techniques with particular economic and political unity (Ball, 1990, p. 165)". It gives autonomy to the manager while taking away teacher autonomy. The teacher becomes a victim and scapegoat, in which emphasis is placed on accountability, collegiality by costing and surveillance (Ball, 1993).

Teachers are certainly feeling the effects of these issues. It is evident from the literature as well as the teacher interviews I conducted. In a public meeting I attended on March 20, 1995, with the Minister of Education, concerns of teachers and the public were very obvious. In 1989, New Zealand restructured their education system similarly to what many provinces in Canada are proposing. They are now finding that they didn't save money; parents paid more for education; there was little difference in the quality of education; the workload for teachers and parents increased, and the rich schools got richer, while the poor schools got poorer (NSGEU, 1994). So why does the government chooses to go ahead with its education reform - full speed ahead? Have they not learned from their past errors - the problems that occur from implementing programs too quickly, such as whole language and inclusion as expressed by one principal at the meeting. The Minister spoke of ownership, partnership, and having a voice in decision-making. Why then is it that only two weeks before the proposed changes will be endorsed, he is inviting input? Why? Because it is a done deal! The government's agenda is to provide a falsehood about inviting voices form the people. Was an additional option built in the proposal to make the government look as if they are will to listen and be fair? The people represented at this meeting felt that was the case. They also felt the government is deceiving the public by promising quality education. One individual alluded to the importance of early education and how it should be ensured, but if the government is really trying to improve the quality of education, then why are they cutting early intervention programs? Politics of decentralization is not about the quality of learning, it is about other issues. Decentralization in fact becomes puppets to councils and the government as one teacher expressed. A number of principals expressed concern that there will not be enough time for them to be full-time managers plus education leaders. They felt the government is trying to make politicians out of assertive principals. If the Minister of Education says he "believes in democracy", why then is the reform demoralizing teachers? The reform discredits that we, as educators, are professionals. Maybe we have to believe that

“decisions made in education are made by people who are not evil, but who are misinformed or under informed (Dilena, 1995)...they believe that learning is separate from the social, and that is why they think testing and a standardized curriculum works. Dilena (1995) states, “we can learn a lot from churches and activists - groups who know that working together can perform miracles. We do need networks and allies for without them we are wasting our efforts”.

What teachers are feeling is a result of what they feel will happen to the students they teach. My concern is how do we prevent more students from falling through the cracks? National curriculum, testing and pedagogical decision-making is bound to have great effects on our students. The testing aspect will monitor not only students’ performance, but the performance of teachers and schools - making comparisons. Will we have to teach to the test, like some teachers are already doing? How do we use scores (and publish the results to the public) to compare students, teachers and schools? Empowerment is gained by greater control over learning goals and active collaboration with each other in achieving those goals. In an interaction model of assessment, teachers have a great deal of opportunity to observe children in a variety of cognitive and academic tasks. This information can and should play an important role in assessment. In a transition model, tasks are imposed, ignoring children’s experiences and the institution mirrors the biases of standardized tests and provides less opportunity for observation of children’s capabilities (Cummins, 1989). This illustrates the ways in which a transitional approach underlying the education reform movement contributes to further disadvantaging our students. “Today’s workplace requires people with teamwork skills, high literacy and mathematical competencies, problem solving skills and technology application skills” (Barlow & Robertson, 1994, p.9). Can such a new system of education provide these skills? I don’t think so.

No one individual student is alike, nor are schools. Like students, each have their own experiences and background history. Schools too have their own uniqueness and with that can come a set of unique problems. Jim spoke of the economics of a community - where a school is located can have an affect on outcomes. Our school has just received the CTBS results and we had the poorest results in the district. The assumption is automatically made that “we have to pull up our socks” - we as a school

community are not performing well. The factors such as school size and the economics of the community are not considered. We are the largest school in the district and the best resourced. We also have a large majority of students coming from “disadvantaged” backgrounds where family support networks are often not there. Could this be part of the reason for such results? Or are we not playing the game - teaching to the test; hauling out special needs students? Or instead are we trying to develop critical thinkers in our school community, which does not include regurgitation of the text to answer factual specific questions on culturally biased tests? Are we as a professional community not performing well enough to meet our students’ needs? Are there large gaps in our philosophies and in the teaching of the curriculum? The raw scores cannot analyze and answer these questions, yet we are publishing these scores to the public - scores that as educators we sometimes don’t understand. Is there not danger in giving the public such figures? The reason is accountability, but does this really say anything about accountability? What do these scores really tell us? I think it is a dangerous game that we are playing.

I agree with Cummins (1989), “The long-term goal would be to rid the educational system of the straightjacket of standardized test which within the mandates of current conceptions of reform and accountability, essentially function as tools for the oppression of teachers and the suppression of learning” (p. 35). The one thing I realize is that I can’t fight the on-set of testing. So what do I do - play along and begin to teach to the test and deprive students from meaningful and purposeful education? Perhaps as Cummins suggests, as teachers and administrators we have to insist that “ any tests used in schools incorporate the full range of curriculum objectives emphasized within an interactive/experimental model of pedagogy. Thus if commercial tests are not available, that adequately assess objectives such as communicative use of language...,critical and creative thinking skills, cooperative problem solving and so forth, then the school district itself should be pressuring to develop such instruments”...(Cummins,1989, p.36).

Reform must involve teachers and we need to challenge the structure in which we are involved . We need to recognize what disempowers us in the classroom so we can empower the students we teach (Cummins, 1989). Once we recognize those forces, then what? There are so many issues

involved in teaching - issues such as teachers and students...issues of gender, race, culture, economics, and oppression - all of these experiences as students and teachers make us who we are today and what we have to struggle against to try and overcome the obstacles in our society. We need reculturing, not restructuring - to restructure is not to reculture. We need to focus on teaching instruction and quality of learning. Emphasis on governance has little to do with education. The rationale for change is to be continually renewing - we know that, so what is the government's mission? We tend to meet the need for change by restructuring - to cover up the inefficiencies at dealing with our problems...that is the political answer in difficult financial times. Is this what the government's mission is...as well as saving money? If we really want to restructure education and change the quality of education, we need time to do this, as change is a gradual thing...we need to be team players so we can aim for the same stars.

As teachers, students and parents, we need to carefully consider what is happening in the reform. The governments agenda is a cost-cutting, deficit reduction agenda. It is important that we consider the hidden agenda of the politicians mission - to remove decision-making power even further away from the local communities and placing it in the hands of a selected few. Such centralization could mute the voices of teachers and take away our hard-earned professional status (Guildford, 1994). The government has to stop thinking about education as a financial burden, and start thinking of it as an investment in our future. So how do we begin to persuade the government to buy into this important investment?

In my journey, I have uncovered many of the forces which have lead students into the pit-falls of education and lead teachers, including myself, to the feeling of disempowerment. It has now left me with the feeling of where do I go from here?

“Learning is not pouring into the minds of children, but growing into social ways of knowing” (Manning, 1995). Learning can not be separate from the social. There are many social factors that influence who we are as learners.. As a teacher, in my journey I have travelled through many social constructs that, at times, I have had little control over. The aim of teacher research is trying to come to understand our own practice, but this can often be driven by other social forces. Because of this, it is easy to

pass blame. One of the things I have gained from this process is I am guilty of blaming the other factors that affect me as a teacher - home, the education system, and society in general. Often it is the sharing with others when we truly learn. At times we are blind to certain aspects of our practice. Sarah and I have studied together over the past few years and in that time she has helped me gain insights from a different perspective. When we meet for coffee, I have napkins with notes on them everywhere as I would begin to make connections out of our discussions. The social aspect of learning is so important for children and teachers for we grow and learn together.

I have tried to evolve my teacher research in a systematic way - in a fair and balanced way, explaining what is happening and what forces are at work. So what have I really gained from this process? I have recognized and am now able to name my struggle with the three C's...change, conflict, and communication. There will always be conflict and constant change, and communication is the link in resolving the conflict that change brings about. On one hand I am encouraging change in particular facets of education - the ones I strongly believe will benefit the learning environment for our students, yet I am resisting the reform. It is change I have concerns with. I feel I hold tight to my position when I truly believe in something - maybe to the extent that I am not listening enough to the voices of others. That is why I have asked myself the question, "Do I have to step back from the emotional?" I think I do. I think it has created a tunnel vision effect which can be more damaging than productive when you are trying to act as an agent of change. It can also destroy you as it eats away at you, thus making one ineffective. I think it also acts as a barrier - one that I thought was set up by others...but is it really? Have I myself built the barriers? Is it a result of having few on a staff who speak the same language...leaving one with the feelings of isolation? I have to look more at what I can do as an individual...to step back and observe - not place blame, but to listen. From this perhaps I can gain insights as to how I can become a positive element in the change process.

Nine years ago, I stepped on the plane that took me to the unknown - the churning in my stomach was a result of fearing the unknown. Now, nine years later, as I begin my journey back, that same feeling is inside of me...this time it is a result from fear of the known. Why? What am I fearing?...the 3 C's - change, conflict, and communication. Some of the

problems that have evolved in education are a result of change occurring too quickly - yet I am involved with a program of change in our school that I want the transition to happen quickly. A great deal of conflict has developed because of this change. This is why I am fearing the known - I know that conflict awaits me upon my return. I think what disturbs me the most is sometimes this conflict becomes personal - it affects relationships among colleagues and this becomes stressful. Conflict does not have to be negative, if we learn how to negotiate. I have not learned how to deal with conflict well. I think a part of this is the result of the lack of communication I have had with staff in dealing with change - the implementation of the new resource program.

I have always had difficulty in dealing with negative communication and conflict. As a child, I have tried to avoid it - going out of my way to do so..trying to please people and keep peace. I now know that I can't please everyone and conflict is a part of life. There are certain career directions I feel I could never aspire to as those positions require a tremendous amount of communication and conflict is a part of that. The night prior to parent interviews for me is a sleepless night. Again, it is the fear of conflict. I think it goes back to the lack of confidence, professionally and personally. If someone "barks", I want to "whimper" off into a corner. I need to better articulate my position and take a stand, but with a listening ear and communicate my concerns instead of filing them away inside and letting it brew. I think of Patricia and how she stands her ground, getting conflict out in the open and dealing with it. I think I need to do more of this in a positive way, but it is a difficult transition when our way of dealing or not dealing with issues is often so ingrained in us.

I recently had an e-mail from a colleague in response to a message I sent regarding the resource program. She has had great concerns with the resource program at our school. I had asked how things were going this term. She said we would have to sit down and talk about it for September. I think as a staff we have to open the communication lines. There has been a lot of communication amongst groups, but not collectively so everyone knows what the issues are. It makes it difficult when on a staff of forty plus - you may have 41 different opinions as to what direction this program should take...especially when the majority wish to return to a traditional approach in dealing with "at-risk" students. At least we would uncover some of the major concerns. This is my mission when I return -

to open the lines of communication and try to deal with the conflict that has resulted from change. A positive thing for me (other than what the children have gained) which has come out of the resource program is allowing me to share, grow with and learn from my colleague, Linda, whom I work side by side. I am truly fortunate to work with such a wonderful educator. I have watched her adapt with such ease to change. I have observed her caring, patient, and humanistic approach with students, and I have learned a great deal from her. That opportunity to share and get acquainted with teachers is often not there. Maybe it is up to me to somehow build in that crucial time...there needs to be enough room for conversations about what literacy is and how we go about trying to achieve it - as in Jim's school.

In my journey, I began to feel like I was not doing enough to keep the quality of education from eroding - to help prevent more students from falling through the cracks. As Judith Newman (1995) said, "We have to be aware of the political realities we are living in". As teachers, we did not talk about the politics of education before - for many of us, we probably did not know how to name it. I think we are slowly beginning to name it and talk about it. Teachers are becoming angry because of the politics. Could this lead to building resistance to it? Could our anger lead to collective and collaborative action against it? Sarah helped me to see that the change in the resource program was a political move and that I was an instrument in that change. She also helped me identify other things I have become active in, in the name of education. Perhaps I have to look at these things and validate them as efforts in doing my part in trying to meet student's needs the best I can. Maybe Debbie is right..."accept what you can't change, and change what you can".

If I have a vision of what education could be, then I have to do my part in becoming active...the starting point is communication. As my journey in education continues, I think this quote is worth reflection:

**"VISION WITHOUT ACTION IS MERELY A
DREAM; ACTION WITHOUT VISION JUST
PASSES TIME; VISION WITH ACTION CAN
CHANGETHETHEWORLD"**

Joel Barker, Future Edge

CHAPTER 6 - EPILOGUE...So What Does All Of This Mean?

“THERE ALWAYS SEEMS TO LOOM THE POSSIBILITY OF SOMETHING BEING OVER, SETTLED, SWEEPING, CLEAR THE WAY FOR CONTENTMENT. THIS IS THE DELUSION OF A PASSIVE LIFE.”

Carolyn G. Heilburn, 1988, p.130

As a subject of my own research, I have tried to make sense of my role in the classroom and within the political issues of education. It has generated much inward thought on how I view myself in this system and how we best meet the needs of our students. Sometimes it is difficult to step back and analyze ourselves as teachers, but it is not until we begin to reflect, that we really understand ourselves, our practice, and the many facets that enter into education, affecting us as learners...I had to do this first. Teacher research has helped me learn and grow - to let the writing take me to where I go next in my own classroom and within the political system. The politics became so overwhelming, that I had to write about my journey. My writing, conversations, and interviews became a link in connecting me with other educator's concerns, hopes, and possible action. Often educators feel isolated and the need for a supportive community is vital in carrying out our work as teachers.

This process has provided me with different perspectives. It has also repositioned me as a teacher, a learner, and a colleague. I have gained insight into my own practice. I have discovered often there is more underneath than we care to expose - even to ourselves for this makes us vulnerable. However, if we don't seek, often we don't find..."seek and ye shall find". I was only seeing what I wanted to see; however my vision of others seemed very clear - so I thought. I have learned that I have to understand my own practice and my role as a learner first before I can deal with the politics of education. I now realize that I can't just sweep these issues clear away as Heilburn indicates.

The political issues of education go back hundreds of years. The link between economics and literacy education has always been the force behind the back-to-basics movement. Test scores are used as the key element in a return to the fundamentals - the "proof in the pudding" (Rose, 1988). When the economy is unhealthy, historically we have always

looked to education as a scapegoat. Our world is socially constructed, and we cannot analyze educational “failure” or “success” in isolation - nor can we analyze students in this fashion, but we do. Learning is social and for me, I have to understand my social world to gain insight into my own practice. I too have looked for scapegoats - it is easier to do this than to truly look inside of one’s self.

I realize even more that we are all learners. Like our students, teachers also need to start from where they are in a supportive learning community. To learn from each other - as students, teachers, parents, and politicians, we have to invite dialogue and create continuing conversations. This is the essential key in unlocking the doors of isolation and knocking down the barriers that we build. Sometimes the isolation comes out of our differing philosophies...our different ways of knowing, which may push us in new directions. If we don’t shift directions, “there is danger to stay where we are, to undertake each day as routine, and to listen to our arteries hardening...We should make use of our security, our seniority, to take risks, to make noise, to be courageous, to become unpopular” (Heilburn, 1988, p. 130).

Returning to the Resource Room after a four month study leave fills me with feelings of “unpopularity” and alienation as a staff member. Change is a risk, and often messy, leaving the change agents unpopular as Heilburn suggests. What I have grown to understand is that others’ input and voices are the important aspects in the process. It is something the government does not seem to incorporate when making decisions and implementing new programming. I believe that this is where much of the resistance is coming from in the educational reform and in our new resource program in our school. I, like the government, have not listened to all the voices and as a result alienation sets in. Yet, this is often the result when we become “courageous” to try out “radical” new ideas.

After we discover together the real limitations that exist, we then try to understand them and become active individually, collectively, and collaboratively to provide meaningful education for all of our students. I think this is how I continue to march further and this is where I am now. I am marching with some discomfort, but I think this is necessary to truly seek solutions. My future vision would be to march with a band of students, teachers, parents, and politicians to a different beat of the

drum...a rhythm where all join in and move together in unity.

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APPENDIX 1

Sweet Little Caroline

Her voice so sweet, her eyes so brown
She was one of many children in this little town
She captured so many hearts, including mine
To everyone she was Sweet Little Caroline

Her mental and physical development was behind her peers
However, through her eyes she had no fears
Her clothes tattered, and her tangled hair so fine
She was still Sweet Little Caroline

Her strength and courage touched me
For her love for life was strong
For what life had to offer her, through my eyes was wrong
But she still entered the classromm and filled it with
sunshine
For she was everyones' Sweet Caroline.

Her knowledge of the english language was weak
She often used her first language to speak
She helped me to translate
Since many of the children found english hard to
communicate

Her language barrier and learning disability
Never discouraged her effort and continuity
To try her best and give freely of herself
For this was her greatest wealth

When I said good-bye and flew away
A part of little Caroline would stay
It was not long before I fled
When the phone rang and I was told she was dead

She died such a senseless death
The barrel of a gun was raised to her head
The wonderful memories of her are mine
For she will always be my Sweet Little Caroline

Caroline was one of my challenging needs students for two years. In the second year, I worked very closely with Caroline and two other students. My bond with these students grew very strong throughout the course of the year. Many times these childrens' basic needs of food and clothing were not met...this meant preparing and serving breakfast was usually the first thing on our agenda.

Caroline had been suffering from malnutrition since an early age. She was a ten year old in a three year olds body. When I first saw Caroline, I thought she was a sister to one of the students. I soon discovered she was a grade one student at age nine. Her family spoke their native tongue at home, which caused some problem for Caroline in the english based education system. Caroline and I came a long way from that first year. We learned and grew from each other.

The decision to leave the community was a very difficult one to make for many reasons...Caroline was one of them. We were starting to grow in our learning, and I did not want break this process. Perhaps this was selfish of me since a teacher was accepted to replace my position... I guess I wanted to be a part of her growth - her success.

As indicated in the poem dedicated in her memory, Caroline did not have the opportunity to meet her new teacher and carry on the learning process we had began. She died the summer I had left. When I returned to the community for a visit two years later, there was a void... Caroline was not there. I still miss her and a part of her will always remain with me.

APPENDIX 2

RCMP call off Davis move

Backgrounding
THE NEWS

By IAN BAILEY
The Canadian Press

DAVIS, PLEEF — A Newfoundland flag was hoisted onto a roaring bonfire in celebration late Monday after a two-day runway forced the RCMP to call off a possible confrontation with the Innu of Davis Inlet.

A pair of early Innu men torched the flag, while about 200 men, women and children cheered loudly as the fire lit the night.

"I think tonight people will be able to sleep," said Katie Rich, a former chief of the isolated Labrador community.

"They weren't for the last couple of days."

The RCMP had planned to arrive today in military helicopters to provide security for court officials, who were evicted last December from the island village, home to a third of the region's 1,500 Innu.

But Justice Minister Ed Roberts said the Moiwatses temporarily delayed the operation because it was too dangerous.

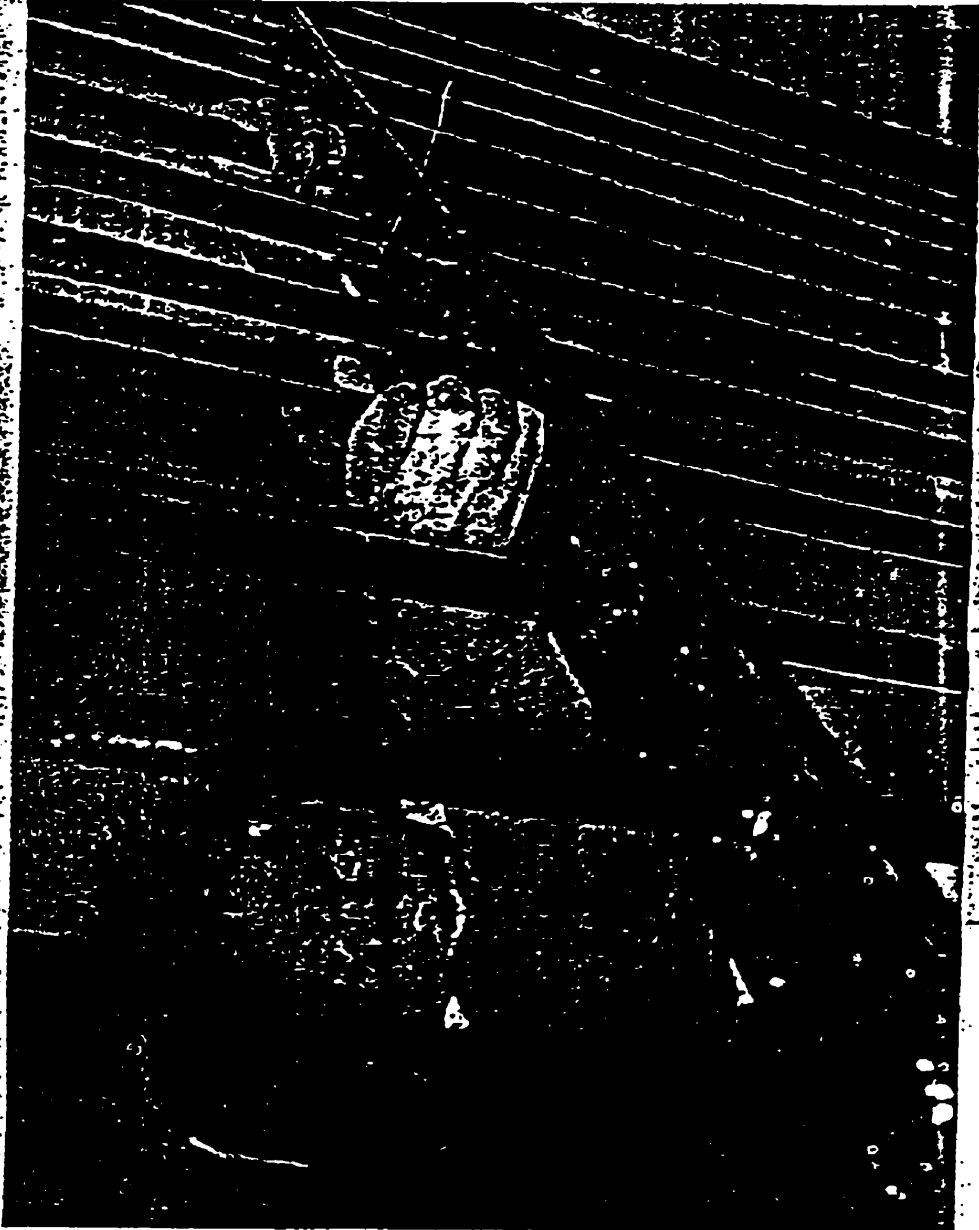
"Police intelligence indicates the presence of 100 persons from outside the community who are assumed to be reinforcements against the RCMP Police," Roberts said from St. John's.

"As well, the runway of the Davis Inlet airport has been strewn with debris which will hamper the landing of aircraft."

The Innu argued that only about 30 mainland Innu arrived in Davis Inlet on Monday to provide moral

support.

"They have threatened to resist a call on RCMP invasion, but they have been very cooperative in the past," Roberts said.



INNU PROTEST — A young boy hangs from the bar of a playground set at Davis Inlet, Nfld., Monday. The hut was ransacked by the RCMP.

Innu fight against system

By IAN BAILEY
The Canadian Press

DAVIS INLET — The Innu fight against the traditional justice system shouldn't be mistaken for a soft touch on crime.

"It's not that we condone wrongdoing," says spokeswoman Katie Rich.

"If someone breaks and enters a building, we don't condone that."

The Innu are locked in a fight with the Newfoundland government over how to deal with crime in the isolated island community that's been immersed in poverty and despair for years.

The battle took a breather Monday when the RCMP delayed plans to use military helicopters to escort the chief provincial court judge into Davis Inlet today.

But Justice Minister Ed Roberts insists the court will return to the village and the Innu who violently evicted it last December.

The province's Liberal government says it will not raise issues from the establishment of a traditional justice system.

APPENDIX 3

Sunday
April 24,
1994

LIFESTYLES

Psychologist exudes positive energy

Disorder no deficit for Downey

During his childhood, Attention Deficit Disorder caused Scott Downey numerous problems. But Downey said he has learned to use the disorder to his advantage. To cope with the hyperactivity, he has become involved in a variety of activities from martial arts and music to psychology and pain management.

By DEANA STOKES SULLIVAN
The Evening Telegram

It wasn't until he began counselling children about three years ago that Scott Downey began to understand the problems he experienced in his own childhood.

"I was a difficult child, behaviorally and academically," says Downey.

He describes his introduction to school, in Stephenville Crossing where he grew up, as "very negative."

"I remember being locked in the classroom in kindergarten, looking outside at the other children playing," he said. "I can't remember why I was just punished for something."

Throughout school, he spent a lot of time in the principal's office being disciplined. And when he was seven, the police showed up at his home responding to a call that he had been throwing rocks through windows. Downey said he



PHOTO BY THE EVENING TELEGRAM

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Downey, who is from a family of psychologists at the Dr. Charles A. Janeway Child Health Centre in St. John's, realizes he was a typical child with Attention Deficit Disorder (ADD), Impulsiveness, Difficulty with concentration and behavioral problems are all symptoms of the disorder.

When he was about seven or eight years of age, Downey began playing guitar and singing. He went on to become a professional musician and singer. On April 30, he will perform at a benefit concert at Memorial University's D. F. Cook Recital Hall in aid of CHADD Canada (Children and Adults with Attention Deficit Disorder).



PREPARING FOR BENEFIT

A talented musician, Scott Downey enjoys playing guitar and singing. On April 30, he will perform at a benefit concert at Memorial University's D. F. Cook Recital Hall in aid of CHADD Canada (Children and Adults with Attention Deficit Disorder).

Downey said that he was a typical child with Attention Deficit Disorder (ADD), Impulsiveness, Difficulty with concentration and behavioral problems are all symptoms of the disorder.

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In his role as a psychologist, Scott Downey counsels a variety of clients at his home office. It was through counselling that Downey realized he has Attention Deficit Disorder.

HELPING OTHERS



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APPENDIX 4

Sacred Heart Elementary
School
Marystown, Newfoundland
Canada
AOE 2M0

September 13, 1994

Mr. M. Siscoe
Roman Catholic School Board
for the Burin Peninsula
Marystown, Newfoundland
AOE 2M0

Dear Mr. Siscoe:

A strong and sturdy house is built on a good foundation...a good foundation is what our students need to prevent them from falling through the cracks. We, the primary and elementary teachers, try to lay down that foundation and each year we build on that.

Early intervention is the key to success. " School failure, research shows, is unnecessary and almost entirely preventable through early intervention" (Educational Research, vol. 6 #1).

M.J. Kelly states, "When a learning disability is undetected or ignored, the result is stress, anxiety, and frustration. Sometimes the loss of self esteem leads to delinquency" (The Canadian Press).

It is therefore crucial that we begin by stacking our resources - financial and human in the early years of schooling. We also need to keep up-to-date- on professional development and be provided with guidance in delivering our programs.

We have joined collectively as a group of concerned educators once we learned of the absence of inservice days provided to the primary and elementary programs with this board. This coupled with the loss of our primary coordinator has left many of us apprehensive and frightened for the future education of our students.

We want to build a strong foundation for our students and provide early intervention. Crisis intervention in the middle and secondary years seems so unnecessary when we can get to the root of the problem before it grows into a crisis situation in the later years.

The alarming number of teachers concerned with the issue of "Crisis in the Classroom" is a result of the frustrated students who have "fallen through the cracks" of a highly political system. This system continues to suppress the disadvantaged (even to a greater extent when educational reform is put into place).

We can not provide early intervention without the support of the board and the department of education. Some of us have been on K-12 staffs, whereby staff meeting concerns were prioritized ...secondary level concerns always being first.

We must change the mind set of the importance of early years of education if we wish to provide quality education to all. If we lay down a solid foundation in the early years, then each and everyone of us can be instruments in developing strong educational institutions. Why "patch up the cracks" when we can prevent them from forming later on in life?

Therefore we are requesting that primary and elementary teachers have equal access to inservice opportunities and support services.

We look forward to your response regarding this matter in the near future.

A group of concerned educators

Please see the attachment below:

"Research on prevention of school failure clearly shows that no one program can prevent school problems if administered for only one or two years. To prevent school failure, it is critically important to enable all children, regardless of their family background or personal characteristics, to enter first grade with good language skills, cognitive skills and self concepts. These researchers believe that intensive intervention will be needed for only a brief period for the great majority of students. Intensive early intervention followed by long term, relatively inexpensive improvements in instruction and other services to families can produce substantial and lasting gains. The best evidence for this conclusion comes from research on the "Success for All Program", which begins with four-year-olds and provides high-quality preschool and kindergarten, followed by one-to-one tutoring in first grade for those with serious reading problems. It uses research-based curriculum and instructional methods throughout the elementary years, in conjunction with non-graded reading instruction and family support programs. Not only do these students perform better than controls in first grade, but their advantage continues to grow in succeeding elementary years. Slavine et al pointed out that ending school failure depends on linking prevention, early intervention and continuing instructional improvement. There is abundant evidence that we ensure school success for the majority of disadvantaged, at-risk children by the use of one-to-one tutoring and early intervention"(Educational Research, Vol.1, #6).

APPENDIX 5

Sacred Heart Elementary School
Marystown, Newfoundland
AOE 2M0

October 8, 1994

Roman Catholic School Board
for the Burin Peninsula
Marystown, Newfoundland
AOE 2M0

Dear Mr. Siscoe:

We wish to thank you for extending the invitation to respond to your letter. A meeting to discuss your letter elicited these comments:

- "26% decrease from previous year in allocation of days"...the board has chosen to reduce by 100% the allocation of days for certain areas - ie, primary, elementary and french.

- "We are given all these tools (ie. programs) and not shown how to use them. This is where problems arise...proper inservicing of programs and approach to learning is important. For example, if there are "problems" with CTBS scores, then we need support in working through them" (the question of validity is of concern however.)

- The grade four health program, which has been implemented this year, has had no inservice time directed at teachers.

- The Learning Resources Conference days were not used (only two individuals were eligible and they could not attend).

- The National French conference, did not have any representation from our board.

- The grade three french immersion science program has not been inserviced.

Suggestions for sharing days/providing inservice:

- Technology is important, however if students can not read the computer text or the text on the screen, then it is of little benefit if we can not utilize this technology to the fullest. We suggest to balance the emphasis on technology with other curriculum areas.

- Coordinators should become available to substitute for teachers so they will be able to attend provincial inservices.

- Have presenters come to the district and close school (by grade or sections).

-Other school boards are able to allow their teachers to attend individual inservices of their choice. The question of "Why our workshop days depend on left over sick days " also arose.

- Have the board show stronger representation re: Mr. Decker's letter (dated the 14th day of September, 1994).

-Support the teachers needs and interest in professional development.

We realize that some changes have taken place since the meeting which generated these comments. Again, we appreciate your time in responding to our concerns. We all have one goal in common and that is to provide quality education for each and every student.

Concerned Educators Committee
Sacred Heart Elementary School

APPENDIX 6

SACRED HEART ELEMENTARY
P. O. BOX 79
MARYSTOWN, NE
AOE 2MO
TELEPHONE: 279-2051

1994 11 01

DEAR Mrs. Myers :



" IN CELEBRATING BOOK WEEK "

We the Resource teachers at Sacred Heart Elementary are extending an invitation to you, the parents, to come meet with us on Tuesday, November 15 at 7:00 p.m. in the Resource Room. This will be an informal meeting where we will have the opportunity to meet with you, explain our program, view our resources and answer any questions you may have.

We encourage you to attend and we are looking forward to meeting you.

Sincerely,

Resource Room Teachers

Ms. Carol Myers
Mrs. Linda Tobin
Mrs. Mag Hamen



/pm

SACRED HEART ELEMENTARY SCHOOL
P.O. BOX 79
MARYSTOWN, NFLD. AOE 2M0

Telephone: (709) 279-2051

Fax: (709) 279-4351

The resource room has been built around a philosophy of how we believe children learn best (and is supported by the current literature). Our program is a literature based approach in learning to read and/or challenging students who have had great success in reading (context being key).

The resource room concept was developed from the current research in Language Learning. It is a holistic philosophy where children's needs are the focus and their needs direct the curriculum. The new literature based approach in delivery of special services was a necessary direction as curriculum and students have changed over the years. The current research supports total inclusion, however, some researchers support the intense one-on-one approach. This allows for individual interaction between teacher and student.

It is vital that students feel success, at times. In turn, this increases their self esteem which has a direct link to learning. This is a necessary component in the learning process. Allowing "at risk" students some control/imput over the curriculum empowers the child. This heightens their interest and raises motivation levels. A rich environment with a wide variety of literature and teacher support are important factors in working with "at risk" students.

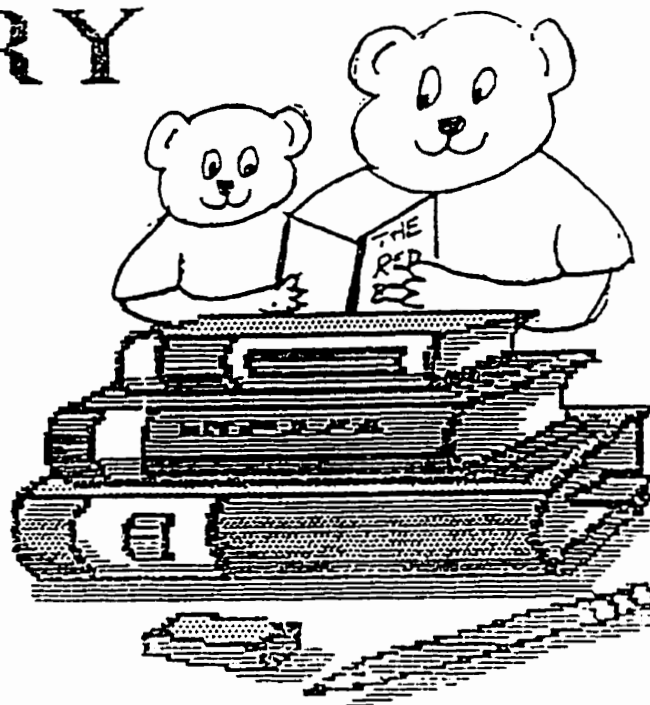
Learning is a process whereby we must identify students not by grade level, but by their potential. Providing meaningful experience is the key to life long learning. This paradym shift requires change in our thinking and teaching.

The resource program entails students from grade one through six and includes enrichment as well as remediation. The room is also available to all of our students as a "drop in centre." The students receiving remediation do so on a one-to-one basis. The focus of this intense remediation is to develop reading strategies so students can become more independent in their classroom communities ... for reading is the basis of all curriculum.

The room has been set up differently from a typical classroom. It has been designed to create an inviting atmosphere where children can enjoy coming and spending time reading ... we felt this is important as it is the first step in "turning children on" to reading. Included in this room is a computer centre; listening centre; and two reading centres - (one being a boat, the other a sofa and coffee table).

We have been pleased with the response by students thus far; children enjoy visiting the centre and often drop by during their free time (i.e. recess and lunch). Many of these frequent lunch time visitors are students who in the past have had little motivation to read.

STORYTIME AT SACRED HEART ELEMENTARY



'Listening to stories, talking about them, and learning to read is important in the educational development of young children. Just as talking to babies allows them to experiment with spoken language, reading to children allows them to hear the language of books. It has been proven that children who have been read to from a very early age are children who become good readers.'

We feel strongly about the importance of reading to young children, along with the continued emphasis of shared reading with older children. As a result, we have organized a storytime (shared reading) for preschool children and their parents. Storytime will take place in the Resource Room on Tuesdays and Thursdays from 8:00 to 8:30 (starting Oct. . . .)

Storytime will allow young children to become acquainted with the school setting as well as provide the experience for children to explore the wonderful world of books and reading. Parents are encouraged to drop in with their preschool children for Storytime...perhaps you yourself might like to share a book with your child.

We look forward to seeing you.

Ms. C. Myers and Mrs. L. Tobin
(Resource Teachers)

APPENDIX 7

There seems to be a concern with meeting individual needs of children in our school. I see this as positive and meeting the objectives of whole language. I feel that we are working well together and extra help is always appreciated but we may need to re-evaluate the grade one resource program.

Here are a few of my concerns:

1. Is it seen as necessary by administration and resource teacher.
2. Why was the remedial part of the program rescheduled to the Kindergarten teachers and the last periods of the day? Might it have been better to have remedial sessions earlier and enrichment groups later? I feel responsible for planning a remedial program because I know the Kindergarten teachers have so many different programs to plan for and obviously their Kindergarten program must be a priority.
3. What will happen to grade one remedial if Kindergarten goes the full day in September?
4. What can we do to better understand the grade one enrichment program? What is it supposed to accomplish? How should children be chosen to participate in it?
5. Are the classroom visit periods serving a purpose? Would a library program be just as effective? Carol: