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ELEMENTARY TEACHERS WHO USE ALTERNATIVE ASSESSMENT STRATEGIES: MULTIPLE CASE STUDIES OF THEIR PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

DISSERTATION

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy in the Graduate School of The Ohio State University

by

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Dedicated to the memory of Donald P. Mescher
June 29, 1929 - March 3, 1990
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

To the individuals who guided me through this dissertation, I wish to extend my warmest appreciation: To Dr. Michael Beeth, who was always accessible, his efficacious support, advisement, and provocation served to motivate me to a higher standard; I was honored with the support of Dr. Nancy Chism, who provided enlightened insights that were valuable at all stages of this study; and to Dr. Kenneth Howey, as professor and committee member, who helped establish a framework of professional development from which this study emerged.

I am indebted to the teachers who so willingly gave of their time and welcomed me into their classrooms and professional lives. Their enthusiasm and candor while reconstructing their professional development inspired me.

To my colleagues, Diana, who provided earnest feedback from the inception, and to Laura and Marlene who unselfishly shared their insights over the past year, I am most thankful.

Thank you to my family: To Joanne whose generosity and support made the difference, and to Steve, Ken, Janet, Bill, John and their families who believed in me. Finally, thanks to Diane, who persevered while I spent the many hours devoted to this study, to Eric and Jodi who waited, and especially to Linley, who was old enough to be angry with my time spent dissertating, but rather understood.
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Introduction

Reform initiatives in education abound. The majority of these reforms fail to thrive in the American classrooms due to a host of variables. And yet, occasionally an initiative will take hold, be embraced by teachers, and significantly impact teaching and learning. Because of the natural resistance to change, reform comes slowly to education, and is rarely comprehensive (Cuban, 1993). Sometimes it seems as if change is fought out on a battle field where tremendous amounts of time and effort are expended for minimal gain.

What is it about some reform efforts in education that allow a rare few to thrive and make a difference while constancy is the norm? Initiatives such as whole language (Dahl & Freppon, 1995), cooperative learning (Stevens & Slavin, 1995), and the middle school movement (George & Shewey, 1994) are having significant impacts on teaching and learning. Although we cannot determine which educational reforms will be systemic and truly impact the education of our youth, it seems that based upon Cuban's (1993) work on constancy and change in American classrooms, we might be able to predict that they will be grassroots movements which will grow from the bottom-up, be accompanied by opportunities for continuous professional development for teachers, not depend on vast resources, and make good common sense.

The trend towards teachers' making greater use of alternative assessments is a reform which appears to meet these criteria. This trend will be documented in Chapter II, but at this point it could certainly be described as a grassroots movement; there are
growing opportunities for professional development in alternative assessment; it does not necessarily require vast resources; and for many people, because alternative assessments inform their instruction, it makes very good sense.

Questions of how we, as an educational system might move from the present, where a scant number of teachers are using alternative assessments, to the future, where greater numbers of teachers' effectively use alternative assessments to improve teaching and learning might best be answered by describing how some teachers who use alternative assessments have changed during their tenures. The focus of this study is not only on the types of teachers' professional development that have shaped these teachers' transitions towards using alternative assessment, it also explores the impacts of contextual variables and their philosophies of teaching and learning on the decision to use alternative assessments.

Background for the Study

As an elementary school teacher in an urban school in western North Carolina, I found I had a dilemma when it came to assessment. My pre-service training inadequately prepared me for the complicated task of assessing the understanding of my students. Yet, that same training had effectively prepared me to teach in a manner consistent with my own philosophy of teaching and learning. Over the period of several years, I was able to implement various student-centered instructional techniques such as literature-based reading instruction, whole language, problem solving, hands-on science, and process skills.

All of these strategies allowed me to teach in a manner that I considered to be student-centered. During the years I taught, I moved along a continuum towards more student-centered instruction. As a beginning teacher, however, I relied on more traditional, teacher-centered instruction, complete with its textbook embedded tests. As I
progressed along the continuum and abandoned the state adopted texts, with their embedded tests, I found myself in a quandary. No longer could I rely on tests prepared by outside experts, and yet I had a real need for data on my students' understanding.

I found that moving away from teacher centered instruction and towards focusing on the individual student did not eliminate the need for gathering data on the students' understanding. Indeed the necessity for such data intensified. I needed data to tell me where each student was—what they really understood, and what they were ready for next. My dilemma became evident when attempting to plan relevant instruction for the individual without knowing what the individual understood and needed next. I experimented with various assessment techniques that made sense to me. With my training in assessment woefully lacking, my experimentation with alternative assessment was a trial and error process. This experience led me to the question of why some teachers are making greater use of alternative assessment and how they are making that transition.

In preparing for this study, I interviewed John, a veteran teacher of 17 years who extensively uses alternative assessment strategies. He led district wide training in assessment, presented at many conferences, co-authored an often cited book on portfolios, completed requirements for his Ph.D., and continues to teach in an elementary classroom. He was considered by his colleagues, administrators, and peers as an "expert" in alternative assessment.

Interviews with John helped flesh out my own inquiry, shaped the methods that I chose to use, and guided formulation of my research questions. The following quote from an interview with him is particularly illuminating, as it convinced me to not only look at how teachers develop to use alternative assessment, but also why:

John: But I think it would be important for you too to talk about teaching philosophy, because that really is a major thing that influences teachers' needs to find data about their kids. If you have a teaching philosophy that's
somewhat open, that utilizes more of a constructivist theory of child growth, you have a real need to gather data and I think of it as qualitative research basically. You have a real need to gather data, but if you come from a place where that's not necessarily how you see children growing, and you see things more sequential, linear, and much more drill and practice, then you have a real different need for data, and a real different need then to see data. I think that would be crucial in a study like this.

Statement of the Problem

Teachers’ making greater use of alternative assessments could be characterized as one of the more popular current trends in education. There is a vast array of published work on the topic of alternative assessment, and literature searches reveal the number of articles being written has steadily increased over the past ten years.

Empirical studies (Gullickson & Hopkins, 1987; Shafer & Lissitz, 1987; Airasian, 1991) document that teachers leave their pre-service teacher training inadequately trained in assessment. The research clearly demonstrated that many preservice teachers do not receive measurement and evaluation instruction, and those that do, report discrepancies between what is taught and what they need to be taught to be effective in the classroom. Findings from such studies indicate that collectively, colleges which are educating future teachers are only requiring about half of them to take a course in measurement and evaluation. The other half of the preservice teachers are not receiving any formal instruction or they are picking up piecemeal exposure to these concepts as part of their methods course work. Therefore, as teachers begin using alternative assessments, they cannot rely on their preservice training, but rather must seek assistance elsewhere.

Given these findings, one could expect then that teachers would not be using alternative assessment strategies in their classrooms. After all, if we did not teach preservice teachers about child development, we could not expect that they would be able to plan developmentally appropriate lessons; if we never introduce the use of math
manipulatives to preservice teachers, we could hardly expect to find them using math manipulatives in the classrooms.

Yet teachers are making greater use of alternative assessments in their classrooms. States such as Vermont and Kentucky have recent state wide initiatives mandating the use of portfolios and performance assessments. Professional journals are awash with articles about alternative assessment. It is a topic of many presentations at most of the major education and research conferences, such as the American Education Research Association. Alternative assessment, as a theme for in-service training, is on the agenda for school districts around the nation.

So on one hand, we have the research clearly showing that we do not adequately train teachers in assessment:

We know that classroom assessment environments are designed and constructed by teachers with little formal training in assessment. Many have had no formal coursework and most have had no inservice training in the subject. Further analyses ... reveal no requirements that teachers be trained in testing to be certified. (Stiggins, Conklin, & Bridgeford, 1986, p. 7)

Yet on the other hand, the research also indicates that many teachers are making greater use of alternative assessments, in a movement described by Calfee and Perfumo (1993) as having "the flavor of a grassroots revolution." The question then begs, how and why are teachers changing and developing to meet the challenge of using alternative assessments; a challenge which Stiggins et al (1986) portrayed in the following statement as an immensely complex task: "Research on teaching tells us that assessment is unquestionably one of teachers' most complex and important tasks" (p. 10).

Research Questions

The research questions follow from the statement of the problem which asserts that preservice teachers are not adequately trained in assessment strategies yet some
teachers develop their own assessment strategies. The questions were developed during the literature review and my pilot study. They focus on professional development, contextual variables, and teaching philosophy:

1. What impacts do teachers' formal and informal professional development experiences have on their transition towards using alternative assessment strategies?
2. What are the impacts of the school context on teachers' transition towards using alternative assessment strategies?
3. What impacts do teachers' philosophies of teaching and learning play in their decisions to use alternative assessment strategies; how do their philosophies of teaching and learning correlate with their need to gather data?

My focus for this research is how some teachers develop from being preservice teachers, through induction year, to practicing teachers who use alternative assessments. Some of the phenomena I explored when I interviewed teachers for question one (1) were:

- description of preservice training/student teaching
- description of induction year experiences
- extent of inservice training
- teaching experience
- teaching strategies employed
- conferences attended
- continuing education
- professional readings
- time frame (at what point in their careers they began to use alternative assessments)

Exploring these factors, in a series of individual interviews, I collected data to describe how teachers in this study made transitions towards using alternative assessments. Their responses during interviews provided insights into which of these, if any, accounted for their development, change, and growth, and which were most critical. Classroom observations provided additional data for some of the above listed phenomena.
Question two (2), which address contextual issues, overlaps with the other two questions but was designed to explore some of the more explicit factors, influences, and pressures which come to bear on teachers' using alternative assessments. Some of the phenomena that I explored when I interviewed the teachers for question two (2) were the nature and extent of:

- collegial support
- administrative support
- parental support

In addressing the third question, about the relationship between a teacher's philosophy of teaching and learning, and one's decision to use alternative assessment strategies, I looked for reasons, both implicit and explicit, underlying a teacher's decision to use alternative assessments. I explored how the participants view children, teaching, and learning. In some cases I uncovered where their views of teaching and learning came from and how they developed. I explored linkages of all this back to the findings from question one (1).

Purpose of the Study

In light of the dichotomy between preservice teachers not being adequately trained in assessment, and a growing number of teachers' using alternative assessments that they develop, the purpose of this study is to describe the types of influences that have proven instrumental in teachers' transitions towards using alternative assessment, and to explore their perspectives as to why they are using alternative assessment.

This study, based on multiple, in-depth, semi-structured interviews, and sustained classroom observations was developed into multiple case studies with cross case analysis. By identifying six practicing teachers who use alternative assessments and determining how and why they got to the point of using them, I hope to add to the relevant literature.
and begin a new discourse centered around what appears to be significant growth opportunities for teachers who use alternative assessment. Themes and correlations are explored in the data analysis for a description of the types of professional development or other phenomena which appear to impact teachers’ use of alternative assessment.

Rationale of Significance of the Study

If it is possible to identify and describe what types of professional development or other phenomena can be attributed to teachers’ use of alternative assessment strategies, and if one believes that as Darling-Hammond (1994) writes:

Authentic assessment strategies can provide teachers with much more useful classroom information as they engage teachers in evaluating how and what students know and can do in real-life performance situations. These kinds of assessment strategies create the possibility that teachers will not only develop curricula aimed at challenging performance skills, but that they will also be able to use the resulting rich information about student learning and performance to shape their teaching in ways that can prove more effective for individual students. (p. 6)

and reinforced by Glaser (1990):

As testing and teaching become more closely intertwined, effective teachers will become especially adept also at developing instructional situations in which significant aspects of student’s thinking and problem solving can be observed, assessed, and constructively guided. (p. 482)

then applying the knowledge created from this study to preservice, induction, and inservice trainings, has the potential to influence such trainings in a positive manner.

Influence of State and National Agencies on Assessment

The timeliness of this study is significant. Teacher education and professional development are often criticized as being reactive rather than proactive. Already, several major stakeholders in education have turned their attention towards teachers’ using alternative assessments. Four examples are presented below.

The Interstate New Teacher Assessment and Support Consortium (INTASC, 1992) is one such organization. Their draft of model standards for beginning teacher
licensing and development, asserts as Principle #8, “The teacher understands and uses formal and informal assessment strategies to evaluate and ensure the continuous intellectual, social and physical development of the learner” (p. 25). The standards proposed in their draft are meant to “... create model standards for ‘Board-compatible’ teacher licensing that can be reviewed by professional organizations and state agencies as a basis for their own standard-setting activities” (p. 2). The expected positive outcome of this would be teachers who are able “to find ways to support and connect with the needs of all learners” (p. 1).

Another such organization, the Standards Revision Committee for Teacher Education and Certification, presented in 1994, recommendations for new standards to the State Board of Education in Ohio. Their standards are performance based and were designed to serve two purposes: “... as the basis for assessments of beginning teachers prior to full licensure, and to drive the development of teacher preparation programs offered in Ohio” (p. 1). Within the ten standards they presented, one deals exclusively with assessment. Standard #8 states that “The teacher understands and uses formal and informal assessment strategies to evaluate and ensure the continuous intellectual, social and physical development of the learner” (p. 16). The reader will note that the wording is identical, verbatim, to the standard on assessment in the INTASC document.

The National Association of State Directors of Teacher Education and Certification (NASDTEC) also recently published new standards (1993). For the three levels of elementary, middle, and high school, they list assessment as standard #5. In the context of elementary level, for example, they write:

Assessment at the elementary level is multifaceted because of the influence and interaction of school readiness variables with the early learning and development of children. Hence, the beginning elementary level teacher should have a plan for comprehensive and descriptive assessments of student learning. The teacher’s assessments should be sensitive to age, developmental stage, gender, language, culture, race, and socioeconomic differences among children. Assessment will consist of direct observation of student behavior, performance tasks, and teacher
developed classroom techniques for relating student performance to parents, children, school and district officials, and the public. (p. 25)

The National Council for the Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE), in their *Standards Procedures & Policies for the Accreditation of Professional Education Units* (1995), rounds out this increased focus on teachers' use of alternative assessments. Standard I.D states: "The unit ensures that teacher candidates acquire and learn to apply the professional and pedagogical knowledge and skills to become competent to work with all students" (p. 17). One of the indicators of compliance for this standard is that "Candidates complete a well-balanced sequence of courses and/or experiences in pedagogical studies that help develop understanding and use of formal and informal assessment strategies for evaluating and ensuring the continuous intellectual, social, and physical development of the learner" (p. 17). Again, the reader will notice that this standard is similar, if not identical, to the standards on teachers' use of alternative assessment offered by INTASC, the State Board of Education in Ohio, and NASDTEC. The significance of this coherent position on assessment is that it cuts across national and state levels, as well as across organizations involved in pre-service and in-service training.

Together, the national and state organizations discussed above establish professional standards that drive the development of teacher preparation. The initiatives are directed not only at the initial state certification level, but also post Bachelor Degree levels such as the National Board for Professional Teaching. With the adoption of these new standards, all of which emphasize teachers' involvement in assessment, teacher educators and professional development personnel will again find themselves in the familiar position of having to react and find ways to adequately train pre-service and in-service teachers to become adept at assessment. Research that explicates factors impacting teachers' transitions towards using alternative assessment, can promote the effective
design of programs and training necessary to move teachers towards effectively using alternative assessments.

Limitations of the Study

One of the limitations of the proposed study is generalizability of the findings. The sample focuses on the minority of classroom teachers; those that are using alternative assessments. As such, the study does not describe why the majority of teachers do not use alternative assessments. The participants for this study were chosen, however, because they made transitions towards using alternative assessment strategies. A relatively small sample size (n=7) was selected because a researcher needs to limit the scope of one’s inquiry. Silverman (1993) addresses this issue when he writes that one basic error made by researchers is taking “an impossibly large research problem” (p. 3). By defining a problem too widely, he warns that “one is usually unable to say anything in great depth about it” (p. 3).

As I tell my students, your aim should be to say ‘a lot about a little (problem)’. This means avoiding the temptation to say ‘a little about a lot’. Indeed, the latter path can be something of a ‘cop-out’. Precisely because the topic is so wide-ranging, one can flit from one aspect to another without being forced to refine and test each piece of analysis. (p. 3)

A second limitation of the study is that the sample consists exclusively of elementary teachers. This decision was based on the strength of my background as a former elementary teacher and on the finding presented by Cuban (1993, p. 279) that the “structural features of elementary schools offer a potentially rich arena for reform.”

I selected a purposeful sample for this study employing two techniques described as criterion sampling and snowball sampling: The former being a method of selecting participants based on some criteria (in this case, teachers who use alternative assessment) and the latter being a method where identified participants may suggest someone they know who uses alternative assessments, who may in turn recommend someone they know.
know... and so it goes. The participants represented urban and suburban environments. Teachers from rural settings are not represented.

Given the small number of participants and the method of sampling (not random) the findings from this study are not intended to be generalized to the greater population of teachers. The teacher characteristics, training, background, school environment, and all the phenomena which I wrote about exploring for question one (1) above are unique to each individual teacher in this study. It is exactly this range of experiences, with the broad scope of differences and similarities, that I explore and interpret to draw inferences about how one’s own reality plays out in one’s transition towards using alternative assessments in an elementary classroom.

Findings drawn from this study are not intended to define some truth about teacher training and development. Rather, they are intended to describe and interpret the training, development, and philosophical assumptions of seven elementary teachers, and how these impacted their transitions towards using alternative assessments.

Definition of Terms

Traditionally, terms are defined here which the researcher determines to be foundational for understanding the subsequent document. While I believe that such terms will be clearly defined in the context of this dissertation, I find it necessary to define a few. Terms such as assessment, evaluation, testing, and measurement, are often used synonymously. By contrasting them against one another here, important differences between the terms are established.
Assessment

The American Federation of Teachers, along with the National Council on Measurement in Education and the National Education Association (1990), define assessment as being:

The process of obtaining information that is used to make educational decisions about students, to give feedback to the student about his or her progress, strengths, and weaknesses, to judge instructional effectiveness and curricular adequacy, and to inform policy. (p. 30)

Assessment and Testing

Chittenden (1991) cites the Encyclopedia of Educational Evaluation in making a distinction between assessment and testing.

Assessment, as opposed to simple one-dimensional measurement, is frequently described as multtrait-multimethod; that is, it focuses upon a number of variables judged to be important and utilizes a number of techniques to assay them ... Its techniques may also be multisource and/or multijudge. (p. 27)

In this definition, tests are not excluded from assessment, but rather, may contribute to an assessment program which may include questionnaires, interviews, ratings, and unobtrusive measures. The key in differentiating a program of testing and one of assessment (which may include testing but not be defined by it) is in the breadth and variety of strategies and procedures used.

Assessment and Evaluation

Chittenden (1991) also cites the Encyclopedia of Educational Evaluation when he delineates between assessment and evaluation.

It therefore seems appropriate ... to limit the term assessment to the process of gathering the data and fashioning them into an interpretable form; judgments can then be made ... Assessment, then, as we define it, precedes the final decision-making stage in evaluation. (p. 27)
From this definition, it is clear that assessment involves data collection which we can think of as documentation, but the evaluative judgments concerning the implications of those data are more complex and bring about other debate and discussion.

**Assessment, Test, Measurement, and Evaluation**

Airasian (1994) offers definitions which may also be helpful to understanding the differences between the terms: assessment, test, measurement, and evaluation. He defines *assessment* as “a general term that includes all the ways teachers gather information in their classrooms.” A *test*, he defines as a “formal, systematic, usually paper and pencil procedure used to gather information about pupils’ behavior” and are “only one of the many types of assessment information teachers deal with, and thus, are a subcategory in the general domain of assessment.” He goes on to define *measurement* as “the process of quantifying or assigning a number to performance” and *evaluation* as “making judgments about the quality of pupils’ performance of a possible course of action.”

**Alternative Assessment**

The array of ideas or methods which can be used in alternative assessment is plenteous. As Darling-Hammond (1994) points out, these may include:

... oral presentations, debates, or exhibitions, along with collections of students' written products, videotapes of performances and other learning occasions, constructions and models, and their solutions to problems, experiments, or results of scientific and other inquires. They also include teacher observations and inventories of individual students' work and behavior, as well as of cooperative group work. (pp. 5-6)

**Professional Development**

Finally, I use the term *professional development*, as it applies to teachers, viewed through the lens of pre-service training, induction, inservice training, and staff
development (Howey, 1985; Willie & Howey, 1988; Witherell & Erickson, 1978). For the term *professional development*, I am also considering other factors which may lead to individual growth such as: inquiry (McKay, 1992; Miller & Pine, 1990), support groups (Rich, 1992), professional reading, travel, community involvement, and service.
Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to present a review of selected relevant literature. Because the number of articles written about alternative assessment is voluminous, this review cannot be comprehensive. My purpose in attempting to identify relevant literature for this study was to define my research questions and to flesh out my own understandings of the complexities surrounding the "grassroots movement" of teachers' using alternative assessments. I focused on literature that deals with: how alternative assessments are being used, professional development, change, and a sampling of current trends in education which I feel may be fueling the need for some teachers to use alternative assessments.

In this chapter, I begin by reviewing articles that help to describe the types of alternative assessments which teachers currently use. Again, this review cannot be comprehensive, but I review the major alternative assessment practices such as: portfolios, performance assessments, and "kidwatching."

Presented next is literature that considers the implications for professional development created by teachers' making greater use of alternative assessments. The review of literature is focused upon both preservice and post Bachelor Degree levels.

Finally, literature representing trends in American elementary classrooms, such as constructivism, multiple intelligence, and whole language instruction, are included. I chose to review these trends, which seem to hold promise for improving teaching and
learning, because the idea of "teacher as assessor" is implicit, and yet crucial to the success of the trends.

### Alternative Assessment Defined

Initiatives in education are frequent and many people would say cyclical. Complicating many of the movements in education are the numerous interpretations of vocabulary or rhetoric used in describing the various initiatives. The promising trend towards teachers' making greater use of alternative assessment strategies does not escape the ambiguity brought about through using different terms to say the same thing or using the same term to mean different things.

Terms such as alternative assessment, authentic assessment, informal assessment, holistic evaluation, formative evaluation, summative evaluation, self-evaluation, student evaluation, portfolio assessment, non-graded student evaluation, educational assessment, and evaluation methods are all descriptors which have been used as descriptors of research dealing with alternative assessment. For the purposes of this study, I will group all these terms under the broad category of alternative assessment.

Drawing attention to the language of assessment is foundational for understanding the nature of information published on the topic. As I listed in the Definitions of Terms section of Chapter I, a specific definition of assessment is offered by the American Federation of Teachers, along with the National Council on Measurement in Education and the National Education Association (1990), as being:

The process of obtaining information that is used to make educational decisions about students, to give feedback to the student about his or her progress, strengths, and weaknesses, to judge instructional effectiveness and curricular adequacy, and to inform policy. (p. 30)
This is the definition of assessment that I will use throughout the remainder of this study. This definition of assessment encompasses alternative assessments as well as standardized tests.

Chittenden (1991) provides a framework for looking at a program of assessment in a school or district which is based on multiple methods of data collection, including three lines of evidence listed below:

- observations
- performance samples
- tests

The array of ideas or methods which can be used in alternative assessment is plenteous and as Darling-Hammond (1994) points out, may include:

... oral presentations, debates, or exhibitions, along with collections of students’ written products, videotapes of performances and other learning occasions, constructions and models, and their solutions to problems, experiments, or results of scientific and other inquiries. They also include teacher observations and inventories of individual students’ work and behavior, as well as of cooperative group work. (pp. 5-6)

Historical Perspective

A broad base of literature points out that traditionally teachers have relied on testing as an assessment strategy; a strategy that is the weakest and most ambiguous in what is revealed about students’ strengths and capacities. The hegemonic paradigm of assessment is based on positivist assumptions that there is a reality which can be quantified and measured which consists of facts and “the” right methods. Stiggins et al. (1986) state that:

Available evidence suggests that the dominant view regards measurement in education as a means of documenting student achievement by using collections of standardized paper and pencil test items for public accountability. Evidence of the dominance of this conceptualization can be found in research reported in scholarly journals, in published standards of accepted professional practice, and in measurement textbooks. (p. 5)
On the other hand, standardized tests are viewed by measurement specialists and accepted by the general public as reliable and valid measures of student achievement based on sound empirical data; they have afforded education an image of scientific precision. Yet with all the focus on the dominant paradigm and its standardized testing, it represents only a fraction of the assessment that takes place in the classrooms (Stiggins et al., 1986).

Not many of the reformers who advocate greater uses of alternative forms of assessment suggest abolishing the use of tests in education altogether. Rather, they support changing the balance and relying less on tests while incorporating other lines of evidence like observations and performance samples (Chittenden, 1991). Scholarship is required that would suggest how to change that balance, and teachers need support in their endeavors to do so.

Historically, the 1920's saw this nation's school systems gearing up to educate a growing population of students (due to new compulsory attendance laws) to meet the need of the growing industrial complex (Stiggins, 1991b). In order to evaluate large numbers of students, inexpensive evaluation methods were required. Evaluations needed to be easy to implement, quick to grade, mass produced, and seen as fair -- the so called standardized test. Objective paper and pencil tests were developed which met these requirements and were used almost exclusively to evaluate students. Standardized tests were used to track pupils, select students for special programs, and for instructional planning.

The focus changed somewhat during the Reagan years of the 1980's when there was a shift towards teacher accountability. This shift led to standardized test scores' being used for comparing student performance, with the hopes that the tests would lead to greater student achievement. Gomez, Graue, and Bloch (1991) write that the unanticipated consequences of this shift included rising test scores that reflected factors other than achievement. More importantly, a narrowing of instruction to match the
domain of items on a single achievement test occurred — a practice commonly referred to as teaching to the test.

In a similar vein, Garcia, Rasmussen, Stobbe and Garcia (1990) explain that school administrators use test scores to compare students' achievement in specific schools and how their achievement relates to district expectations. Test scores are also used to compare schools to one another in district, state, and national levels. Districts are then compared to one another, states compared to other states, and nations compared to other nations. This type of comparison is considered by teachers to be accountability assessment and is seen as important at all layers except at the classroom level. Indeed, even real estate value fluctuates with the results of these test scores for individual schools or districts (Shepard, 1989).

Numerous authors bring up the criticism that standardized tests are alleged to be culturally biased (Bredekamp & Shepard, 1989). Many groups have voiced concerns that the tests favor white middle class students because of the ways the tests are constructed and worded (Haney, 1984). These listed factors have led critics to argue that alternative forms of assessment need to be developed and implemented.

Types of Alternative Assessment

In addition to the list of descriptors mentioned above which one may use to search for articles on alternative assessment, one will encounter a host of terms which are all within the umbrella of alternative assessment. Some of these terms, which will be further discussed below, include performance assessment (Shavelson, Baxter, & Pine, 1992), responsive assessment and holistic assessment (Keefe, 1993), kidwatching (Goodman, 1985), informal assessment and informed assessment (Wolf, 1993), and portfolio assessment (Tierney, Carter & Desai, 1991).
Portfolios

Of all the types of practices which fall under the guise of alternative assessment, portfolios seem to draw the greatest attention. Portfolios are not a novel idea for artists, photographers, or models, who have used them quite extensively to document their professional accomplishments and growth. In education, some consider that portfolios provide an opportunity for richer, more authentic, and more valid assessment of student achievement. Implementation of portfolios is not confined to individual classrooms, as there are attempts to implement portfolios at the building, district, and state levels (Lamme & Hysmith, 1991; Abruscato, 1993).

Characteristics

Authors of articles about portfolios vary in their descriptions of them. It is clear from the array of articles on portfolios that they can vary from simply being manila folders which house students' papers, to elaborate systems which document student achievement and support the assessment of long term projects over time, encourage student initiated revision, and provide a context for presentation, guidance, and critique (Gearhart & Herman, 1995).

Some of the articles concerning portfolios can be quite prescriptive in terms of what should go into them. Valencia (1990) writes that physically it is larger and more elaborate than a report card and smaller than a steamer trunk. She suggests that it is more like an expandable folder which should include samples of student work selected by the student or the teacher, teacher's observational notes, student's periodic self-evaluations, and progress notes contributed collaboratively by the student and teacher.

Calfee and Perfumo (1993) also offer suggestions for what may be found in a student portfolio. Their vision of what may comprise a literacy portfolio includes samples of student reading and writing performance. These samples can be collections of lists of
books read; reading notes; conference memos; or rough drafts, final drafts, and published versions of students' work. They suggest that some tasks be assigned by the teacher, while others be free form; some can be substantial projects while others may be a page or less.

While conceding that portfolios may need some common benchmarks if they are to replace formal testing, Tierney et al. (1991) warns against imposing standard guidelines for portfolios fearing that doing so would displace diversity, causing student investment and self-assessment to become a secondary rather than a primary concern.

**State Level Mandated Portfolios / Vermont**

As alluded to earlier, portfolios are being used at many different levels, including the state level. Vermont was the first state to initiate statewide portfolio assessment. They began a project in the 1991-92 school year whereby all students in grades four and eight would be assessed in mathematics and writing using portfolios. Portfolios were chosen to provide a valid measure of student performance and to encourage changes in curriculum and instruction that would promote higher order thinking. This decision did not come without its share of controversy and deliberation.

Vermont was one of a few states without statewide testing. In public hearings on a statewide test proposal, "teacher after teacher argued that standardized tests measure a narrow band of performance and trivialize the curriculum" (Mills, 1989, p. 8). They thought it was confusing to teach students good writing habits by using the writing process of prewriting, editing, final draft, and publishing, and then asking them to fill out a multiple choice test or test them on a 40 minute writing sample (Mills, 1989). Vermont piloted a portfolio assessment project in 1990-91 and as mentioned above, moved the initiative to statewide in 1991-92.
Vermont Writing Portfolio. The writing portfolio used in Vermont consists of two types of products. The first is a collection of six pieces of writing which includes:

- a table of contents
- a "best piece"
- a letter
- a poem, short story, play, or personal narrative
- a personal response to a cultural, media, or sports exhibit or event, or to a book, current issue, math problem, or scientific phenomenon
- one prose piece from any curriculum area other than English or language arts, for 4th graders, and three prose pieces for 8th graders (Abruscato, 1993)

The second type of product found in the Vermont writing portfolios is a formal writing assignment that is given to all students by all teachers at those two grade levels. The piece produced in response to the uniform writing assessment makes up the standardized portion of the portfolio and may include any related outlines or drafts.

The writing portfolios are assessed by judges on five criteria. These include:

1. purpose
2. organization
3. details
4. voice/tone
5. usage/mechanics/grammar

Each of these five criteria have benchmarks or rubrics which judges can consider in making their evaluations.

Vermont Math Portfolio. The math portfolios on the other hand are designed to provide samples of students' mathematical problem solving and communication, and also to provide indicators of the quality of the math program that students are experiencing. The math portfolios include:

- five to seven best pieces including at least one puzzle, one investigation, one application, and no more than two pieces of group work
- a letter to the portfolio evaluator
• a collection of other pieces of mathematics work (Abruscato, 1993)

Issues of Reliability and Validity. Compared to standardized tests, portfolios and other forms of alternative assessment are heralded as being a more valid measure of students’ achievement because of the authentic data that such assessments provide on student understanding. At the same time, it is also acknowledged that portfolios and other alternative assessments are susceptible to problems of reliability. Reliability may not be much of a concern when portfolios are used in individual classrooms with the objective of informing instruction, but when portfolios are used at a state level where there is a need for standardization, then reliability becomes an issue.

The initiative in Vermont has drawn national recognition as one might suspect. There has been a notable amount of research conducted on their system (Gearhart & Herman, 1995). Results from a survey of Vermont’s teachers who are using the portfolios in mathematics assessment revealed significant changes in curriculum and instructional practices (Koretz, Stecher, Klein, & McCafrey, 1994). These changes were greatest in the areas of problem solving and mathematical communication; areas emphasized by the Vermont portfolio assessment. Other findings from studies of the Vermont initiative indicate that portfolios placed a substantial burden on teachers’ time. Koretz et al. (1994) also found that there were significant variations in teachers’ approaches to portfolios.

Variations in the ways that teachers in Vermont approached portfolios are major concerns for the traditional measures by which we judge assessment techniques; validity and reliability. Some of these variations included whether or not students could revise the work in their portfolios, the number of times revisions could be done, who could assist with revisions, and who decided what should be included in the portfolios. These types of variations will certainly have to be dealt with if Vermont is to keep using portfolios at a
state level. The variations were the subject of Gearhart and Herman's (1995) article entitled *Portfolio Assessment: Whose Work Is It?*, where they discuss the ways that the nature of classroom work may undermine the validity of individual scores.

Variations in the Implementation of Portfolios

Calfee and Perfumo (1993) conducted a nationwide survey of teachers who use portfolios. Respondents included teachers who use portfolios on their own initiative, as well as teachers who do so as part of state, district, school, or school team initiatives. Calfee and Perfumo (1993) identified three themes that seemed to capture the essence of their findings:

- Teachers enlisted in the portfolio movement convey an intense commitment and professional renewal.
- The technical foundations for portfolio assessment appear infirm and inconsistent at all levels.
- Portfolio practice at the school and teacher level shies away from standards and grades toward narrative and descriptive reporting.

These findings are important to this study because they indicate that although teachers experience increased levels of teacher empowerment as a result of using portfolios, the ways that they implement them varies widely. Perhaps of greater significance is that teachers are not as concerned with standards and grades as they are with authentic data of student understanding.

School Level Portfolio Initiatives / Blackburn Elementary

An article by Lamme and Hysmith (1991) reported one school's adventure into portfolio assessment. Their findings echo some of those from Calfee and Perfumo (1993). The authors describe an example of a school level initiative to implement portfolio assessment at Blackburn Elementary, a Pre-K to grade 2 school in Florida. As is the case with many accounts of using portfolios, the article concerned applying the
principles of alternative assessment to literacy instruction. As the entire school moved toward whole language instruction and integrated approaches to teaching, they found that the traditional forms of assessment did not mesh with their new philosophies and strategies.

The school's first change was to simply revise the report card so they would be consistent with their holistic style of instruction. One year later the school implemented portfolios, with specific strategies for developing portfolio systems being left up to individual teachers. Three kinds of data were gathered by teachers: observational data, checklist data, and interview or conference data, with the most difficult being observational data. They found that some of the teachers did not know what to observe or record. Teachers also varied in terms of whether or not they kept written or anecdotal records of their observations, with some of them saying that they could keep such data in their heads. Those teachers who did keep records used various techniques such as notebooks, journals, note cards, sticky notes, and checklists.

Variations in the Implementation of Portfolios. Further variance was documented in the degree that teachers implemented portfolios at Blackburn. Those teachers who were more involved in the whole language movement were also more involved with the portfolio assessment initiative. The authors write that:

On one hand, there were teachers who were crying out for more ideas and suggestions for observation systems and ways to analyze the data they were collecting. On the other, there were teachers who questioned the need to make observations at all. (p. 639)

Teacher Change. The commitment and personal renewal that teachers' using portfolios experience, documented in the survey by Calfee and Perfumo (1993), is corroborated in the study at Blackburn. Teachers there collaborated enthusiastically and consistently. Lamme and Hysmith (1991) report that teachers attended and sometimes
presented at conferences, read professional literature, gathered resources to use with the portfolios, and participated in monthly heterogeneous share groups. Teachers reportedly changed the ways that they taught, based on a more child-centered view of teaching and learning as they became more reflective and responsive to the students’ needs.

**Portfolio Implementation at the Classroom Level**

Tierney et al. (1991) describe a few individual classrooms where teachers are using portfolios, not because the rest of the state, district, or school is, but apparently for intrinsic reasons. The descriptions they provide of the teachers’ implementation of portfolios are consistent with the authors’ statements that they do not expect any two classrooms nor any two students to have the same portfolios. In these classrooms, the exact nature of what makes up the portfolios varied but they all seemed to share a common philosophical underpinning that portfolios are part of the learning process.

In one of the described classrooms, students pick through their reading and writing journals at the end of each quarter to decide what to place in their portfolios. During this process, students write an evaluation of each piece selected. In subsequent portfolio conferences, the teacher and student develop their future goals. When long term class projects are completed, the students and teacher create a class portfolio which represents the experiences of the entire class.

In a middle school setting, Tierney et al. (1991) describe a teacher’s using portfolios with over 100 students in a reading and writing classroom. That teacher uses portfolios which are collections of rough drafts on one side and finished work on the other. Students are later given some choice in which pieces will be evaluated, and by what criteria.

In yet another example, Tierney et al. (1991) describe a high school setting where students keep at least two portfolios; one with their work in progress and the other
showcasing selected finished products. In these portfolios, recognition is provided for process and product; effort and outcomes; improvements and achievement; and diversity as well as standards.

Performance Assessment

Turning now to performance assessment, one should consider that portfolios and performance assessment, as well as other listed methods of alternative assessment, are not necessarily discrete variables. That is, performance assessment may be part of portfolio assessment and vice versa; one does not preclude the other. Whereas the majority of research and published work about portfolios centers around language and literacy, performance assessment is often discussed alongside math, science, and social studies. In the following section, a discussion on performance assessment explores their characteristics; issues of reliability and validity; and implementation.

Characteristics

The definitions of performance assessment are somewhat less ambiguous than the definitions of portfolios, but yet the ways that performance assessments are being discussed and practiced do vary. According to Marzano (1994, p. 46), who links performance assessment with outcomes based education, they are assessments “structured to provide information about students’ skills and abilities on the various proficiencies.” Incidentally, this linking to outcomes based education has perhaps done more to elicit criticism against performance assessment than any other factor, as outcomes based education has met significant opposition.

Mehrens (1992, p. 3) states that the distinction between traditional tests and performance assessments is “the degree to which the criterion situation is simulated. Typically what users of the term mean is that the assessment will require the examinee to
construct an original response." Mehrens (1992, p. 3) also relates that usually an
examiner observes the performance and therefore there is a “heavy reliance on observation
and professional judgment” in the process of evaluating the response. Performance
assessment is accompanied with performance standards which Linn (1994, p. 5) cites
from Goals 2000 as being “concrete examples and explicit definitions of what students
have to know and be able to do to demonstrate that such students are proficient in the
skills and knowledge framed by content standards (Sec. 3, a, 9).”

In contrast to traditional measures of assessment like multiple choice items,
performance assessments do not have a single correct answer; they are meant to mirror
most real life tasks which have multiple solutions and in which multiple strategies may be
employed. As noted by Shavelson, et al. (1992, p. 22) performance assessments are
scored not just on the correctness of the answer, but also on the “reasonableness of the
procedure used to carry out the task or solve the problem.”

Some of the factors which account for the recent popularity of performance
assessment are listed by Mehrens (1992) as being:

- the old criticisms of multiple choice tests
- the belief of cognitive psychologists that assessment of procedural knowledge
  requires formats other than multiple choice questions
- the increased concern that multiple choice tests delimit the domains we should be
  assessing
- the wide publicity of the Lake Wobegon effect of teaching too closely to multiple
  choice tests
- the claims that there are deleterious instructional/learning effects of teaching to
  multiple choice test formats

It is interesting to note that these five factors listed by Mehrens all have to do, in
one way or another, with the perceived dissatisfaction with traditional multiple choice
tests. Perhaps this is because multiple choice tests are so pervasive in education and
hence are viewed as the dominant measure of student achievement.
Linn (1994) reports that multiple choice format tests accounted for 70% of state wide testing programs throughout the nation during the 1992-93 school year but also revealed a strong indication of change which suggests that the nation is poised to include greater use of performance assessments as well as other types of alternative assessment for the evaluation of student achievement.

The issues facing administrators and educators in the increased use of performance assessment are numerous and somewhat complicated. These issues vary in significance and magnitude depending on whether the assessments are used for private and local reasons (i.e. classroom teacher using them to assign grades or inform instruction) or for high stakes purposes such as comparing schools, districts, and states; generalizing results to other areas; or predicting future success in subsequent endeavors.

Stiggins (1991b) writes that the two keys to the quality of performance assessment are:

1. an appropriate method of sampling the desired behaviors or products
2. a clearly articulated set of performance criteria to serve as the basis for evaluative judgments

Issues of Reliability and Validity

Stiggins and other authors (Aschbacher, 1991; Baron, 1991; Marzano, 1994; Mehrens, 1992; Moss, 1992; Shavelson et al., 1992) all express concern with two traditional measures of the worthiness of an assessment; reliability and validity. These concerns are greatest when performance assessments are implemented at district, state, or national levels, because the purpose of assessment becomes one of high stakes decision making.

Moss (1992) addresses the issue of validity when she writes:

Performance assessments present a number of validity problems not easily handled with traditional approaches and criteria for validity research. These assessments typically permit students substantial latitude in interpreting, responding to, and perhaps designing tasks; they result in fewer independent responses, each of which is
complex, reflecting integration of multiple skills and knowledge; and they require expert judgment for evaluation. Consequently, meeting criteria related to such validity issues as reliability, generalizability and comparability of assessments—at least as they are typically defined and operationalized—becomes problematic. This results in a tension between traditionally accepted criteria for validity and criteria that derive from concerns about instructional consequences of assessment, such as authenticity ... (p. 230)

In discussing five core criteria for any type of assessment which is used for high stakes purposes, Mehrens (1992) suggests that one consider questions of whether or not the assessment is:

1. administratively feasible
2. economically affordable
3. publicly acceptable
4. legally defensible
5. professionally credible

In his opinion, performance assessment advocates have been successful with public relations and with some professional groups, although the psychometricians have not been so quick to embrace performance assessments. Mehrens (1992) has doubts about whether this movement will be able to meet criteria of administrative feasibility, economic affordability, or legal defensibility. Mehrens goes on to point out that although advocates of performance assessment insinuate that they will show smaller differences between ethnic groups, research on the subject does not support this claim.

For more specifics on issues of reliability, Shavelson et al. (1992) reported a mixed bag of “good news” and “bad news.” On the positive side, they found that raters are able to evaluate student performance reliably enough that a single rater can be used to provide a reliable score. The down side is that while performance assessments provide in-depth data about a student’s achievement, they sacrifice breadth and therefore a “substantial number of tasks may be needed.”

Continuing the good news/bad news reporting, Shavelson et al. (1992) found that performance assessment is able to distinguish students with different instructional histories, meaning that for example if one group of students had experience with hands on
explorations with electricity and another group did not, the group with the experience will perform better on the assessment. This implies that we may be able to drive curriculum and teaching with these types of tests. Conversely, these assessments need to be carefully constructed to measure more than aptitude.

Finally, in their study of over 300 fifth and sixth grade students, Shavelson et al. (1992) found that there were certain surrogate methods used to measure achievement in science which yielded strong correlations with the performance assessments. The method which had the closest approximation in reliability and validity was the use of "scientific notebooks" in which students described the steps taken in their scientific investigations. For some tasks, Shavelson et al. (1992) found that computer simulations also yielded similar results with the performance assessments. These alternative methods may turn out to be more administratively and economically feasible. Unfortunately, some students' scores depend on which of these methods are used to assess a particular investigation.

Implementation of Performance Assessments

Aschbacher (1991) is in agreement with most proponents of performance assessment when she states that "there is no single method of alternative assessment." She suggests that the common guidelines for the various methods of assessment should be that:

- students perform, create, produce or do something that requires higher level thinking or problem solving skills
- assessment tasks are also meaningful, challenging, engaging instructional activities
- tasks are set in a real-world context or close simulation
- process and conative behavior are often assessed as well as product
- the criteria and standards for performance are public and known in advance

I think it is worth listing here, 19 questions which Baron (1991) brings to view that those who are developing performance assessments should consider:

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1. Does my set of assessment tasks embody what I value both as a representative of my content discipline(s) and the educational community that I serve?

2. When students prepare for my assessment tasks and I structure my curriculum and pedagogy to enable them to be successful on these tasks, do I feel assured that we are all engaging in authentic and ecologically valid activities?

3. Do my assessment tasks reflect an understanding of human psychology with its recent advances in cognition, learning theory, motivation, and instruction?

4. What content, processes, and dispositions should my tasks assess?

5. Do my tasks clearly communicate my standards and expectations to my students?

6. In attempting to learn what my students know and can do, am I making the best use of performance assessment?

7. Are some of my tasks rich and integrative, requiring my students to make connections and forge relationships among various aspects of the curriculum?

8. Have I included some messy, loosely structured problems in which students have to first structure the problems before beginning to solve them?

9. Do my tasks have either multiple solutions or solution paths, and do they encourage diverse perspectives?

10. Are my tasks structured to encourage students to access their prior knowledge and skills when solving problems?

11. Do some tasks require students to work together in small groups to solve complex problems?

12. Do some problems require sustained work?

13. Do some tasks allow students a degree of choice and control over the course of action needed to solve problems and conduct investigations?

14. Do some tasks require students to design and carry out their own investigations?

15. Do some of my tasks require self-assessment and reflection on the part of students?

16. Are my tasks likely to have personal meaning for the students?

17. Are my tasks sufficiently challenging for the students?

18. Do some of my tasks provide problems that are situated in real-world contexts and are appropriate for the age-group solving them?

19. Do some tasks allow for transferring the understandings gained and generalizations made in the present task to other related tasks?

When one considers the complexity and magnitude of the combination of these nineteen questions, one would certainly agree with Baker's (1994, p. 58) assertion that "By embracing alternative assessments ... educators are beginning rather than ending [italics added] a complex process." Taken in their entirety these questions have dramatic implications for professional development; issues that will be addressed later in this chapter.

Concerns of Implementation. In examining which states are involved in performance assessment and what they are doing, Aschbacher (1991) found that about
half of the states were involved (to varying degrees) in implementing performance assessments; conversely, this means that half of the states were not. The survey by the Center for Research on Evaluation, Standards, and Student Testing (CRESST), which Aschbacher reports on, found that the states' four major concerns with performance assessments were costs, logistics, technical concerns, and lack of support for implementation. Again, one should consider these concerns as they pertain to statewide high stakes testing and not necessarily to local use by classroom teachers who are using these assessments to inform their own instruction.

The costs associated with implementing performance assessments on a statewide level are many. Costs include training of state education agency staff, test administers and scorers, teachers and administrators; administering assessments; transporting products used for the assessing; providing release time for teachers involved in the implementation and scoring; and processing, analyzing, and reporting data.

Logistical problems may include transporting the products and testers, storage and maintenance of said products, testing all students (some states have legislative mandates which stipulate that all students at certain grade levels be tested), and providing timely results to teachers and administrators so they can reflect on the results and alter their instructional plans where needed.

Technical concerns stem from the fact that assessing performance is not as straightforward as scoring a multiple choice test which can simply be fed into a scantron machine. With performance assessments, states have to be concerned with reliability and validity issues which include inter-rater reliabilities, use of sound procedures, security of tests, training of raters, generalizability of results, structured rating systems with clearly defined rubrics, and content validation.

The need to have criteria for assessing performance is the focus of an article by Quellmalz (1991, p. 319) who states: “Perhaps the greatest challenge facing proponents
of performance assessment is the development of evaluative criteria that represent clear, significant, useful levels of expertise.”

Before leaving the topic of performance assessments, I cite an idea in Baron’s (1991) article where she addresses the need for effective performance tasks. She mentions the use of “task banks of performance exercises” which I think hold great promise for teachers who want to use performance assessments, regardless if it is part of a state wide initiative or in a local classroom. In this day of advanced communication technologies we could make great use of the technologies by developing a “bank” of performance exercises which teachers across the nation could tap. As Baron (1991, pp. 314-15) illuminates: “It is almost dizzying to speculate about how much further advanced we could be if each reader of this journal were to develop just one performance assessment exercise this year.” It is even more dizzying if we expand beyond the readers of that journal!

In concluding my summary of terms that fall under the realm of alternative assessment, I turn my attention towards three articles; one by Wolf (1993) in which he replaces the term informal assessment with informed assessment, then an article by Keefe (1993) in which she describes responsive assessment and holistic assessment, and another by Goodman (1985) in which she describes kidwatching.

**Informal Assessment / Informed Assessment**

Wolf is concerned that using the term informal assessment may imply or conjure up images of assessments which are “subjective, capricious, casual, and possibly even misleading,” while those using the term formal assessment (for traditional assessment) imply that their measures are “objective, reliable, scientific, and without question, accurate.” Wolf seems to think that using the term informed assessment, on the other hand will avoid some of these problems. He states that:
Informed assessment refers to the process that knowledgeable teachers engage in when they systematically observe and selectively document their students' performance through multiple methods, across diverse contexts, and over time as students participate in meaningful learning activities. (p. 519)

**Responsive Assessment / Holistic Assessment**

The reader of Keefe's article (1993) can see how easily an author can "muddy the waters" by introducing or using various terms to say basically the same thing. The title of her article, *Responsive Assessment for Special Learners*, creates an image of assessment being responsive to students. She starts out by discussing *responsive assessment*, changes her rhetoric to *holistic assessment* in mid article, and concludes with a discussion on *portfolio assessment*. Keefe cites Stake (1975, p. 225) when she describes responsive assessment as evaluation that is "responsive to the concerns of individuals and groups who are affected by, or have a stake in, the evaluation." Holistic assessment, she defines as "... attempts to view the learner and learning as a whole." She continues by defining holistic assessment as "... a vehicle by which teachers can discover what their students really know and document their actual progress. It is a process which can help teachers truly individualize instruction."

Keefe does make some interesting points about how assessment of special needs students has followed a positivist assumption based on theory that disabilities can be objectively identified. Once a child is identified with a disability, (s)he becomes part of an "assessment cycle that continues for the duration of the cycle" complete with IEP's and a host of conventional assessment techniques. The problem with the majority of the conventional tests is that they are not sensitive enough to detect progress in terms of "approximations and emerging skills." Many of the special needs students get caught in a trap where the teacher teaches to the test, breaking up instruction into discrete subskills, thereby depriving the student of holistic contextualized instruction. Her most salient point
is that traditionally assessment practices in special education (and I would suggest general education) have set out to satisfy the needs of “secondary stakeholders” (legislators, state and federal agencies, school districts and program directors), instead of the “primary stakeholders” (students, teachers, parents).

Kidwatching

Yetta Goodman, along with her husband Kenneth Goodman, is one of the biggest names in the whole language movement. Without any references or citations to the source of the term kidwatching which she uses in her article (1985), one can only assume that she coined the expression which she purports has “caught on among those who believe that children learn language best in an environment rich with opportunities to explore interesting objects and ideas” (p. 9). As one might infer from the name, the main focus of kidwatching is observation. Although she uses a unique term, the message is very similar to those being expressed by the vast array of alternative assessment advocates.

I discuss Kidwatching in greater detail later in this review when I explore Whole Language. Goodman’s advice on Kidwatching as an assessment technique is consistent with most of the literature on alternative assessment. The thing which seems to vary the most among the articles I’ve reviewed is the terms which the professionals are using to describe what I am referring to here as alternative assessment.

In discussing alternative assessment above, I have implied, by citing many authors, that the movement towards using alternative assessment involves many complexities which teachers, administrators, and others involved in education may not be adequately prepared to manage. I’ve also discussed some scenarios that appear to be top-down initiatives (such as Vermont) and school wide initiatives (Blackburn Elementary School), where it appears that there are some teachers caught up in the movement with
perhaps less than intrinsic motivation. I turn my focus now to the implications that this
movement has for professional development.

Implications for Professional Development

Role of Teacher

The key to effective assessment is a knowledgeable teacher. The following quote
by Wolf (1993) powerfully frames the importance of the teacher in the alternative
assessment movement. He stresses that teachers need greater knowledge of curriculum;
instruction; child development; and the roles of language, culture, and social context:

A knowledgeable teacher is the foundation of informed assessment. The further we
move away from commercially published, “teacher-proof” assessments and turn
toward teacher-based assessment of students, the greater the need for teacher
knowledge about curriculum and instruction, about children and their development,
and about the roles that language, culture, and social context play in learning. For
assessment to be informed, teachers must apply this knowledge to set clear, sound
goals for instruction along with carefully articulated performance standards and
benchmarks for measuring student progress towards those goals. (p. 519)

Darling-Hammond (1994) argues eloquently that the challenge for professional
development in light of the alternative assessment movement requires:

... enhancing the capacity of all teachers - their knowledge of students and subjects,
and their ability to use that knowledge - by professionalizing teaching. This means
that teacher education policies must ensure that all teachers have a stronger
understanding of how children learn and develop, how assessment can be used to
evaluate what they know and how they learn, how a variety of curricular and
instructional strategies can address their needs, and how changes in school and
classroom organization can support their growth and achievement. (p. 17)

Darling-Hammond (1994) continues her argument by writing that in order to
maintain high standards without standardized tests, teachers will have to be well versed in
bias so that they are able to identify and eliminate unfair biases which may exist in their
assessments or in their process of scoring them. Teachers will require a working
knowledge of other traditional measurement concepts such as validity, reliability, and
generalizability; issues that do not vanish just because one engages in alternative
assessment. Maintaining that engaging teachers in the assessment process is critical, Darling-Hammond (1994) writes:

That engagement becomes a powerful vehicle for professional development, supporting teachers in looking at and understanding student learning, in investigating the effects of teaching on learning, and in transforming their practices so that they become more effective. It is this insight into what students are really doing, thinking, and learning that is one of the greatest contributions of authentic assessment to teacher development. (p. 24)

Eggleston (1991) lists five ways that teachers will need to use assessment. These include:

1. evaluating the results of teaching a lesson
2. enabling children to assess their own progress
3. diagnosing learning difficulties
4. being accountable by reporting achievements to parents, administrators and the public
5. using assessment to negotiate within the school, administration, and community in order to influence policy

He adds that teachers need to examine the failures and incomplete responses of students to try and identify explanations such as “incomplete understanding, missing links of knowledge, and faulty reasoning.” Ability to do this would allow teachers to address the faulty reasoning or misconceptions which left undetected and not addressed will most likely remain hidden and block further instruction.

I offer at this point, a compilation of quotes from various authors who speak to this relationship between teachers' using alternative assessment and the need for professional development:

We know that classroom assessment environments are designed and constructed by teachers with little formal training in assessment. Many have had no formal coursework and most have had no inservice training in the subject. Further analyses ... reveal no requirements that teachers be trained in testing to be certified. (Stiggins et al., 1986, p. 7)

Complicating the picture, early findings on the classroom use of performance assessment suggest that changing the fundamental beliefs and instructional practices of teachers is much harder than assessment proponents thought. (Baker, 1994, p. 58)
Thoughtful observation of children takes place in a rich, innovative curriculum in the hands of a knowledgeable teacher who demands and accepts responsibility for curriculum decision making. (Goodman, 1985, p. 14)

(teachers) who have viewed themselves a subclass report spending enormous amounts of time and energy rethinking the meaning of their work and they feel good about this renewed commitment. (Calfee & Perfumo, 1993, p. 534)

... the rebels who do portfolios discover in this concept a way to express their professionalism. It is unfortunate that the movement finds so little undergirding conceptual and technical support. Teachers cannot call upon Cronbach alphas or latent trait theory” when asked to reassure policy makers that they know what they are doing. (Calfee & Perfumo, 1993, p. 536)

This alternative means of assessment represents a high-stakes challenge for the state’s teachers, asking much more of them than mere familiarity with a new assessment tool. Successful implementation of this form of assessment calls on teachers to make significant changes in their instructional techniques. (Forseth, 1992, p. 25)

Research on teaching tells us that assessment is unquestionably one of teachers’ most complex and important tasks. (Stiggins et al., 1986, p. 10)

... teachers are not adequately trained and do not properly employ evaluation techniques. (Gullickson, 1986, p. 348)

Their survey of teachers found the discrepancy between actual skill level and desirable skill level was among the largest in the assessment area. (Schafer & Lissitz, 1987, p. 57)

... involving teachers in assessment contributes to the process of teacher professionalization by allowing teachers to move out of the role of technicians who administer assessments designed by others and into the role of decision makers who act on assessments that they have created and conducted. (Wolf, 1993, p. 522)

The quotes above clearly indicate that these authors writing on alternative assessment realize that for such a movement to be sustained and expanded, professional development will have to play a key role, which by all accounts will be a tremendous challenge. It is a challenge intensified by findings from empirical studies (Schafer & Lissitz, 1987; Gullickson & Hopkins, 1987) which explore the level of assessment instruction at the preservice level.
Preservice Instruction in Assessment

The first question one might ask is whether or not there is assessment instruction available to preservice teachers, and if so, is it a requirement for graduation or certification? Schafer and Lissitz (1987) report on their findings of survey data gathered from a sample of member colleges of the American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education, which produce the majority of teachers in this nation. Schafer and Lissitz (1987) found that 49 percent of the programs surveyed do not require a formal course in measurement.

Availability

Findings by Schafer and Lissitz (1987) should be considered alongside a finding by Gullickson and Hopkins (1987), which indicates that instruction in educational measurement and evaluation is available to undergraduates as a separate course in 71 percent of the colleges they surveyed. Of this 71 percent, only 75 percent (or 53 percent of the total, which is close to the 49 percent reported by Schafer & Lissitz, 1987) require that preservice teachers take such a course. Their survey was conducted with 33 colleges in South Dakota and its six contiguous states.

Gullickson and Hopkins (1987) also report that when a course on measurement and evaluation is available but not required, 25 percent or less of the students enroll for the course. At the colleges where no separate course in measurement and evaluation is offered, professors who replied to the surveys indicated that preservice teachers receive such instruction as part of their methods coursework. Schafer and Lissitz (1987) addressed this issue in their work and found that in such cases when there is no formal course in measurement and evaluation, common measurement topics were not covered in other methods or educational psychology courses: "We found that extensive domains are
not covered in any required coursework for certification in a large number of curricula” (p. 60).

According to Schafer and Lissitz (1987), the percentage of certification programs omitting requirements for common assessment topics in selected program areas varied from approximately 12 percent in elementary education, and slightly higher percentages for social studies, mathematics, English, and science, to significantly higher (approximately 41 percent) percentages for administration. This finding for administrators is especially worrisome since they will eventually serve as leaders in schools.

Summarized, these findings indicate that collectively, colleges which are educating future teachers only require about half of them to take a course in measurement and evaluation and the other half are either not receiving any formal instruction or are picking up piecemeal exposure to these concepts as part of their methods coursework. An optimist might be mollified that at least 50 percent of preservice teachers are taking formal coursework in measurement and evaluation, but it is necessary to examine the features of those courses.

Content

“The content of most educational measurement textbooks and courses shares little relevance with the day to day life of teachers in classrooms” (Airasian, 1991, p. 13). This quote from Airasian (1991) provides the reader with the sense that simply affording preservice teachers with a course in measurement and evaluation is probably not sufficient. Airasian, citing numerous authors, provides an overview of measurement texts and courses:

First, the topics most commonly emphasized include the roles of educational measurement; educational objectives; test construction and item writing; validity; reliability statistical selecting, evaluating and interpreting standardized tests ... ; and
checklists and rating scales. Often these topics are supplemented by information about legal and ethical aspects of measurement, program evaluation, and marking and grading. The bulk of textbook coverage and instructional time tends to be spent on item writing, test development, statistics, validity, and reliability. (Airasian, 1991, p. 13)

He continues his overview by revealing that usually the topics covered focus on "formal types of classroom measurement" which are planned, developed, and required by those other than the classroom teacher. He concludes that "few realistic examples of the classroom use of measurement techniques and procedures" make up the content of the measurement courses or textbooks.

Gullickson and Hopkins (1987) provide the professors' perspectives on what type of instruction preservice teachers should receive in measurement and evaluation. The results of their study render an interesting portrait of the typical professor of measurement. Gullickson and Hopkins (1987) found that the professors who teach the measurement courses tend to rely on a lecture format and tend to emphasize statistics and standardized testing issues. Both of these, classroom teachers would argue, should be de-emphasized in favor of non-test evaluation strategies.

Gullickson (1986) writes about a study which directly compared elementary and secondary teachers' perspectives on issues of measurement and evaluation instruction with professors' perspectives on the same. He found that the two groups disagree strongly on the issues of statistics (professors emphasize / teachers de-emphasize), non-test evaluation activities (teachers emphasize / professors de-emphasize), and formative and summative evaluation (teachers emphasize / professors de-emphasize). Gullickson hypothesizes on the reasons for differences of opinion regarding non-test evaluation techniques by offering three explanations:

1. professors may not be aware of the extent to which teachers employ such techniques
2. professors may perceive such techniques to be properly the domain of instructional methods courses and not the domain of measurement courses
3. professors may perceive the use of such techniques as less reliable and less valid than other evaluation techniques - thus deserving less emphasis

Two other factors which Gullickson and Hopkins (1987, p. 15) bring to bear on the characteristics of measurement professors are that most likely few of them are “specifically trained in the application of measurement to the day-to-day classroom evaluation activities.” Additionally, many measurement professors are not “an integral part of the teacher education faculty” and therefore may be “less committed and/or less able to lobby effectively for curricular revisions ....,” and I would argue less aware of the void that exists between theory and practice.

**Standards for Teacher Competence in Assessment**

With the research clearly indicating that many preservice teachers are not receiving measurement and evaluation instruction, and those that are report discrepancies between what is taught and what they need to be taught to be effective in the classroom, the question then becomes: What is relevant classroom assessment training for teachers?

The American Federation of Teachers, along with the National Council on Measurement in Education and the National Education Association (1990), has developed standards for teacher competence in educational assessment of students. Included in these standards are:

1. Teachers should be skilled in choosing assessment methods appropriate for instructional decisions.
2. Teachers should be skilled in developing assessment methods appropriate for instructional decisions.
3. The teacher should be skilled in administering, scoring and interpreting the results of both externally-produced and teacher-produced assessment methods.
4. Teachers should be skilled in using assessment results when making decisions about individual students, planning teaching, developing curriculum, and school improvement.
5. Teachers should be skilled in developing valid pupil grading procedures which use pupil assessments.
6. Teachers should be skilled in communicating assessment results to students, parents, other lay audiences, and other educators.
7. Teachers should be skilled in recognizing unethical, illegal, and otherwise inappropriate assessment methods and uses of assessment information.

These standards were written with the intention of guiding:

- teacher educators in the design and implementation of teacher preparation programs
- professional development for in-service teachers
- self-assessment by teachers
- educational measurement professors

For each standard, extensive descriptions and elaborations are provided to serve as benchmarks or objectives for teachers to strive to attain or become proficient.

Schafer (1991) adds his own similar list of training priorities which he breaks down into eight content areas:

1. Basic concepts and terminology of assessment
2. Uses of assessment
3. Assessment planning and development
4. Interpretation of assessments
5. Description of assessment results
6. Evaluation and improvement of assessments
7. Feedback and grading
8. Ethics of assessment

Training priorities, according to Stiggins et al. (1986), should include “measuring higher order reasoning skills, writing quality paper and pencil test items, integrating assessment and instruction through oral questioning strategies, and designing quality performance assessments based on observation and professional judgment.”

Teacher Made Tests

Stiggins et al. (1986) draw from the research to describe the characteristics of teacher made tests. Typically these tests rely on short answer questions, avoiding essay questions, and use more matching than multiple choice or true-false items. The test items are written to measure lower level thinking like knowledge of facts, terms, and rules 80 percent of the time. Interestingly, the 80 percent breaks down to junior high teachers'
writing questions at these levels 94 percent of the time while elementary and senior high
teachers write questions at these levels 69 percent of the time. This is particularly relevant
when one considers that depending on the grade level, teachers utilize their own “teacher
made” assessments one-third to three-quarters of the time and that they rely on these
assessments as the main source of information on student learning.

Although the types of tests described which teachers typically develop may
measure the accumulation of discrete bits of knowledge, Resnick (1987) states that “they
are ill suited to assessing the kinds of integrated thinking that we call ‘higher order’.” Her
criteria for assessments which require higher order thinking are that they be non-
algorithmic and complex, yielding multiple solutions involving nuanced judgment,
application of multiple criteria, uncertainty, and self-regulation.

Airasian (1991) has found that teachers make informal assessments of their
students, which he calls “sizing up,” early in the academic year. These assessment are
often based on nonsystematic observations such as how they are dressed, language they
use, classroom behavior, friends they hang around with, other teachers’ comments and
knowledge of their socio-economic class. Teachers view these initial perceptions as being
very accurate. Airasian makes the point that these perceptions are long lasting (usually the
whole year) and impact many decisions and outcomes of teaching and learning. Students
pick up on the teachers’ perceptions and have a tendency to fill that role in a self-fulfilling
prophecy. He continues by writing that “... teachers are unaware of the extent to which
they rely upon informal, unsystematic assessments for decision making and the dangers
of this reliance.” These issues should be included in the priorities for teacher training in
assessment.
In-service Training in Assessment

Focusing only on preservice education would be too narrow to make the needed changes in assessment instruction for teachers. Stiggins (1991a) comments on this point when he says:

But simply offering sound, relevant college and university measurement courses and writing helpful measurement textbooks, while very important, will not suffice. It is essential that we provide high-quality, efficient inservice training for all those teachers and administrators who have completed their degree programs without relevant assessment training. (p. 538)

O'Sullivan and Chalnick (1991) are optimistic that measurement training can be accomplished if states would require additional training in measurement as part of the recertification process. As alluded to above, a change in the focus of such measurement instruction would have to precede this type of reform if we are to anticipate any significant outcomes.

O'Sullivan and Chalnick (1991), suggest that outside forces or influences such as accreditation bodies and certification standards might be helpful towards increasing professional development in assessment strategies. Wiggins (1992, p. 32) maintains that "good teaching is inseparable from good assessing" and that teachers need to be empowered by having ownership of local measures and standards if we expect real school reform to take hold. It is an interesting combination; empowered teachers having ownership, and outside influences converging to improve assessment.

Outside Influences on the Alternative Assessment Movement

There are other outside influences focusing on the broader issue of school and teacher education reform which have implications for assessment and professional development. Some of those influences, which are described below, include The Holmes Groups with their publications Tomorrow's Teachers (1986) and Tomorrow's Schools.
In 1986, the Holmes group published *Tomorrow's Teachers*, in which they illuminate the need for teachers to have greater subject matter knowledge, systematic knowledge of teaching, and reflective practical experience; three areas which researchers consider key requirements for teachers to be effective in assessment. Shulman (1987, p. 19), echoes these concerns when he writes that “To understand what a pupil understands will require a deep grasp of both the material to be taught and the processes of learning,” certainly. To achieve greater subject matter knowledge, the Holmes Group proposes that teachers have a strong liberal arts background before entering into a graduate professional program in teacher education.

In *Tomorrow's Schools* (1990), the Holmes Group discusses public forms of accountability. Their third “guidepost” for organizing professional development schools is to move away from present standardized tests as forms of accountability and towards new forms of professional responsibility. This sentiment was previously voiced in the publication *A Nation Prepared* (Carnegie Foundation, 1986), that described a balance in which teachers must be prepared to accept a greater degree of accountability in exchange for increased discretion.

In *Tomorrow's Schools* (1990), the Holmes Group acknowledges that as the focus on accountability increased, with its issues of validity and reliability, instruction in the schools narrowed to the range of what was being tested. They advocate the development of alternative assessments and recognize that it is an opportunity for collaboration between schools and universities:
Researchers have pioneered many innovative assessment procedures to study the nature of learning, but few have found their way into use by teachers. Conversely, teachers have always engaged in informal methods for assessing learning that have not been carefully studied or widely shared. (p. 75)

Speaking about the trend towards greater use of alternative assessments, the Holmes Group (1990) write that “A quiet renaissance is gathering momentum across the country that Professional Development Schools can draw on and contribute to” (p. 75). One last quote from their report particularly addresses the relationship between alternative assessment and professional development: “Consequently, as teachers work to develop new teaching methods and curricular conceptions, they also must experiment with consonant forms of assessment. We need Professional Development Schools as sites for such experiments” (p. 75).

The authors of A Nation Prepared (1986) forecast that progress in improving assessment will be very expensive. “It will require substantial support from the federal government and private foundations for programs of research, development and field trials” (p. 93).

The National Board for Professional Teaching Standards

Assessment is not a concept confined to teachers’ determining what their students have achieved. The National Board for Professional Teaching Standards is set up to assess teachers. It is noteworthy that one of the areas which teachers will be assessed on, as a process of being certified, is assessment. To quote standard VIII for the Early Adolescence/Generalist: “Accomplished generalists employ a variety of assessment methods to obtain useful information about student learning and development and to assist students in reflecting on their own progress” (p. 7). Teachers who will want to be certified by the National Board will have to make sure that they are practicing sound assessment strategies.
The Role of Alternative Assessment in School Reform

The trend towards teachers' making greater use of alternative assessments is laden with complications. As Airasian (1991, p. 16) points out, "As we begin to understand the complexity of the classroom and the diverse roles assessment plays in it, an additional problem will confront us. A broader need for assessment training and information will be created."

The possible benefits of the movement include informed instruction which takes into account students' understandings and misconceptions and promotes higher order thinking skills. Successfully implemented, alternative assessment strategies can provide diagnostic information necessary to serve the individual needs of students. Stiggins (1991c, p. 7) writes that "teachers cannot diagnose student needs, group students intelligently, assign meaningful grades, or evaluate the impact of instructional treatment without sound day to day assessment. For all of these reasons, they need relevant, helpful classroom assessment training."

To take advantage of the promising opportunities for improved teaching and learning through using alternative assessments, it will be necessary for teachers to have in-depth understanding of content, pedagogical, curriculum, and child development knowledge. The measurement training, as Gullickson & Hopkins (1987) point out, that is currently provided to pre-service and inservice teachers is either not available or, where it is available, does not include relevant topics. "In sum, it seems apparent that many students, given the substantial constraints imposed on the educational measurement course, will continue to be inadequately prepared for classroom evaluation tasks" (p. 15).

The alternative assessment movement has the potential to play a major role in school reform, yet it appears that school and teacher education reform is necessary for alternative assessment to reach its full potential. I argue that all the stakeholders in
education should be involved in the reconceptualizing of educational assessment with the intent of improving teaching and learning.

Initiatives like those proposed by the Holmes group and ideas brought out in *A Nation Prepared* must necessarily be met with changes at the national, state, district and school level. We must rely less on what we perceive as scientifically sound and indisputable standardized tests. The public, and especially parents of school children, will need to be made aware of the narrow scope of standardized tests and the ramifications they have on instruction.

Teachers, who will need to have greater understanding of content, curriculum, pedagogy, and child development to effectively use alternative assessment, will require more effective instruction and training. Forsyth (1992, p. 28) states that “Teachers are trying to come to grips with new assessment tools and the implications they bring for classroom instruction. The success of any alternative system will depend on the skills the teachers are enabled to develop - and the support they receive.”

The general conclusion that using alternative assessment is a complex undertaking that can be labor intensive necessitates a reconceptualizing of the role of the teacher. The often heralded implication that teachers need release time to effectively initiate and sustain reform certainly applies here. This sentiment is reinforced by Gomez et al. (1991, p. 627) who write: “... the nature of teacher work must be reconsidered. Schools will need to provide release time during the school day for teachers - alone and in groups - to plan and implement portfolio assessment.”

**Educational Reform as an Impetus for Alternative Assessment**

For the remainder of this review of literature, I diverge from discussing alternative assessment directly and explore a few issues or trends in education which appear to be causing, or at least are factors contributing to teachers’ becoming involved in what Calfee
and Perfumo (1993, p. 532) describe as a "grassroots revolution: teachers regaining control of assessment policy." As I do so, I realize that the trends that I explore are not comprehensive (as far as a list of trends which may be motivating teachers to use alternative assessment), nor can they be complete reviews in and of themselves. Yet, I think it is important to briefly discuss a few prominent trends in education to explore implications that the trends (and possibly other trends like them) have for assessment, or the implications that assessment has on the trends.

The Role of Standardized Tests

Many of the people writing about alternative assessment state that much of the existing dissatisfaction with traditional forms of assessment and the driving force for creating new ones is based on the belief that traditional assessments do not yield information now believed to be critical to learning (Bachor, Anderson, Walsh & Muir, 1994; Stiggins, 1991b; Darling-Hammond & Wise, 1985). The reasoning, influences, and forces which are leading to the increased use of alternative assessment throughout this nation are numerous. Darling-Hammond and Wise (1985) describe that teachers are dissatisfied with standardized tests because the tests are too narrow in scope:

Teachers' various objections to statewide minimum competency testing are based on a view that a single, uniform measure cannot adequately allow for the differences in student responses of abilities, nor can it take into account the variations in local resources and goals that exist in education. (Darling-Hammond & Wise, 1985, p. 319)

Actually, I consider that this explanation, while true, is too simplistic. I suggest that the roots of teachers' growing dissatisfaction with standardized testing is a result of changes in their own thinking about teaching and learning, and that the teachers' objections to standardized testing are an end product of changes in teachers' views of teaching and learning.
Role of Teacher Change

Teachers have been exposed to innovative ways of thinking about and performing their jobs. In preservice education, inservice training, and graduate courses, teachers have been the audience of professors and trainers advocating innovations such as whole language, child-centered curriculum, and constructivism. Professional journals are awash with articles on these and other movements or reforms in education. Messages being heard at professional conferences which teachers attend are that they should among other things, lay down their basal readers, develop the curriculum around the students, take into account various levels of intelligence, and realize that students construct their own knowledge.

Teachers who accept these messages, either immediately or over time, set out to incorporate them into their daily instruction. As they integrate these innovations into instruction, while continuing to rely on standardized tests and textbook or curriculum imbedded tests, a disharmonious condition is created. This is where the argument typically is picked up; that teachers' dissatisfaction with traditional forms of assessment is based on the belief that traditional assessments do not yield information now believed to be critical to learning. This dissatisfaction however is rooted in teacher change - change advocated by education reformists, teacher educators, inservice trainers, and those involved in professional development. I will describe three such trends in education; namely: constructivism, multiple intelligences, and whole language.
Constructivism as an Educational Trend

The Influence of Piaget

One of the greatest influences on education has been the work of Jean Piaget. In explaining the tremendous impact Piaget has had, Gardner (1991) writes that:

An extremely ingenious observer and experimenter, Piaget bequeathed to the emerging science of developmental psychology many, if not most, of its classic demonstrations. Among the most notable are the conservation problems, in which children must judge, for example, whether two globular mounds once similar in appearance continue to contain the same amount of clay when one has been rolled into sausage (or alternatively, into pancake) form; the object permanence problem, in which an infant either continues or fails to continue to search for an object that has disappeared from sight; and the intentional moral dilemmas, which ask the child to decide, for example, whether it is worse to break a single dish while one is trying to steal a cookie or to break a whole stack of plates while one is trying to help a friend. (p. 26)

These "most notable" contributions of Piaget's work often times over-shadow his epistemology that is generally referred to as constructivism. Another eminent scholar, Von Glaserfeld (1990), whose extensive writing on constructivism stems from the earlier work by Piaget, explains that Piaget's work extended over five decades, during which his ideas and focus changed:

In interpreting Piaget, it is important to remember that his publications range over an astounding variety of topics and are spread over more than a half century. As with any versatile and original thinker, his ideas did not cease to develop and change. It is, therefore not surprising that one can spot contradictions in his work. An obvious instance is his theory of stages, which was gradually superseded by his theory of equilibration. (p. 22)

Students in child development courses tend to memorize the "stages" which Piaget described, without understanding the ramifications of his work on education. Black and Ammon (1992) allude to this, when they write:

Until recently, this (Piagetian research) has not been used effectively in education because it has been interpreted as being directed primarily at demonstrating general stages of intellectual development (sensorimotor, preoperational, concrete operational, and formal operational) - stages that seem to reduce intellectual development to an abstract logic that sets limits on knowledge acquisition across the various subjects and only serves education by cautioning teachers against expecting too much from their students. (p. 325)
Gruber and Vonèche (1977, p. xxvii), in their introduction to *The Essential Piaget*, make a similar point:

By this time the reader may well believe we are arguing that Piaget's theory is unimportant and only his observations matter.* Not at all. We propose only that other parts of Piaget's theory are far more important than the stage concept, and we hope to draw the reader's attention to them.

*In Piaget's view this would be almost a mortal sin, since he has devoted so much of his energy to the struggle against just such an empiricist view of the growth of knowledge, both in the child and among scientists.

The "other parts" of Piaget's theory that Gruber and Vonèche refer to is what Ashton (1992) describes as "the new rallying theme in education": *constructivism*. Again, I quote Gruber and Vonèche, as they provide a description of Piaget's theory of constructivism:

Here we wish only to stress the point that for Piaget the growth of the intellect, rather than something that happens to the child from the outside, is a process of self-construction, governed by existing formations of cognitive structures. To be sure, it happens in relation to the world, and it is a process that has evolved in such fashion that its results are biologically and socially adaptive; the world plays its regulative function. But it is not a matter of stimulus and response, push and pull. Rather, environmental events are assimilated as well as they can be to existing structures, chewed over and digested, and, finally, only occasionally do they result in fundamental changes in such structures. (p. xxviii)

In the Piagetian view of constructivism, knowledge does not exist outside the person and can only exist when it is constructed within the mind of the learner by forming relationships made to existing understandings in the knower's mind. Black and Ammon (1992) explain that new information is interpreted in terms of existing understandings through a process Piaget labels assimilation. They elucidate that:

These understandings evolve as a lack of fit between newly assimilated information and old understandings forces a reformulation. Reformulation takes time as bits and pieces of information are recombined, and higher-level understandings typically emerge after repeated (recursive) interactions with the problem at hand. (p. 324)

Piaget (1952) describes the process of *adaptation* as "an equilibrium between assimilation and accommodation" (p. 6), with assimilation being the cognitive function...
that makes experience meaningful, and accommodation entailing adjustments and modifications of the individual to real situations. (Green, 1989).

Piaget (1952) discusses this “equilibrium” in greater detail when he writes:

Assimilation can never be pure because by incorporating new elements into its earlier schemata the intelligence constantly modifies the latter in order to adjust them to new elements. Conversely, things are never known by themselves, since this work of accommodation is only possible as a function of the inverse process of assimilation. We shall thus see how the very concept of the object is far from being innate and necessitates a construction which is simultaneously assimilatory and accommodating. (pp. 6-7)

Many others have expanded on Piaget’s work, with the greatest expansion (or some might say deviation) from his theory being the importance that social interaction plays in children’s construction of knowledge (Smith, 1993). Foremost among the theorists who contend that social interaction is a crucial role in constructivism, Vygotsky (1978) writes that:

Any function in the child’s cultural development appears twice or on two planes. First it appears on the social plane, and then on the psychological plane. First it appears between people as an interpsychological category, and then within the child as an intrapsychological category ... Social relations or relations among people genetically underlie all higher [cognitive] functions and their relationships. (p. 75)

Articles have been written by researchers and theorists (social constructivists) who argue that Piaget’s theory of constructivism is flawed because it did not properly address the importance of social interaction. Conversely, others (cognitive developmental constructivists), counter these assertions, while claiming that the social constructivists’ understanding of Piaget is meager; asserting that Piaget did address the importance of social interaction (Fosnot, 1993). The debate is substantial and the articles voluminous but it does seem to impact what eventually settles out and filters down to teachers.

The Challenge for Teachers’ Incorporation of Constructivism

Many teachers, in their quest to put theory into practice, have interpreted constructivism as a way to teach. Pirie and Kieren (1992) for example, report that
teachers consider that they are “doing” constructivist teaching when they either have their students using manipulatives (in the case of a mathematics lesson) or engage their students in group discussions.

Influential reports such as those by the Holmes Group (1988, 1990) and the Carnegie Forum on Education and the Economy (1986), expound the need for teachers to teach for understanding by incorporating the theories of constructivism in their teaching.

Learning at all levels is an active process, in which children construct and reconstruct knowledge as they go along. To know something is not only to take in the bare information but to interpret it and relate it to other knowledge. Powerful learning, then comes about when students can develop a mental scheme in which to frame their knowledge and then go on to make fresh knowledge and an even newer mental scheme. Much current cognitive research holds that there is no way to make real use of knowledge other than creating a personal intellectual apparatus that holds information together and allows the learner to play with it. Real knowledge is purpose-built, site-built, and infused with the learner’s sense of purpose. (Holmes Group, 1990, p. 13)

In order to tie all this back into alternative assessment, consider this quote by the same group:

A principal stimulus for learning is the student’s own sense of purpose and efficacy. Teaching is not simply locating knowledge out there and trying to beam it into students’ heads. It involves using students’ ideas as a foundation to build on, taking what students already know and think as a point of departure for new learning. (Holmes Group, 1990, p. 18)

The greatest challenge for teachers, taken from this quote, is finding out “what students already know and think,” for use as a springboard into subsequent instruction or planning. Quality holistic assessments which can reveal what individual students truly know and understand, through use of continuous, multi-method, multi-trait, multi-criteria observations or performances, are necessary for teachers to gain evidence of students’ cognitive processes. Chittenden (1991), refers to this process as “finding out” (as opposed to other stances or teachers may adopt concerning assessment; the other two being: keeping track and checking up), and considers it the most crucial to successful teaching. He writes:
Here, the teacher's purpose is one of inquiry, of figuring out what's going on. What did the child mean? What do you suppose the children got from that story? (Versus did they get the main idea?) In this stance, teachers may again be asking questions but clearly not with the intent of checking up - an intent that is quickly communicated to children ... Inquiry is going on when a kindergarten teacher encourages children to talk about some of the things they noticed on a trip. There is no right answer. Or when an elementary teacher introduces a science activity by seeking evidence of the children's prior knowledge and interest: "What questions do you have about caterpillars? Have you ever seen something like them before? Where? (p. 30)

Darling-Hammond (1994) reinforces this point by writing:

Authentic assessment strategies can provide teachers with much more useful classroom information as they engage teachers in evaluating how and what students know and can do in real-life performance situations. These kinds of assessment strategies create the possibility that teachers will not only develop curricula aimed at challenging performance skills, but that they will also be able to use the resulting rich information about student learning and performance to shape their teaching in ways that can prove more effective for individual students. (p. 6)

The preponderance of articles written on how constructivism can be, and is being implemented in the classroom centers around mathematics (Etchberger & Shaw, 1992; Pirie & Kieren, 1992; Steffe & Wiegel, 1992; Kamii, Lewis, & Jones, 1991; National Council of Teachers of Mathematics, 1990). This is not to say that constructivism is not influencing science, social studies, and literacy instruction, but that mathematics seems to taking the tenants of constructivism more to heart. Steffe and Wiegel (1992) refer to the National Council of Teachers of Mathematics and the National Research Council when they state that "constructivism has emerged as one of the main philosophies of mathematics education." Further evidence is provided by the National Council of Teachers of Mathematics, who published a monograph (Number 4, 1990) in the *Journal for Research in Mathematics Education* titled Constructivist Views on the Teaching and Learning of Mathematics. Articles in this monograph and in other journals advocate creating constructivist environments in mathematics classrooms.
Implications for Assessment

In many articles about constructivism, authors either explicitly or implicitly address the issue that assessment plays a critical role in teachers' effectively creating constructivist environments. Pirie and Kieren (1992) list four necessary, underlying tenants of belief pertaining to the creation of such environments:

1. Although a teacher may have the intention to move students towards particular mathematics learning goals, she will be well aware that such progress may not be achieved by some of the students and may not be achieved as expected by others.
2. In creating an environment or providing opportunities for children to modify their mathematical understanding, the teacher will act upon the belief that there are different pathways to similar mathematical understanding.
3. The teacher will be aware that different people will hold different mathematical understandings.
4. The teacher will know that for any topic there are different levels of understanding, which will be inherently different from one another.

The implicit message in each of these four tenants is that the teacher must constantly appraise and reappraise the learning taking place. This is complicated by the fact that each student will have different levels of understanding, reached by different constructions of knowledge, and influenced by varied previous knowledge. Pirie and Kieren (1992) write that:

... although two students may appear to exhibit the same understanding this may not be the case. The implication of this is that simply examining what a student does in the face of a mathematical task is not enough. If a teacher is to really observe the kind of understanding exhibited by a student, she must prompt students to justify what they say or do and thus reveal their thinking and logic. In order to expose different levels of understanding, tasks need to be used which allow for varying levels of response (p. 509)

Steffe and Wiegel (1992) point out that since the major implication of constructivism is that "students have a mathematical reality of their own," it is critical that teachers strive to understand the mathematical reality of the students. Without mentioning the word assessment, they give considerable attention to the role of teachers as observers and interpreters of observation. They do warn that the primary goal of constructivism can not be to raise student achievement on standardized tests, because by so doing,
mathematics education would continue to be trivialized. In this advice, the authors are acknowledging that standardized tests have a profound influence on curriculum and instruction.

The Association of State Supervisors of Mathematics (1992), warn in their position statement that:

A student’s mathematical capabilities are too complex and varied for a single numerical score to be used as an indicator of his or her achievement or potential in mathematics. Hence, such limited information should not be the sole factor in making educational decisions that affect the student’s future.

Schools and teachers that are moving ahead with a transition towards constructivism but are still bound to district or statewide standardized testing, report trying to please both camps, causing what Livingston, Castle, and Nations (1989) refer to as “teaching with schizophrenia.” They note that de-professionalization of teaching occurs when a teacher’s judgment and documentation over time can be invalidated by a single test score.

Etchberger and Shaw (1992) report on a case study of a fifth-grade teacher who made the change to constructivism. She wrote in her journal about the pressures of trying to get through the curriculum to “cover the test” on the one hand, yet spend the time necessary to try and be constantly aware of what knowledge base each individual student has, on the other. As a developing constructivist teacher, she saw that it was necessary to gain access to the students’ individual understandings in order to use that information in planning and implementing instruction.

The teacher in the study by Etchberger and Shaw (1992) found that cooperative learning was an ideal vehicle through which construction of knowledge could take place. As other teachers do the same, either following the advice of social constructivists or finding it out for themselves, there will be further implications for assessment. Certainly,
if standardized tests fail to measure what students really understand, they fare even worse in measuring understandings constructed in group dynamics.

**Constructivism in Teacher Education**

In a report of attempts to incorporate a developmental-constructivist approach to teacher education, Black and Ammon (1992) discuss a two year post baccalaureate program which tries to integrate knowledge of child development with knowledge of subject matter. In this program, preservice teachers are engaged with doing Piagetian tasks with children. The authors go on to explain that:

Students are then asked to use the knowledge gained from these assignments to analyze the difficulties and successes that children in their classrooms encounter with subject matter they choose themselves. Here, the first effort is made to shift the seemingly natural way to think about the results of administering Piagetian tasks as assessing general cognitive levels to identifying developmental or conceptual milestones in different curriculum areas, while also thinking about individual students in terms of their achievement of these milestones. (p. 326)

The technique described above appears to provide students with experience tying assessment, curriculum, and instruction together. Additional experiences or requirements include implementing lessons while keeping records of student work, and conducting traditional forms and alternative forms of assessment on the same topic. This all appears to be designed to give the preservice teachers, real experiences in understanding students' understandings with the sole purpose of informing their own instruction; constructivism.

**Teachers' Implementation of Constructivism**

The research from classrooms is not as promising. Although the National Council of Teachers of Mathematics (NCTM) advocates methods that are in line with constructivism, research shows that while teachers ask many questions during a typical math lesson, the questions tend to require only rote responses which fail to provide insights into students' understandings. Reform necessary to realize the visions set forth
Suggestions from various authors for ways that teachers should be implementing assessments in the mathematics classrooms (always tied into the NCTM standards, which reflect constructivist thinking) are varied but always are intended to reveal students' understanding, to inform instruction. According to Sammons, Kobett, Heiss & Fennell (1992), it is "very important that assessment inform and mirror instruction. That is, if manipulative materials are use during instruction, then they should also be used in the assessment of students' learning." They suggest five assessment techniques which should all reveal student understanding, while supporting instructional and assessment goals:

1. Observation and questioning
2. Diagnostic interviews
3. Problem-solving-based investigations
4. Performance-based tasks
5. At-home connections

Their bottom line message is that teaching, learning, and assessment must be linked, and teachers must assess as they teach.

Clarke (1992) offers his own list of assessment alternatives, again linked to the NCTM standards and with the purpose of informing instruction:

- Annotated class lists
- Students' work folio
- Practical tests
- Student-constructed tests
- Students' self-assessment

One of the big differences here is the incorporation of the student into the assessment process; an idea which seems to be gaining support. After all, who would have the greatest insight into a student's understanding, and therefore be able to suggest or design assessments which may reveal that understanding?
Successful implementation of constructivism entails more than just assessment reform. Curriculum, which many feel is driven by assessment, must be reformed so that teachers are able to take the findings from their assessments and utilize them in planning instruction. Others point to teacher education and professional development as areas that need to reform. They suggest that if effective constructivist teaching is to take place, teachers will need greater subject knowledge (Mosenthal & Ball, 1992; Shulman, 1987).

Theory of Multiple Intelligences as an Educational Trend

Turning now towards another issue or trend in education which also relates to assessment, it becomes obvious that various reforms or initiatives are not necessarily separate discrete variables. One reform may greatly influence another, the influence may be reciprocal, or they may both be rooted in the same theory or philosophy. The work by Howard Gardner and his theory of *multiple intelligences* has recently come on the education scene and is also influenced by Piaget. The ramifications of Gardner's theory have some similar implications for teaching and learning, in terms of teaching for understanding, but it suggests an even more complicated view of the role of education.

In 1983, Howard Gardner published *Frames of Mind*, in which he introduces his theory of multiple intelligence. Working in the Piagetian tradition, Gardner began to focus on development in a number of artistic domains such as music, drawing, and expressive language. He found that achievement of Piagetian milestones in one domain was independent of development in other domains (Hatch & Gardner, 1990). These findings were reinforced with studies of people who suffered damage to the brain. Gardner found that while some of these people suffered impairment in one domain, (language for example) they were largely unaffected in other areas; suggesting multiple intelligences.
Criteria of an Intelligence

Gardner acknowledges that the idea of multiple intelligences is not new but purports that in his theory of multiple intelligences each meet certain criteria of intelligence. He lists the criteria of an intelligence as:

- Potential isolation by brain damage
- The existence of idiots savants, prodigies, and other exceptional individuals
- An identifiable core operation or set of operations
- A distinctive developmental history, along with a definable set of expert “end-state” performances
- An evolutionary history and evolutionary plausibility
- Support from experimental psychological tasks
- Support from psychometric findings
- Susceptibility to encoding in a symbol system (1983, pp. 63-67)

Seven Intelligences

In *Frames of Mind*, Gardner (1983) describes six intelligences which he theorizes meet the above mentioned criteria. They are:

1. Linguistic intelligence
2. Musical intelligence
3. Logical-Mathematical intelligence
4. Spatial intelligence
5. Bodily-kinesthetic intelligence
6. The personal intelligences*

*This sixth intelligence has later been divided into two separate kinds of intelligence:

- Inter-personal intelligence
- Intra-personal intelligence

Hence the seven multiple intelligences reported on by Gardner (1991) in *The Unschooled Mind.*

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The Implications of Multiple Intelligence on Assessment

If one accepts the idea that individuals have multiple intelligences, and that they are independent of each other, then one must question the use of standardized tests that measure one level of intelligence which we then generalize to the whole individual. Hatch and Gardner (1990) make this point when they write:

As long as it was believed that ability was the same across domains, it did not matter greatly which domain was chosen for measurement. Assessing ability in language or math should yield similar results to assessments in other domains. However, for those, like Gardner, who came to believe that abilities functioned and developed independently, focusing on a restricted set of domains resulted in a severely distorted view of an individual's competence. (p. 416)

Hatch and Gardner (1990) conjure up interesting images when they ask the reader to imagine Alfred Binet trying to predict the future success of people like Albert Einstein, Virginia Woolf, Martha Graham, Mahatma Gandhi, Pablo Picasso, Sigmund Freud and Igor Stravinsky with a standardized IQ test. With this scenario in mind, Hatch and Gardner (1990) suggest that we make assessment that recognizes abilities not covered on standardized tests a regular part of learning. They continue by arguing that:

Because it emphasizes that the different intelligences are used in conjunction with different tasks and media, MI theory (multiple intelligence) argues that distinct measures are needed to assess the unique capacities of each intelligence. These distinct domains and symbol systems require different kinds of sensory processing and present unique constraints and problems. As a consequence, paper and pencil tests which ignore the unique aspects of symbol systems such as music or the specific demands involved in interpersonal or bodily-kinesthetic tasks cannot adequately address a person's Multiple Intelligences. (p. 418)

Hatch and Gardner (1990) advocate development and use of “intelligence-fair” assessment. They draw attention to traditional standardized tests which, by design, require invoking linguistic or logical intelligences; as though every measurement is filtered through these two intelligences. This is similar to complaints from teachers who argue that a math test which requires reading a word problem is first a reading test. Then only if the student can successfully read the problem can it measure a student's ability in math.
In this same article, Hatch and Gardner (1990) make other suggestions for assessment which echo the concerns of many alternative assessment advocates. They suggest that assessment should:

- occur in context
- involve tasks that are familiar and valued within a culture
- be culture-fair and context appropriate
- inform instructional practice directly

Teachers' Implementation of Multiple Intelligence Theory

A four step model is offered by Campbell (1992) as a practical guide or sequence for teachers to follow to implement Gardner's concept of multiple intelligence.

1. The main lesson
2. Centers based on multiple intelligences
3. Sharing and revising
4. Projects

In this model, each school day begins with a 15-20 minute multimodal overview of the topic to be studied. Topics are guided by overarching themes which are based on students' interest. The greatest part of the children's school day is spent in seven learning centers, focusing on the topic being studied, which allows for performance in the seven intelligences identified by Gardner. The third component, "Sharing and revising," is self-evident, and brings meaningful closure to the day's learning. "Projects" is a component which comes after centers and sharing, and allows students to apply strategies or skills to other areas, generally unrelated to the topic being studied. The projects are on-going (three weeks in duration) and can be done either independently or cooperatively in small groups. The implications for assessment in such a model are that the role of the teacher changes: (S)He must learn to observe students from seven different perspectives in order to gather resources and facilitate learning.
More recently, Gardner’s message has been that we need to teach for understanding. In his book *The Unschooled Mind*, Gardner describes some problems with contemporary education in the United States. Foremost among these is our failure to teach for understanding. In an interview with Siegel and Shaughnessy (1994) Gardner expressed his biggest concern with American education as being that:

"... even our better students in our better schools are just going through the motions of education. In *The Unschooled Mind*, I review ample evidence that suggests an absence of understanding - the inability of students to take knowledge, skills, and other apparent attainments and apply them successfully in new situations. In the absence of such flexibility and adaptability, the education that the students receive is worth little. I suspect that this problem exists in other countries as well, but our American fixation on the master of fact and the administration of short-answer instruments of assessment makes the problem particularly acute here." (pp. 563-564)

Here, Gardner appears to place the crux of the blame for American education’s failure to teach for understanding upon our fixation with standardized tests. In the interview with Siegel and Shaughnessy (1994), Gardner adds that standardized tests present situations that do not exist outside the classroom; “life does not present itself in multiple choice formats” (p. 564). Rather, he suggests, individuals usually carry out projects for significant periods of time resulting in genuine products.

In the same interview, Gardner reveals a constructivist influence when he responds to how teachers can foster understanding. He advises that teachers should look for evidence of what their students understand, and provide them with opportunities to use their understandings or knowledge in new ways. His definition of understanding is when an individual can “take knowledge, concepts, skills, and facts and apply them in new situations where they are appropriate” (Steinberger, 1994).

Perkins and Blythe (1994), who are involved with Howard Gardner in an initiative called Project Zero, add to the definition of understanding as:

"... a matter of being able to do a variety of thought-demanding things with a topic - like explaining, finding evidence and examples, generalizing, applying, analogizing, and representing the topic in a new way." (p. 6)
Perkins and Blythe (1994) provide practical advice for how to put understanding up front and they also discuss barriers to teaching for understanding. One of these barriers is that the tests which teachers prepare their students for, typically do not support teaching for understanding.

Perkins and Blythe (1994) suggest that students be engaged in performances of understanding throughout the instructional process. Typically assessment is left until the end of a topic, unit, or chapter. Performances can become part of the instructional practice and be opportunities for students to “generalize, find new examples, carry out applications, and work through other understandings” (p. 6). It is not enough however, that students are engaged in such performances, they must be clear on the criteria, and receive feedback along the way to help them perform better.

A four part framework is suggested by Perkins and Blythe (1994) that provides teachers with a model for planning a topic or course. These four key concepts are:

1. Generative topics
2. Understanding goals
3. Understanding performance
4. Ongoing assessment

The first two concepts are fairly typical suggestions that teachers may hear in courses, in-service training, journals, or conferences. Evidence of teachers addressing the first two concepts are visible in the schools in terms of thematic units, holistic instruction, and integrated curriculum. The last two however, understanding performance and ongoing assessment, are probably less common and could be where teachers are failing to teach for understanding.

Whole Language as an Educational Trend

As mentioned earlier, various initiatives or reforms in education are not always discrete variables, as they influence and are influenced by each other. Theorists and
Philosophers can influence or have an impact on many different issues and trends in education. Piaget's work has greatly influenced the constructivism movement. His theories are the foundation of Gardner's theory of multiple intelligences and the rhetoric of teaching for understanding. Vygotsky (1987) admits that even Piaget's critics build on his understandings, his concepts, and his methodology. The whole language movement which has had such a large impact in classrooms around the nation is also influenced by Piaget. As with all the educational trends mentioned in this paper, assessment plays an crucial role in this movement. It is a role which if not properly dealt with, can prove critical to sustained reform.

Piaget's influence is evidenced in Ferreiro's (1990) words as she describes the theoretical framework for whole language:

In order to acquire knowledge about the writing system, children proceed the same way as in other domains of knowledge: They try to assimilate the information provided by the environment. But when the new information is impossible to assimilate, they very often are forced to reject it. They experiment with the object to find out about its properties, they experiment with the object to test their "hypothesis," they ask for information, and they try to make sense out of the mass of data they have assembled ... As we repeatedly have tried to demonstrate, these children's theories are not a pale mirror image of what they have been told. The theories are real constructions that, more often than not, seem very strange to our adult way of thinking. (pp. 13-14, italics mine)

Whole Language Considered

Although it is beyond the scope of this paper to adequately review whole language (or Piaget for that matter) it is important to define a few terms before considering this movement's implications for assessment.

Altwerger, Edelsky, and Flores (1989) make clear that whole language is not a set of practices, but rather it is a set of beliefs held by teachers that is based on the following ideas:

- Language is for making meanings, for accomplishing purposes.
- Written language is language - thus what is true for language in general is true for written language.
• The cueing systems of language (phonology in oral, orthography in written language, morphology, syntax, semantics, pragmatics) are always simultaneously present and interacting in any instance of language in use.

• Language use always occurs in a situation.
• Situations are critical to meaning making.

With these ideas in mind, the overarching considerations regarding whole language is that children acquire language by using it and therefore reading and writing should be taught by engaging the students in reading and writing. An observer in a whole language classroom will see an abundance of print; whether it be in rich literature or print used for appropriate purposes such as recipes for cooking or directions for games and activities.

In a whole language classroom, learning is not broken into separate discrete skills to be practiced in isolation. As such, teachers do not rely on decontextualized work sheets or skill sheets. Ken Goodman (1989), in a preface for The Whole Language Evaluation Book, powerfully states that:

Whole language teachers have rebelled against behavioral objectives, textbooks, mastery learning, and narrow curricula. And they have rebelled against traditional evaluation, particularly standardized tests, because they find them synthetic, contrived, confining, and controlling, out of touch with modern theory and research. The tests reduce reading and writing to trivial, decontextualized, abstract skills to be tested with multiple-choice questions. (p. xi)

Considered a grass-roots revolution, whole language is described with a large variety of words and phrases. A small sample is listed:

• child-centered
• democratic community
• developmentally appropriate
• rich, authentic experiences
• participation
• reading real literature
• writing with a real purpose
• problem solving
• environment that encourages risk taking
• holistic planning
• collaboration between home and school
learning that is real and relevant (Goodman, Bird, & Goodman, 1991)

The Implications of Whole Language on Assessment

Rarely is whole language discussed or written about without some consideration to evaluation or assessment. Indeed, evaluation is the main theme in Goodman, Goodman and Hood's (1989) *The Whole Language Evaluation Book*, and Jaggar and Smith-Burke's (1985) *Observing the Language Learner*. Vincent (1991), a first grade teacher, addresses the role of evaluation in the following excerpt:

“One of the most difficult tasks initially for me in implementing whole language in my first grade classroom was to develop some method for evaluating my students. My traditional classroom background had led me to believe that there must always be a test instrument, developed by "experts," to evaluate my students. But through my reading and experience with whole language I have been liberated from the traditional modes of evaluation and have developed a trust in my ability to evaluate my students. (p. 253)

Referring once again to Goodman’s (1989) preface in *The Whole Language Evaluation Book*, he eloquently writes that:

In their curriculum planning whole language teachers create opportunities for pupils to use language in authentic, richly contextualized, functional ways. The language is kept whole so that all the necessary data for language learning will be present. Whole language teachers believe that evaluation can be useful only if it takes place in these whole and richly contextualized learning experiences. Traditional evaluation is inappropriate and tends strongly to underestimate growth in functional use of language. (p. xi)

Yetta Goodman has a chapter in Jaggar and Smith-Burke’s (1985) *Observing the Language Learner*, entitled Kidwatching. Her message is that conventional measures cannot reveal the progress of conceptual and language development and that assessment needs to occur “continuously and simultaneously with the experiences in which the learning is taking place” (p. 10). She continues by stating that the curriculum becomes sterilized when it is based on standardized multiple choice tests. When teachers teach to the these types of tests, the range of their instruction becomes narrowed, and students end up involved in repetitive practice on isolated discrete skills.
She does recommend that regardless of the strategies that teachers use in their kidwatching, they need to document their observations and maintain records, whether through “anecdotal records...; selected writing samples of students’ letters, logs, and stories; or tapes of children’s reading of oral reporting” (pp. 16-17). Goodman emphasizes that these observations should occur in “different settings, with different materials, and through different experiences” (p. 17). This type of advice is constant throughout most of the literature on alternative assessment.

The characteristics of assessment advocated by those in the whole language movement are that they should be ongoing, congruent with instruction, holistic, realistic, employ natural language in authentic context, involve self-evaluation, and most importantly, inform instruction.

One of the obvious reasons for the upsurge of interest in evaluation regarding whole language is that, as noted, these teachers are refusing to use workbooks and skill sheets in their instruction; two methods which are easy to grade, both in terms of skill and time required. They are “rebelling” against curriculum embedded and standardized tests; both of which are developed by outside experts, are easy to administer and grade, and do not require expertise, on the part of the teacher, in measurement. Yet the need for assessing student achievement and assigning grades does not vanish with a teacher’s transition to whole language. Additionally, part of the “beliefs” which teachers hold about whole language is that assessment should inform instruction.

Teach- ers’ Implementation of Whole Language

The implications of the inclination of teachers’ decreased reliance on measurement devices developed by outside experts is that they necessarily, then, must rely on their own designs or measurement tools. Stiggins et al. (1986) address these implications when they write:
We know that classroom assessment environments are designed and constructed by teachers with little formal training in assessment. Many have had no formal coursework and most have had no inservice training in the subject. Further analyses ... reveal no requirements that teachers be trained in testing to be certified. (p. 7)

Therein lies a dilemma: A growing number of classroom teachers are moving towards whole language instruction, a movement with an abhorrence for standardized testing, yet few teachers are adequately trained in assessment. I remind the reader of Wolf's (1993) quote which directly speaks to the importance of the teacher in the alternative assessment movement:

A knowledgeable teacher is the foundation of informed assessment. The further we move away from commercially published, “teacher-proof” assessments and turn toward teacher-based assessment of students, the greater the need for teacher knowledge-about curriculum and instruction, about children and their development, and about the roles that language, culture, and social context play in learning. For assessment to be informed, teachers must apply this knowledge to set clear, sound goals for instruction along with carefully articulated performance standards and benchmarks for measuring student progress towards those goals. (p. 519)

This deeper knowledge which Wolf refers to, is mentioned by Ferreira (1990, p. 74) when she writes about the pedagogical implications of the whole language movement. She indicates that teachers need to have knowledge of the “psychological evolution of the writing system,” since adequately evaluating children’s achievement in language requires the detection of “otherwise unnoticed signs of literacy development.” When teachers understand the theory, they can begin to think differently about students’ questions, answers, productions, and interactions.

In the words of Smith, Goodman, and Meredith (1976, p. 147), “Teachers more than ever before need to listen to their children and observe their behavior from the point of view of thought and language development.” They continue by saying that when teachers do so, they may be surprised to find how much of the language and capacity of their students they had missed when they had not been perceptive of cognitive processes of development.
Yetta Goodman (1989) provides a model of evaluation which has as its three components:

1. Observation
2. Interaction
3. Analysis

The observations may be formal or informal, but both require documentation, record keeping, and a knowledgeable teacher. Goodman indicates that interaction may be the most powerful aspect of the model.

As teachers interact with students, they are not just discovering what students know about any particular learning but are also using the moments of interaction to question the student, to encourage, to stimulate, and to challenge. (p. 11)

Just like the observations, interactions can be formal or informal, and require a knowledgeable teacher. The analysis may include techniques such as miscue analysis, or employ tools like portfolios and audio tapes. The focus of exactly what to analyze may vary throughout the year, and again requires a knowledgeable teacher.

Descriptions of how teachers are making the transition to whole language instruction are often replete with discussion centered around assessment. As Cambourne and Turbill (1990) reveal:

Teachers who decide to implement a whole-language philosophy share a common experience: the methods of assessment that they have traditionally been expected to use in their language programs no longer seem to be appropriate. (p. 337)

They make an interesting point, that research and thinking about assessment have not kept pace with the research and thinking about language and learning. Cambourne and Turbill’s (1990) thesis is that principles which underlie the whole language movement are so profoundly different than traditional strategies of language instruction that a different approach to assessment is required. In their research with teachers’ implementing whole language, Cambourne and Turbill (1990) found that the teachers were uneasy about how they were approaching assessment. The teachers knew something was askew and were implicitly seeking approaches to assessment that brought:
learning, teaching, and assessment back together, focused on process as well as product, included the learner and other traditionally ignored participants in the student's learning as part of the process, acknowledged the enormous superiority of the "knowledgeable-human-as-instrument" over the "formal-test-as-instrument," and finally, used data that were collected in situ rather than vitro. (p. 339)

The teachers in the study by Cambourne and Turbill (1990) focused on five basic points concerning assessment that they thought needed to be addressed:

1. When to record information
2. How to record information
3. What information to record
4. How to make sense of the information collected
5. Ensuring the trustworthiness of the assessment data

Of these five points, what information to record, seemed to be most troublesome for the teachers. The researchers found that this decision was value laden and thus differed from teacher to teacher. As Cambourne and Turbill (1990) point out, "What (the teachers) wanted to record proved to be a function of what they knew, valued, and understood about language, learning, literacy, reading, writing, and a host of other language-related factors" (p. 342). Of great significance, the researchers found that as the teachers learned more about language, their views of what is important changed, and one could infer that their answer to what information to record would change.

In a study of 71 teachers in elementary and middle schools, Walmsley and Adams (1993) found that teachers were almost unanimous in their criticism of traditional assessment practices. During interviews, the researchers found that although the enthusiasm that teachers exhibited for whole language was high, the teachers appeared uncomfortable talking about assessment in their classrooms. While the teachers were vocal in their opposition to standardized testing, they had very little to say about how their students' achievement should be assessed.

One is left with the impression from studies of teachers who are adopting the whole language philosophy and implementing parts of it in their classrooms, that perhaps they lack theoretical knowledge of whole language, deep knowledge of language itself,
and certainly knowledge of alternative assessment strategies. Thus a frustration awaits many teachers who join the movement of whole language. Whole language instruction appears to require that teachers use alternative assessments, yet standardized tests continue to flourish and teachers lack proper assessment training to implement necessary changes in their assessment practices.

Winograd (1994) lists six problems worth solving when considering the development of alternative assessments:

1. Clarifying the goals of assessment
2. Clarifying the audiences to be addressed
3. Selecting and developing assessment techniques and tasks
4. Setting the standards of student performance
5. Establishing methods of management
6. Integrating assessment and instruction

These problems are worth considering and solving regardless if the situation pertains to whole language instruction, constructivism, theories of multiple intelligence, teaching for understanding, or any other trend which seeks to reform education and align instruction and assessment.

The three trends discussed above (constructivism, multiple intelligence, and whole language) all require a reconceptualization of assessment practices. Each of these issues or trends are heavily reliant on assessment methods, which provide information to the teacher, to provide insights into children’s understandings and development. These insights are necessary so that plans, which capitalize on them, can be made to improve instruction and ultimately, learning.

When it is written that teachers are moving towards greater use of alternative assessments because they are dissatisfied with standardized testing, much of the story is not being told. The reasons that teachers are becoming dissatisfied need to be considered and explored. Much of the theory and many of the reforms which are eminent in education today have an underlying, perhaps unspoken reliance on teachers’ ability to
adequately assess their students. This ability seems foundational for success in implementing these theories and reforms, yet consideration for it usually comes last.

Teacher educators, inservice trainers, and professional development specialists, along with administrators and other stakeholders, will need to make training and awareness in assessment a priority. It must be a priority, if we are to expect reform, which so greatly depends on teachers being able to properly assess their students' understanding, to take hold, be sustained, and most importantly, improve teaching and learning.
CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

Introduction

This chapter describes the research methods used, rationale for their use, and related issues. The chapter begins with a theoretical framework in which I discuss my research orientation and rationale for the selection of the methods used. Thereafter, I present the techniques and procedures used in the study.

Situating Myself Methodologically

The purpose of this study was to examine the impact of various phenomena, forces, and history which may play a role in a teacher's transitions towards using alternative assessment strategies in elementary classrooms. As listed in chapter I, the three questions that guided my inquiry were:

1. What impacts do teachers' formal and informal professional development experiences have on their transition towards using alternative assessment strategies?
2. What are the impacts of the school context on teachers' transition towards using alternative assessment strategies?
3. What impacts do teachers' philosophies of teaching and learning play in their decisions to use alternative assessment strategies; how do their philosophies of teaching and learning correlate with their need to gather data?

Methods of naturalistic inquiry were the most appropriate way to examine the research questions posed because they allowed collection of data that could address the research questions. Employing the use of qualitative inquiry methods such as multiple in-
depth semi-structured interviews and classroom observations, was the most befitting way to study the complexities of teachers' thinking, professional development, and related contextual phenomena. What follows is a rationale for this statement.

The five axioms upon which the naturalistic paradigm finds its support are listed by Lincoln and Guba (1985, pp. 37-38) as being that:

1. There are multiple constructed realities that can be studied only holistically.
2. The inquirer and the "object" of inquiry interact to influence one another, and therefore knower and known are inseparable.
3. The aim of inquiry is to develop a time and context bound idiographic body of knowledge in the form of working hypotheses that describe the individual case.
4. All entities are in a state of mutual simultaneous shaping, so that it is impossible to distinguish causes from effects.
5. Inquiry is value bound.

The following excerpt from Lincoln and Guba (1985) cultivated my conviction that a naturalistic approach to this study was the most befitting. Their illustration portrays a particular study concerned with the effects of particular in-service workshops. In addressing the issue of causality, they ask if it is possible to trace a "causal chain" that can show unequivocally, a change in student behavior being the effect of a teacher's participation in the workshop. Their illustration follows:

... The plans are put into effect, perhaps at several sites, in ways that more or less correspond to those plans, but that also deviate from them because of local exigencies. If several workshops are offered, they probably also differ in significant ways from one another as well as from the common plan. Teachers attend these workshops, each coming with a different level of commitment, interest, training, and experience. These teachers, shaped in some way by, and in turn shaping, the events of the workshop that they happen to attend, return to their schools, each in its own fiscal, social, political, cultural, and administrative environment. The conditions and circumstances of the schools constrain some elements of whatever it is the individual teacher has brought back and reinforce others; moreover, the message the returning teachers may bring (and the enthusiasm with which they bring it) may influence local decision makers in different ways, resulting in, say, greater or lesser support. Into the rooms of these teachers come the children, each with his or her own level of commitment, interest, and ability. There they are confronted by teacher actions shaped not only by all of the preceding factors but by the interactions with the children at the very moment of teaching. Finally, the children return to the neighborhoods and homes, and there they behave in ways shaped to some extent, to be sure, by what they have learned from the teacher, but by myriad other influences—such as parental expectations and peer pressures—as well. (pp. 157-58)
Lincoln and Guba's (1985) portrayal wonderfully illustrates the boundless complexity inherent with inquiry in social settings. Furthermore, the above quote casts doubt that one can show empirical cause and effect relationships when there are so many complex, "mutual simultaneous shaping" (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 150) variables.

I accept the constructivist philosophy that individuals construct multiple realities, or at least, that given one reality, individuals have multiple perspectives of that reality. I share a view with Glesne and Peshkin (1992), that the world is a place where "reality is socially constructed, complex and everchanging" (p. 6). My role then, as a researcher in such a complex web of socially and individually constructed realities, was to try to understand how the various participants in a social setting construct the world around them and then report my interpretations of their constructions.

In my effort to interpret these multiple constructions, my own epistemological framework supports the idea that although it is possible only to approximate an understanding of reality, it is only through my eyes. With this view, it became necessary to seek the type and amounts of information necessary to make as close an approximation as possible to the construction of others. This approximation, however, is based on my interpretation and construction of the participants' realities. Readers of this research then, will engage in further constructions of the already inexact portrayal of the participants' realities. Stake (1994, P. 241) writes that "Meanings do not transfer intact, but take on some of the conceptual uniqueness of the reader." Stake writes about the knowledge transfer from researcher to reader in the following quote:

... case researchers, as others, pass along to readers some of their personal meanings of events and relationships — and fail to pass along others. They know that the reader too will add and subtract, invent and shape — reconstructing the knowledge in ways that leave it differently connected and more likely to be personally useful. (240-41)

Qualitative methods were thus employed, using rich thick descriptions to sustain the reader's interpretations of the participants' constructed realities. Substantial verbatim
quotations, from discussions with participants, appear in Chapters IV and V. The range of quotations allow the reader to engage in one's own interpretations of the participants' words and therefore the reader is less dependent upon my interpretations.

In reference to the axiom, "inquiry is value bound," I don't allege to have worked behind a "veil of objectivity" (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 173); a veil that I feel could cause oversights of significant perspectives. Rather, as Lincoln and Guba suggest, I preferred to place myself in the research, thereby providing the "reader of this research one perspective from which to judge it" (p. 176). Schuerich (1992, p. 5) reaffirms this position when he writes that "We openly put the researcher back into the scientific process, where he or she has always been anyway."

Cochran-Smith and Lytle (1990) point out that research from the interpretivist perspectives presumes that teaching is a highly complex, context-specific, interactive activity in which differences across classrooms, schools, and communities are critically important (emphasis mine). I was interested in exploring the differences (as well as the similarities) and began this study recognizing that differences were likely to exist. I sought to understand and interpret those differences (and similarities) which are brought to bear in the cross case analysis of Chapter V.

The types of phenomena that I was most interested in, professional development, teachers' philosophies on teaching and learning, and contextual variables, could not be understood through a pre-test / post-test inquiry, nor through questionnaires or surveys. In order to gain access to the multiple perspectives of the participants, it was necessary to focus on in-depth, long term interactions with those teachers best suited to directing me to a fuller understanding of these phenomena.

Studying the impacts of teachers' training, philosophies, and contextual variables on their use of alternative assessments promised to be at least as complex as the in-service workshop scenario portrayed above by Lincoln and Guba (1985). Each of the teachers
participating in the study had constructed their own realities, shaped by idiographic
phenomena that were unique to each of them and could only be understood through
naturalistic inquiry whereby the teachers were given a voice. Sarason, Davidson, and
Blatt (1962) point out that "... teachers are more painfully aware than any other
professional group about the inadequacies and irrelevancies of their training ..." and
therefore, it is with the teachers that this study unfolded, in their voices, in their
classrooms, in their multiple realities.

And so this study began, not with a priori hypothesis where I set out to prove
grand theory, but rather to seek out meaning and understanding with the hope of
constructing grounded theory. Glaser and Strauss (1967), in their seminal book
Discovery of Grounded Theory, describe how the discovery of theory from data -
systematically obtained and analyzed - can be furthered. Glaser and Strauss (1967, p. 3)
assert, and I agree, that "... generating grounded theory is a way of arriving at theory
suited to its supposed uses." They continue later by adding that one can judge the
usefulness of a theory by how it was generated, "... that it is likely to be a better theory to
the degree that it has been inductively developed from [research]" (p. 5). Glaser and
Strauss (1967) also explain that:

Generating a theory from data means that most hypotheses and concepts not only
come from the data, but are systematically worked out in relation to the data during
the course of the research. Generating theory involves a process of research. By
contrast, the sources of certain ideas, or even "models," can come from sources
other than the data. The flashes of insight, of seminal ideas, are garnered from
sources outside the data. But the generation of theory from such insights must then
be brought into relation to the data, or there is great danger that theory and
empirical world will mismatch. (p. 6)

This approach does not ignore nor discount previous learnings from my pilot
study (Mescher, 1995) and prior knowledge from previous experiences. In fact, the list
of phenomena associated with the research questions generated in Chapter I, which
initially guided my inquiry, reflects these previous learnings and therefore is grounded.
In the remainder of this chapter, I will describe the methodology and specific techniques employed in this study. The intent in selecting these techniques was to collect the types of data that would be rich, thick, and descriptive, and also lead to an understanding that would make sense and fit the daily situations of teachers and their multiple constructed realities.

The Research Design

One of the major premises of naturalistic inquiry is that designs must be “emergent rather than preordinate” (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 208). These authors list several reasons why the design must be emergent:

- The existence of multiple realities constrains the development of a design based on only one (the investigator’s) construction.
- What will be learned at a site is always dependent on the interaction between investigator and context and the interaction is also not fully predictable.
- The nature of mutual shapings cannot be known until they are witnessed. (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 208)

As such, they write: “All of these factors underscore the indeterminacy under which the naturalistic inquirer functions; the design must therefore be “played by ear”; it must unfold, cascade, roll, emerge” (pp. 208-09).

Therefore, at best, I could only predict the design. This prediction, however, was based on tacit and explicit knowledge attained from a pilot study (Mescher, 1995) that I engaged in prior to this study and from personal experience as an elementary teacher. The actual design continually emerged as I collected and analyzed the data.

These caveats aside, the design for this study involved working with seven elementary teachers over the course of one year. I began with one teacher, using three semi-structured audio-taped interviews to collect data about the teacher’s professional development, philosophy about teaching and learning, and contextual phenomena. The interviews were the major source of data for research question one (1) and three (3), the
former being issues of professional development and the latter being issues of context. Observations provided a means to gather data for these two questions which lent credence to the stated impact of professional development and context on actual classroom use of alternative assessments.

Research question two (2), however, which deals with the impact of personal philosophy, required a greater contribution of data from observations. The interviews provided the participants' description of their philosophies about teaching and learning -- a task which some found difficult to explicitly describe. Although it is not possible to observe philosophy, I was able to observe teaching practices which were either congruent or incongruent with stated philosophical views. To the extent that the two were in harmony, my constructions of the teachers' realities were either corroborated or the need for follow-up interviews was intensified.

With the exception of the first participant, I conducted the initial interview and then did the classroom observations before conducting follow-up interviews. With the first participant, I conducted two interviews before the observations and then followed up with one interview. The types of data collected during the second interviews with each participant dealt with their teaching and assessment strategies. Therefore, I found it much more valuable to conduct the observations first, and then have a chance to discuss their strategies; as such, by allowing the research design to emerge, I was able to make clearer connections. The interviews that followed, provided opportunities to clarify observations and address questions raised from the previous interviews. Transcription of the audiotapes and data reduction began with the first interview and was on-going throughout the study.

As the study proceeded, I repeated the interview-observations-interview-interview sequence with the other teachers participating in the study. The main thrust of data collection occurred over a six month period (from October, 1995 to March, 1996), with
data analysis and follow up field work overlapping that period and extending over an additional three month period (from April, 1996 to June, 1996).

The following sections of this chapter will deal in depth with issues of sampling selection, methods of data collection, data analysis, trustworthiness, ethics, and politics.

Site and Sampling Selection

Patton (1990), states that “Perhaps nothing better captures the difference between quantitative and qualitative methods than the different logics that undergird sampling approaches” (p. 169). Quantitative methods usually employ large random samples in an attempt to increase statistical strength. Qualitative methods rely on usually smaller samples selected purposefully. Through selecting a purposeful sample, a researcher can help to insure that the types of rich, in-depth, contextualized information, can be attained.

The logic and power of purposeful sampling, according to Patton (1990, p. 169), “lies in selecting information-rich cases for study in depth.” He continues by stating that “Information-rich cases are those from which one can learn a great deal about issues of central importance to the purpose of the research, thus the term purposeful sampling” (p. 169).

Context is critical when making sampling decisions. Lincoln and Guba (1985) write about the importance of context and state that the naturalist deals with each context on its own terms. They list several characteristics of purposeful sampling as being that it involves:

- emergent sampling design
- serial selection of sample units
- continuous adjustment or “focusing” of the sample
- selection to the point of redundancy

The first characteristic, emergent sampling design, refers to the fact that in a naturalistic study the sample is not always drawn in advance, or it can be modified as the
study progresses. The second characteristic, of serial selection, deals with comments I made above in the section titled The Research Design. Below, I quote Lincoln and Guba’s description of serial selection since it is a key characteristic of my design:

The purpose of maximum variation is best achieved by selecting each unit of the sample only after the previous unit has been tapped and analyzed. Each successive unit can be chosen to extend information already obtained, to obtain other information that contrasts with it, or to fill in gaps in the information obtained so far. It does not matter where the investigator begins in the sampling process (from a practical point of view, the first unit is often a gatekeeper or someone nominated by the gatekeeper), but successive units are selected in accord with the need to extend, test, and fill in information. Such successive units are most easily obtained by nominations (reputational, personal), but any means that brings the investigator’s attention to bear on heuristic new units can be employed. Techniques such as the “snowball” sampling technique have utility, as does, we suggest, the “each one reach one” technique most often employed for Sunday school outreach activities. (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, pp. 201-02)

The characteristic of continuous adjustment or “focusing” of the sample seems inherently linked to the first two characteristics. It speaks to the emergent nature of the sample selection as well as the idea of a serial selection of the sample based on insights and information gained by the investigator. I am skeptical about the forth characteristic of selection to the point of redundancy. Given my belief that there are multiple realities that individuals construct, I reject the notion that one can ever attain redundancy or the point that no new information is forthcoming. Even in an ideal situation where there are not time nor funding constraints, redundancy can never truly be met.

The units of analysis at the macro level for this study were individual elementary teachers who use alternative assessment strategies. Beyond that level, the unit of analysis became individual interviews and classroom observations. The sites where the participants were located were both urban and suburban; this however was not a criterion for selection. Learnings from my pilot study (Mescher, 1995), about the importance of collegiality, suggested that it may be important to strive to select participants who were an “island” (an individual who is perhaps the only one or one of a few in the school that is using alternative assessment), as well as participants who, along with the rest of the
faculty at a school, were using alternative assessments. This strategy comes closest to Patton's (1990, p. 174) stratified purposeful sampling. The intent of the strategy is to capture major variations.

For this study, I employed two types of purposeful sampling that Patton (1990) describes. The first method, he refers to as criterion sampling (p. 176). In this method, all the subjects selected should meet some predetermined criterion. In the case of this study, I selected teachers who are actively practicing alternative assessment strategies. I knew first hand that two of the participants used alternative assessment strategies. Four others were recommended to me (through a snowball sampling technique described below) by individuals who are recognized as specialists in the field of assessment.

The second sampling method employed, which Patton calls snowball sampling (p. 176) was used to locate participants. This process works, for example, by asking well-situated people: "Who else do you know that is using alternative assessment strategies in their classroom?" The snowball technique turned out to be an extremely effective method to locate participants for this study. I found that there is an informal network of teachers who use alternative assessment in their classes. Each of the participants in this study were able to generate a list of other teachers who use alternative assessments.

The sample size was seven elementary teachers. This was a size manageable enough to allow me to reach the depth of information needed. I had found in previous experience, with in-depth interviewing and observational techniques, that this number is an efficient size to manage, both in terms of time and ability to process the vast array of information.
Methods of Data Collection

**Triangulation**

Recognizing that in isolation all data collection methods are imperfect, several authors (Denzin, 1978; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Patton, 1990) write about the need for triangulation of methods. Triangulation involves using several kinds of methods such as interviewing, observations, and document analysis. Research designs that rely on a single method are more susceptible to limitations which may be inherent in the particular method. The logic for triangulation of methods is that different methods will produce different types of data which can be used as a cross-check. Webb et al. (1966) point out that “Once a proposition has been confirmed by two or more measurement processes, the uncertainty of its interpretation is greatly reduced” (p. 3). In a similar vein, Morse (1994) writes that:

> Because different “lenses” or perspectives result from the use of different methods, often more than one method may be used within a project so the researcher can gain a more holistic view of the setting. (224)

For this study then, I used in-depth semi-structured interviews and classroom observations. These methods are described below.

**In-depth Interviewing**

Fontana and Frey (1994) state that beside the fact that the spoken word always has a “residue of ambiguity,” interviewing is one of the “... most common and most powerful ways we use to try to understand our fellow human beings” (p. 361). They categorize the art of interviewing into three groups: structured, group, and unstructured.

Unstructured interviews can provide greater breadth of coverage and do not limit the scope of responses. Fontana and Frey (1994) differentiate between structured and unstructured interviews in the following:
The former (structured) aims at capturing precise data of a codable nature in order to explain behavior within preestablished categories, whereas the latter (unstructured) is used in an attempt to understand the complex behavior of members of society without imposing any a priori categorization that may limit the field of inquiry. (p. 366, in parenthesis-mine)

Marshall and Rossman (1995) describe in-depth interviewing as being "much more like conversations than formal events with predetermined response categories" (p. 80). They make a point that "... the participant's perspective on the phenomena of interest should unfold as the participant views it, not as the researcher views it" (p. 80).

Patton (1990, p. 278) tells us that "Qualitative interviewing begins with the assumption that the perspective of others is meaningful, knowable, and able to be made explicit."

The type of interviewing that I conducted during my study consisted of semi-structured interviews. I wanted to allow the participants' perspectives to unfold and to allow the interviews to progress in an emergent manner. I also wanted to have enough structure to insure that I was addressing some of the same questions with each participant. I found that it was helpful to prepare for interviews by generating a list of core questions to serve as a guide. Following methodological learnings from my pilot study (Mescher, 1995), and Patton's (1990 pp. 295-96) advice, I made use of open-ended questions which do not "... presuppose which dimension of feeling or thought will be salient for the interviewee," so that the respondents can "... respond in their own terms."

Fontana and Frey (1994) discuss several elements of interviewing that an investigator must be concerned with. They include: accessing the setting, understanding the language and culture of the respondents, deciding on how to present oneself, locating an informant, gaining trust, establishing rapport, and collecting empirical materials (pp. 366-67). Experiences in the past three years, when I made the transition from being a public school teacher to a graduate student in academe, led me to realize that I am now on the "outside," although I still have an emic perspective. As such, I was able to quite easily establish rapport, gain trust, access the setting, and understand the language and
culture of the respondents. Because of my experiences as an elementary teacher, I was able to place myself in the role of my respondents, which resulted in more informed research. It was helpful therefore that I stress my experience in the classroom and present myself as a colleague.

All interviews were audio-taped for later transcription and data analysis. Although Lincoln and Guba (1985) point out that taking handwritten notes rather than using tape recorders "should be the mode of choice" (p. 272), I preferred to follow Patton's (1990) advice that the "tape recorder is part of the indispensable equipment of researchers using qualitative methods" (p. 348). Lincoln and Guba (1985) claim that taking notes "forces the interviewer to attend carefully to what is being said" (p. 272). In past experiences, I found that advice to misleading. Indeed, not only do I miss many details, or dismiss some comments as irrelevant (data that may later be crucial in analysis), but taking the time to write down responses distracts me, and adversely impacts the flow and pace of the interview. I believe this is what Patton had in mind when he wrote that using tape recorders increases the accuracy of data collection and "... permits the interviewer to be more attentive to the interviewee" (p. 348)

Transcription of audio-taped interviews was accomplished as soon after each interview as time permitted. A quick turn-around helped in the translation of inaudible speech by combining the recent memory with the context of the quote to retrieve the data. It also allowed me to include comments (in the margins or elsewhere) about non-verbal cues which lingered in my memory. Interviews were transcribed verbatim, including pauses, utterances, inflection and laughter.

There were certain types of data I sought to collect and understand which were perhaps only accessible through interviewing. I was not able to observe the participants' past professional development, nor could I expect to be able to observe all the complexities of the context, past and present. Neither did I expect that a participant's
philosophy of teaching and learning could be understood solely though observations, although subsequent propositions could be triangulated through observations. I also made the assumption that the teacher participants were the best source of information on these topics.

Observations

In an attempt to establish a greater understanding of what each of the teachers in the study meant by alternative assessment, I relied on classroom observations. Marshall & Rossman (1995) write that “Observation entails the systematic noting and recording of events, behaviors, and artifacts (objects) in the social setting chosen for study” (p. 79). They also note that observation plays a key role during interviewing, as the investigator needs to be attuned to non-verbal cues such as body language, affect and inflection. The main criterion to apply in judging the written description of an observation, according to Patton (1990, p. 202) is whether it “... permits the reader to enter into and understand the situation described.”

Adler and Adler (1994) provide this rich description of qualitative observations:

Qualitative observation is fundamentally naturalistic in essence; it occurs in the natural context of occurrence, among the actors who would naturally be participating in the interaction, and follows the natural stream of everyday life. As such, it enjoys the advantage of drawing the observer into the phenomenological complexity of the world, where connections, correlations, and causes can be witnessed as and how they unfold. Qualitative observers are not bound, thus by predetermined categories of measurement or response, but are free to search for concepts or categories that appear meaningful to subjects. (p. 378)

Adler and Adler (1994) describe various levels of involvement by the investigator, representing a continuum of involvement ranging from the investigator's being fundamentally removed from the setting, to the investigator's fulfilling a complete membership role. For the purposes of this study, I assumed what they describe as “... researcher in peripheral membership role” (p. 380). In this role, I did not engage in many
activities of the classroom nor did I often assume the role of the teacher. I found in my pilot study (Mescher, 1995), however, that attempting to observe a teacher using alternative assessment is a difficult task requiring clarifying follow-up questions to validate what I thought I observed. This role therefore, required interacting with the participant frequently enough to gain an emic perspective, without participating in the role of the participant.

Denzin (1989), as cited in Adler and Adler (1994, p. 380) suggests that observational data should contain explicit reference to participants, interactions, routines, rituals, temporal elements, interpretations, and social organization. Patton (1990 p. 200) warns that “... using observational methods requires disciplined training and rigorous preparation.” I received relevant training in the form of three successive years of observing student teachers, taking anecdotal records, documenting observations, and verifying perspectives with the student teachers and their cooperating teachers, which proved invaluable in data collection.

In the spirit of emergent design, the observations tended to move from being descriptive, general, and unfocused, towards becoming more focused, with attention directed on “... the people, behaviors, times, spaces, feelings, structures, and/or processes” (Adler & Adler, 1994, p. 381). Initial observations informed and shaped subsequent observations, with specific questions arising which required more closely focused observations or further interviews. The interviews conducted prior to the observations afforded additional focus.

In my research design, I indicated that (with the exception of the first participant) observations took place after the first interviews. With each participant, I conducted an initial interview that focused on the reconstruction of their professional development. The initial interview was followed up by classroom observations. The observations provided a wealth of data in the form of field notes about the classroom culture and environment.
The observations also provided opportunities to develop a sense of the "typical day." The data I collected were descriptions of my observations, and also descriptions and interpretations of assessment tools used in the classrooms. The aggregate data did "... generate the kind of 'common sense' or 'cultural knowledge' that ... lies at the base of all knowledge and theory ..." (Adler & Adler, 1994, p. 377).

The observations revealed recurring patterns of behavior and practice which illuminated what the teachers meant when they said they use alternative assessment. The observations also offered an opportunity to triangulate interpretations obtained from the interviews. Whilst the interviews contributed self-report data about the ways that alternative assessments are being used in the participants' classrooms, the observations provided opportunities to describe in greater detail the implementation of alternative assessment strategies. This detail either corroborated or contradicted data from the interviews. In either case, the detail was crucial to later data analysis. In a similar vein, and as stated earlier, it was possible to find evidence during observations which were either compatible or discordant with participant's stated philosophies of teaching and learning.

Data Analysis

My greatest methodological learning from my pilot study (Mescher, 1995) was the need to start the data analysis at the beginning of the study and to analyze the data throughout data collection. Analyzing the data allows a researcher to create explanations, pose hypotheses, develop theories, and link stories to other stories (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). If this process is done as the data is collected rather than waiting until all the data is in, a researcher can focus and shape the study as it proceeds.

There were several experiences during my pilot study (Mescher, 1995) that convinced me that I should have started data analysis earlier. By the very slow nature of
transcribing, I found that I naturally interpreted and analyzed key phrases or exchanges. These interpretations and analyses, however, were implicit and I failed to capture those thoughts; those thoughts were then lost. I found the same to be true during data reduction as I assigned data to various categories. During the process of data analysis, I had clear reasons for assigning some data to particular categories but I never recorded the thoughts. They, too, were lost.

The challenge of qualitative analysis, according to Patton (1990, pp. 371-72) "... is to make sense of massive amounts of data, reduce the volume of information, identify significant patterns, and construct a framework for communicating the essence of what the data reveal." Various authors (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Patton, 1990; Huberman & Miles, 1994) indicate that, unlike quantitative data, for which there are clear conventions to use, qualitative data has no absolute rules for data analysis. Patton (1990) writes:

There are no formulas for determining significance. There are no ways of perfectly replicating the researcher’s analytical thought processes. There are no straightforward tests for reliability and validity. In short, there are no absolute rules except to do the very best with your full intellect to fairly represent the data and communicate what the data reveal given the purpose of the study. (p. 372)

Although there are no absolute rules for data analysis, Huberman and Miles (1994, p. 429) provide an interactive model of data analysis which involves linked processes of data collection, data reduction, data display, and conclusion-drawing and verification. Data reduction involves reducing the "... potential universe of data ... in an anticipatory way " (p. 429). The reduction, however, is based on an emerging conceptual framework and is informed by the other “linked” processes. Data display consists of organizing the data in such a way, as to permit "... conclusion drawing and/or action taking ..." (p. 429). This may be accomplished, for example, by using matrices, diagrams, vignettes, synopses, or structured summaries. Conclusion drawing and verification generally involves a wide extent of strategies which may either be for comparison/contrast purposes, or for confirmatory inference. Within the data analysis
model offered by Huberman and Miles (1994, p. 429), it is critical to realize that the processes are not linear, however, and should be ongoing throughout the study so that the processes inform each other.

The data analysis process that I practiced during this study were nonlinear, much like the model offered by Huberman and Miles (1994, p. 429). Additionally, data analysis closely resembled Strauss and Corbin's (1990) description of open coding. They write:

During open coding the data are broken down into discrete parts, closely examined, compared for similarities and differences, and questions are asked about the phenomena as reflected in the data. Through this process, one's own and others' assumptions about phenomena are questioned or explored, leading to new discoveries. (p. 62)

Within Strauss and Corbin's (1990) description of open coding, they discuss procedures that involve making comparisons and asking questions. Specifically, they discuss procedures of labeling phenomena, discovering categories, naming categories, and developing categories. Although the process appears linear, if plugged into the framework presented by Huberman and Miles (1994), it can become a cyclical process.

For this study, data analysis began during my pilot study (Mescher, 1995), during which I conducted a line-by-line analysis (Strauss and Corbin, 1990, p. 72) of interviews. The line by line analysis proved to be generative, as it was a major source for the list of phenomena presented in Chapter I, which for convenience I present again here:

- description of preservice training/student teaching
- description of induction year experiences
- extent of inservice training
- teaching experience
- teaching strategies employed
- conferences attended
- continuing education
- professional readings
- time frame (at what point in their careers they began to use alternative assessments)
- collegial support
• administrative support
• parental support

With the above list of phenomena generated from the line-by-line analysis, I was able to generate the list of guiding questions for the semi-structured interviews. The list of phenomena also served as initial categories as I began data reduction and compared collected data for similarities and differences.

I mentioned elsewhere that the data for this study were analyzed in multiple case studies with cross-case analysis. A potential danger involved with cross-case analysis is that as Huberman and Miles (1994, p. 435) point out, the multiple cases might "... be analyzed at high levels of inference, aggregating out the local webs of causality and ending with a smoothed set of generalizations that may not apply to any single case."

These authors describe a strategy for cross-case analysis, termed variable-oriented strategies. This strategy consists of identifying themes in individual cases and then looking for recurrence of those themes that cut across or emerge in the other cases. They suggest that "Often a key variable comes clear only during cross-site analysis" (p. 436). Glaser and Strauss (1967, pp. 101-02) comment on a constant comparative method that stresses the importance of analyzing data throughout the study, whether it be across cases or within single cases:

If the analyst wishes only to generate theoretical ideas-new categories and their properties, hypotheses and interrelated hypotheses—he cannot be confined to the practice of coding first and then analyzing the data since, in generating theory, he is constantly redesigning and reintegrating his theoretical notions as he reviews his material. Analysis after the coding operation would not only unnecessarily delay and interfere with his purpose, but the explicit coding itself often seems an unnecessary, burdensome task. As a result, the analyst merely inspects his data for new properties of his theoretical categories, and writes memos on these properties.

The defining rule that Glaser and Strauss (1967, p. 106) offer for the constant comparative method is: "While coding an incident for a category, compare it with the previous incidents in the same and different groups coded in the same category" (emphasis in original). Coding, they suggest, can be as simple as notes in the margins,
or more elaborate, like using index cards. Had the personal computer been a reality at the time of their publication, I’m sure it would have come into mention.

Prior to the data reduction process mentioned above as a part of the Huberman and Miles (1994) data analysis model, I processed the raw data into usable data. To aid data analysis I transcribed all interviews, verbatim, on a word processor soon after each interview. Selected field notes were also word-processed.

Huberman and Miles (1994) warn about burying oneself under 1,000-plus pages of data. Clearly, the issue becomes one of data management; a process made easier with computers, but still requiring a coherent system "... for collecting information from a range of informants, across a potential range of sites, in a roughly comparable format" (p. 430). I was mindful of a metaphor used by Lather (personal communication, February 14, 1995) in a graduate class on qualitative inquiry. She asked us to imagine that we were making a movie and had shot 100 hours of film. The movie, however, needed to be two hours in duration, which required the difficult task of "letting go of those 98 hours." I found the process of data analysis to be equally painstaking, but I was again cognizant of Lather's comment that "... charts and matrices can allow one to bring back those 98 hours."

I utilized the technological advantages of computers for data analysis. Data reduction was accomplished through various techniques. Following my plan laid out in the proposal for this study I began by coding hard copies of transcripts and field notes with different colored highlighters—each color representing a different category. This method gave way to opening files for different categories and using a copy and paste strategy to compress pertinent data. Eventually this method was replaced by a combination of the two. I turned to coding data on the hard copies and then within a word processing program used a search function to find the coded data to cut and paste into the separate files which were set up by category.
I found, as Richards and Richards (1994) point out, that the computer did not do
the work, it did not analyze the data; it just made it easier to store, organize, and retrieve
data.

Trustworthiness

The basic issue in relation to trustworthiness is simple: How can an inquirer
persuade his or her audiences (including self) that the findings of an inquiry are
worth paying attention to, worth taking account of? (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 290)

Lather (1986) speaks of being between a rock and a hard place, which I interpret
as the awkward position that qualitative researchers may find themselves in when trying
to live up to the quantitative paradigm's claims of validity and reliability. Qualitative
researchers write about trustworthiness as a measure of the credibility of their findings.
In the remainder of this section, I will describe triangulation, prolonged engagement,
member checks, peer debriefing, and thick description as techniques I employed to
establish trustworthiness.

Triangulation

The logic of triangulation is based on the recognition that each research method
has its own inherent strengths and weaknesses. With a combination of two or more
different research methods Denzin (1970, p. 308) suggests that investigators can "...
achieve the best of each, while overcoming their unique deficiencies." Denzin (1970, pp.
298-99) uses a metaphor of a kaleidoscope in discussing the advantages of using multiple
methods:

Indeed, scientists demand a certain degree of consensuality, but that consensuality
will never be complete, since each method implies a different line of action toward
that reality-hence each will reveal different aspects of it, much as a kaleidoscope,
depending on the angle at which it is held, will reveal different colors and
configurations of objects to the viewer. Methods are like the kaleidoscope-
depending on how they are approached, held, and acted toward, different
observations will be revealed. This is not to imply that reality has the shifting
qualities of the colored prism, but that it too is an object that moves and that will not permit one interpretation to be stamped upon it.

By engaging in in-depth interviews, observations, and limited document analysis - by collecting data through various methods, I increased the credibility of my findings while decreasing the uncertainty of interpretation.

**Extended Engagement**

Lincoln and Guba (1985, p. 301) describe prolonged engagement as "... the investment of sufficient time to achieve certain purposes: learning the 'culture,' testing for misinformation introduced by distortions either of the self or of the respondents, and building trust." Thus, credibility can be furthered through time and over time. What constitutes **sufficient** time, of course, is relative to "... the context's scope and sophistication." The idea of prolonged engagement offered by Lincoln and Guba is based on a continuum, but may create an image of drawn-out engagement over the course of many months. The amount of time that I spent in the field with the teachers, interviewing them and observing their classrooms, may be more accurately described as extended engagement. The time spent with the teachers, together with the time that I spent transcribing interviews and processing field notes, contributed to trustworthy data.

In reference to the above quote, concerning *distortions either of the self or of the respondents*, Lincoln and Guba (1985, p. 302) point out that "... first and foremost the investigator must deal with personal distortions." These are distortions that may occur merely by being in an unfamiliar situation. **Sufficient** time spent in that situation allows one to make the unfamiliar familiar - acclimate oneself, so that the investigator can fully understand the context.

Distortions by others is perhaps a more complicated phenomenon, as it may be intentional or unintended. **Extended engagement provides the opportunity for the**
investigator to "size up" the situation and judge whether or not the observed behavior is genuine. Additionally, if there is intentional distortion, it becomes less likely over time that the participant can maintain the facade.

Finally, extended engagement allows the investigator to build trust with the participant. Trust can be built as the participant perceives the researcher's investing sufficient time to get the story right. It can also be established through extended engagement when the investigator is able to substantiate previous promises of anonymity, promises to maintain the interests of the respondent and allowing the respondent to influence the inquiry process. These later concerns are further addressed as a function of member checks.

**Member Checks**

The member check is described by Lincoln and Guba (1985, p. 314) as a process "... whereby data, analytic categories, interpretations, and conclusions are tested with members of those stakeholding groups from whom the data were originally collected ..." Given my desire to approximate as closely as possible the respondents' constructed realities, it was imperative that participants had the opportunity to respond to the data and my interpretations for authenticity.

I made member checking a continuous on-going process, both formally and informally. Informally, member checks occurred on a daily basis during observations and interviews, and as such, they were enhanced by extended engagement. Clarifying questions during or after interviews and observations served to increase the clarity of my interpretations. More formally, I provided copies of interview transcripts to respondents so they could verify their accuracy. As data analysis progressed, I provided my interpretations of their constructed realities to the participants so that they could verify my
findings. These member checks were vital for increasing the approximation by which I attempted to interpret the realities of the teachers in the study.

**Peer Debriefing**

Citing Lincoln and Guba (1985, p. 308), peer debriefing is "... a process of exposing oneself to a disinterested peer in a manner paralleling an analytic session and for the purpose of exploring aspects of the inquiry that might otherwise remain only implicit within the inquirer's mind." These authors provide four compelling reasons (p. 308) for incorporating peer debriefing as a strategy in building trustworthiness. Peer debriefing:

1. keeps the inquirer "honest" by forcing him or her to make explicit, issues of substantive, methodological, legal, ethical, or any other relevant matters.
2. provides initial and searching opportunities to test emerging hypotheses.
3. provides opportunities to develop and again make explicit, next steps in the emergent design.
4. provides opportunities to "force out" implicit complexities, thereby affording their expression.

One might view the peer debriefing strategy as multiple mini-dissertation defenses with a low-stakes, non-threatening, partisan group. Following Lincoln and Guba's (1985, pp. 308-09) advice to select members for the peer debriefing who are neither junior nor senior to oneself, I made arrangements with two colleagues, who were approximately at same point in their studies and were also proposing naturalistic studies, to meet regularly on a bi-weekly basis. The purposes of our meetings were the same as the four reasons provided by Lincoln and Guba above. Dialogue with the members of my peer debriefing proved valuable throughout the study. Discussions and arguments that ensued enhanced the design of the study, organization of the presentation of findings, and clarity of interpretations.
Thick Description

As the name implies, thick description refers to providing sufficient information about the context of the inquiry, so that a reader has an appropriate base of information to determine the degree of transferability or fittingness. Lincoln and Guba (1985, p. 124) describe transferability as a direct function of the similarity between contexts, and fittingness as the degree of congruence between sending and receiving contexts. This quote by the same authors helps frame the importance of providing thick description:

Now an inquirer cannot know all the contexts to which someone may wish to transfer working hypotheses; one cannot reasonably expect him or her to indicate the range of contexts to which there might be some transferability. (p. 124)

The inquirer, however, can provide sufficient information so that subsequent readers of the research can make informed judgments about the degree of transferability and fittingness to other contexts.

Lastly, I feel that I began a longer range establishment of trustworthiness by conducting a carefully planned and professionally implemented study. By establishing a quality track record from the beginning, I will establish trustworthiness that will follow me to my next study.

Politics and Ethics

... to our subjects first, to the study next, and to ourselves last. (Fontana & Frey, 1994, p. 373)

The very decision to conduct a naturalistic study reflects an ethical decision. "The openness of qualitative inquiry allows the researcher to approach the inherent complexity of social interaction and to do justice to that complexity, to respect it in its own right" (Glesne & Peshkin, 1992, p. 7). Many of the techniques and methods explained throughout this chapter, such as triangulation of methods, member checking, extended
engagement, and peer debriefing were designed to increase the accuracy of representation of the participants' constructed realities.

**Representation**

Conducting educational research ethically requires a great deal of sensitivity and extra effort by the researcher (Eichelberger, 1989). Ethics in a qualitative study, such as the one that I conducted, necessitates making sure that the researcher allows the teachers' voices to be heard. In this study, the interpretation of the teachers' realities are mine, but it is the teachers' realities that I tried to approximate. I felt that I was accepted into their professional lives and classrooms to such an extent as to be allowed to probe for greater understanding of their philosophies and then to look for evidence of their philosophies in practice. I therefore felt compelled to reveal my findings as accurately as possible. In the same way that I established trustworthiness using member checks, I also dealt with the ethics of my research. By using member checks, I helped insure that what I was finding and reporting was the "real thing" - that it represents the constructed reality of each of the participants.

In the American Psychological Association's (APA hereafter) publication, *Ethical Principles in the Conduct of Research With Human Participants* (1973), issues of informed consent, freedom from coercion to participate, and anonymity of the individual are considered. Following, is a brief discussion of these issues.

**Informed Consent**

Informed consent, the APA suggest, "... requires that the decision to participate be made in light of adequate and accurate information" (p. 27). Therefore, I fully informed the participants about the anticipated procedures and purpose of the study. As
such, I dealt with the issue of informed consent through the process of gaining entry (Marshall & Rossman, 1995).

Freedom from Coercion to Participate

The APA publication (1973) states as a principle, that “Ethical research practice requires the investigator to respect the individual’s freedom to decline to participate in research or to discontinue participation at any time” (p. 42). Eichelberger (1989) reminds the reader that in the process of gaining entry (in a school for example), the researcher usually contacts an administrator in central office and is then sent to a principal who may enthusiastically volunteer his or her teachers to participate. By the time the researcher reaches the teachers, they may feel like they have no choice but to participate in the study. As the researcher, I minimized this concern by contacting the teachers individually (with administrative approval) to help insure that respondents were truly interested in participating. The participants were informed that they were free to decline participation without fear of reprisal. Furthermore, I assured the respondents that they could discontinue participation in the study at any time, again without fear of reprisal.

I sought and was granted permission to conduct research in Henderson City Schools and Carrollton City Schools. This conventional procedure entailed providing a prospectus of the proposed research to the college office for referral to appropriate school district officials. Additionally, a similar prospectus (research proposal abstract) was deemed “exempt” from review by the university’s Human Subjects Review Committee.

Anonymity

The APA (1973) suggests that the inquirer take a conservative stance on anonymity since there are “... great individual differences in the resistance different people would offer to the disclosure of different types of personal information” (p. 87).
To insure anonymity, audio-tapes were transcribed using pseudonyms. Anonymity was an option for any participant that desired it, although some of the teachers wanted their names used in the final presentation of findings. Where necessary, identities were masked throughout the transcripts. The audio-tapes themselves will be kept secure at my residence, where after a period of three years, they will be erased or destroyed.

Entering this study without an apriori hypothesis lessened the likelihood of manipulating or "fudging" the data (either implicitly or explicitly) to prove that my hypothesis was correct. Yet, I am aware that this as an ethical issue, and as such, I took measures to insure that I did not manipulate the data and force conclusions. The use of member checks -- whereby I reported my findings to the participants, extended engagement, thick description, and peer debriefing all helped insure the integrity of the findings.

**Justification for this Research**

That many teachers in the field are using alternative assessment strategies is unquestioned. That we do little to prepare teachers in their pre-service training for assessing their students is also evident. To find out how and why some teachers have moved from preservice teachers with little or no background in assessment towards inservice teachers who actively use alternative assessment should prove useful to teacher educators, staff developers, and those involved in professional development.
CHAPTER IV

PRESENTATION OF CASE STUDIES

Introduction

The findings from this study are organized into five separate case studies which are presented in this chapter. Four of the case studies represent elementary teachers who use alternative assessments. The fifth case study represents a traditional elementary teacher who does not use alternative assessments, and is included as a comparative benchmark.

Data were collected from two additional participants (n=7) which are not presented as individual case studies. The two teachers include one who uses alternative assessments and one who does not. Data from both teachers were valuable to the study, as they contributed to emergent themes and corroborated findings. Excerpts from interviews with Jan, the teacher who uses alternative assessments, along with discussion of implications are included in the cross case analysis of Chapter V and the summary and discussion of Chapter VI. Jan's case study was not developed because I felt it was superfluous to narrate the description of her classroom, a typical day in her classroom, and her assessment strategies. There were striking resemblances between Jan and the other teachers in that regard. The data that I later present, concerning Jan, deal with issues of her professional development and are worth reporting because of their distinctive nature. Data representing the additional teacher who does not use alternative assessments were excluded from this study. I found that for the purpose of presenting a comparative benchmark case, the development of one case study was sufficient.
Each individual case study roughly follows the same organizational template. Included in each case study is an introduction, followed by a description of the participant’s classroom; a typical day in their classroom; their professional background; and their assessment strategies. The description of the typical day in each classroom draws from observational field notes. In each case, the typical day presented closely mirrors a full day spent in that classroom. Added to the description, however, is data collected during other observations and pertinent information from interviews. The objective is to provide the reader a sense of what the students experience in the class during a typical day and thereby provide a glimpse of the role of teacher and the role of the students. The descriptions of the teachers’ classrooms and typical day provide wonderful insights into the teachers’ philosophies of teaching and learning.

This chapter combines narrative descriptive writing with direct quotes from discussions with the participants. Excerpts from the discussions appear verbatim as an additional data source from which the reader can infer meaning. My own interpretations and analyses are interspersed throughout this writing and again in Chapter V, where I include a cross case analysis. The depth of information is included so that the reader does not solely depend upon my interpretations. It should also allow the reader to judge for oneself the relevancy and accuracy of the interpretations presented herein.

Beth

Introduction

Arriving at Frankfort Elementary twenty minutes early for my first interview with Beth, I introduced myself at the main office and was given directions to find Beth’s classroom. I walked the short distance to her room, which necessitates a trip through the lunchroom, and greeted the few students who were waiting in the hall for the school day.
to begin. A Chinese proverb was displayed next to the door that read: *I hear and I forget, I see and I remember, I do and I understand.* Anxious to see her room, I peeked through the 12 inch square glass window in the door and saw Beth sitting at a table working with an individual student. I tapped on the door, let myself in and was greeted by Beth who then continued assisting the young student.

The student, it turns out, was not one of Beth's, but was a fourth grader from another class who was slated to give the morning announcements in twenty minutes to the rest of the school. She and Beth were working out last minute additions and perfecting pronunciations of unfamiliar words for her moment to speak to her peers. The involvement of students making the morning announcements was new to the school; one that Beth had initiated in the previous year and continued to coordinate. This first glimpse of Beth’s initiative and drive as a teacher was not too surprising. Previously, as a fellow student in a graduate level class, I had listened to several accounts of her teaching and what she thought was important in education. I remembered the zest, confidence, and pride with which she spoke about her own teaching. Recounting that on several occasions her discussions involved the role of assessment, I felt that hers was an ideal case to begin with.

**The Classroom**

Arrangement

During the twenty minutes that I was to wait for our scheduled interview, I took my first look around Beth’s classroom and observed a quick transition of the start of a school day: “quick,” because the students were only in the room for fifteen minutes before going to art. As the students entered the classroom, they first grabbed a chair from one of two stacks of chairs positioned near the back of the room. The class of twenty-
seven fifth graders consisted of nearly equal numbers of boys and girls, with four of the students being African American, the remaining being European American. They then located themselves at one of five tables. Beth had arranged the room so that students were together in groups of five or six, and on this particular day the students apparently had some choice of where to sit as was made evident by the resulting ensemble of boys tables and girls tables, with only one table of mixed gender; math would have it that way. The students were at their tables long enough for morning announcements and to begin spelling work in their personal folders.

**Visuals**

One could make several assumptions about some of the things Beth values in teaching with just a cursory look around her classroom. It appeared that science held a dominant role in her class. Besides the bulletin board which illustrated the "scientific method," there were terrariums with live plants; several live animals including rats, hermit crabs, gerbils, and various insects in varying stages of metamorphosis. On one of the windows was displayed human x-rays of hands, feet, skulls, teeth, and chests. There were also a plenitude of manipulatives which were readily available to all the students; not stored in closed cabinets or high on shelves that only the teacher could access, but available for everyone. These included things such as scales, balances, thermometers, rulers, cylinders, petri dishes, trays, and measuring scoops. Additional evidence of the importance of science included posters about recycling, conserving natural resources, and endangered species; a hanging display of the solar system; and "big book" copies of the *Magic School Bus* series.

Student displays in the hall revealed that they had spent time predicting and graphing their ideas about soybeans. On one such graph, students were asked to predict how many soybeans would fit in to a test tube filled to the 4cm mark. Another asked
what would happen to soybeans when put in water. The displays had been produced by
students in groups and they included some of the actual results. For example there were
swollen soybeans and test tubes filled with soybeans to the 4cm mark. Some one looking
at the displays could lift up little flaps to reveal a student’s first try or prediction. Included
in the impressive display of students’ involvement in the scientific process was Beth’s
own hypothesis, modeling teacher as learner, about one of the questions: I think that
because the beans are smaller, they will not swell as much as the kidney beans. Therefore
I predict that the beans will rise only 2 cm. The hallway display included information
gathered over the internet, suggesting that Beth was integrating technology into her
teaching, which further suggests an effort to stay very current in educational trends.

The idea that Beth was current in educational trends was supported by bulletin
boards that covered the walls around the room; each focused on other content areas and
reflected current mainstream thought in those areas. These included bulletin boards that
illustrated math problem solving strategies, the steps in the writing process, and a writer’s
spotlight. There were additional displays and visuals: the color wheel, origami, poetry,
life cycles, number lines (including negative integers), cursive alphabet, multiplication
chart. The displays included plenty of student work and progress.

Children’s Literature

Other aspects of the physical environment of Beth’s classroom that may suggest
what she values about teaching included a large selection and display of quality children’s
literature. Just a few of the titles were: Whipping Boy, Shiloh, Taste of Blackberries,
The Great Gilly Hopkins, The Summer of the Swans, Number the Stars, and From the
Mixed-up Files of Mrs. Basil E Frankweiler. Additionally, there were collections of
books centered around various themes for the students to use as resources, such as:
poetry, space, inventions, and food. Interestingly, the majority of textbooks that one
normally finds in students' desks were either missing from the room altogether or were piled in corners or under tables. The only text that students had at their desks were math books. According to Beth, the piled books served only as a resource for the students; if they wanted access to them, they were available but the books were not relied on or used for instruction.

**Manipulatives**

There were various centers located around the room: a listening center, a computer center with three computers and a printer, art center, science center, and a math center. Just as the science manipulatives were plentiful and accessible, so were the math manipulatives and art supplies. For math, students had easy access to calculators, flash cards, geo boards, blocks, counting discs, play money, fraction games and unifix cubes. They also had access to plenty of paper (all types), scissors, markers, glue, wall paper, pencils, paint, compasses, stencils, and index cards. These lists are not comprehensive but give an idea of the variety of materials and manipulatives available to the students in Beth's classroom.

**A Day in Beth's Classroom**

**Morning**

A typical day in Beth's classroom begins with the students working individually on a spelling task. This appears to be a strategy to get the students engaged quickly so that some of the mechanics of teaching, like morning announcements, lunch count, and notes from parents can be dealt with. Once these matters are handled, Beth introduces what the various centers will be for the day and what the goals of each center are.
students spend the morning hours rotating through five centers or groupings so that they have been in each area by the end of the day.

One of the groupings always involves student free choice. Other groupings usually deal with math, reading, science, and writing. This varies from day to day and often times a center involves an integrated task that might combine math and science, science and social studies, art and social studies, or any possible combination of content areas. The tasks at the centers may be extended long term tasks that run the course of several weeks or months, while others may extend over several days, and yet others may be tasks that an individual can complete in a day. Sometimes there is a designed component of competition between groups, for example, which group locates the greatest number of inventions while using an encyclopedia on compact disc while at the computer.

The computer area is often a focus point for one of the centers and unlike many classrooms where the computer either sits idle or is used by the same small group of either advanced or remedial students, the computers in Beth's class are almost always in use and all students use them. One of the computers is especially up to date in its technological features and is supported by an impressive collection of powerful educational software.

Each group of students works within a center for a predetermined amount of time (i.e.: thirty minutes) before rotating to the next center; all of the movement is choreographed during the initial introduction to the centers. The students' work at the various centers is often social and involves a good deal of discussion and cooperative work. While the students work, Beth is constantly moving around the room working with small groups or individuals.
Afternoon

The work in the afternoons takes on a slightly different flavor. Beth describes the afternoon work as whole group instruction. But even then, the students often work in groups in within the same social / cooperative learning culture that is so dominant during the morning. What many people mean by whole group instruction, the teacher leading instruction to the entire group, is not necessarily what Beth means by whole group. For her, it simply means that the whole group is working on the same type of task at the same time. It may begin with some background information provided by the teacher, but it quickly transforms back to student-led inquiry, and Beth reassumes a role of facilitator.

The role of facilitator seems crucial for the role that Beth also assumes, one of teacher as assessor. During the time that she monitors group work, she constantly has opportunities to find out what students are thinking and understanding. This structure is key for the types of assessments that Beth uses.

Beth’s Professional Background

Beth is a veteran teacher in her ninth year of service in the public schools. Her nine years of teaching have been fairly equally distributed among four different schools. Her first two years were at a literature based alternative school before leaving to teach in a suburban school where she taught fourth grade for two years. She then left there and went to a middle school for three years where she taught seventh grade math and science and also one reading/language arts class. She is currently in her second year at her present school. The story of her transitory tenures is rather interesting and illustrates a teacher seeking out an environment or school culture that would support, or at the very least, allow her to teach in a way that was consistent with her philosophy of teaching and learning. It is also a story where her decision to leave her first school took her from one extreme of a continuum to the other.
Preservice Training

Beth did her undergraduate work at The Ohio State University and during her senior year was in a cohort of students known as the EPIC (Educational Programs in Informal Classrooms) strand; a strand of preservice elementary teachers that emphasized informal education and integrated classrooms. The EPIC strand was a year long program that had field components throughout which provided exposure to several schools for each student. At that time, the EPIC students were placed at one of several informal schools in the Henderson, Ohio area. Although Beth does not recall the EPIC program ever dealing directly with alternative assessment, she does credit the program for providing a philosophical foundation from which she has developed as a teacher.

Beth: Yeah, and it [EPIC] was a really good program as far as kinda getting it so I was alternative, and I opened to some of the different things that I do. It really was good training because ... [goes on to tell how that training helped her in her first year teaching at Jefferson Heights]. So coming from EPIC, which was an alternative, and then going into that, being hired, was a really good experience for me because it kinda laid a real strong foundation for what I do now.

Jerome: Do you remember having any course work at Ohio State as an undergraduate that dealt with assessment or evaluation?

Beth: (Shakes head no)

Jerome: No separate course work?

Beth: Uhm, no.

Jerome: Do you remember any of your methods or foundation courses dealing with assessment?

Beth: Yeah, I think they hit parts of it; like the different (pause) ... no I don't think so.

Beth later described her experience with EPIC in greater detail and recounted how she “fell” into EPIC. Her initial motive when changing to education from engineering was less than honorable; she wanted to get through as fast as possible. As is evident in the following passage, she did not initially buy into the EPIC philosophy but over time found it to be a great program.
Beth: When I went into teaching, I kinda jumped into it and well actually I was in engineering and so then when I came out of engineering and I went into student teaching I wanted to see if I could get through the college as fast as I could and do this in four years (laughs) so I remember that was a goal. OK now we’ve gotta switch, I wanna get out of here and have a degree and uhmm I remember doubling up on stuff and doing that as quick as I could but when I got into EPIC, I don’t think I really bought any of the alternative stuff. I thought, originally when I went into education I thought - straight rows. You know, the way I was taught you know, I mean that’s what I thought and I can even remember going into Hillside in Upper Arlington and watching what she did with kids and not really understanding but kinda going “Well this is neat, this is cool, but it just won’t work,” and I can remember observing that situation and looking and going “Yeah this is fine, but it’s not me,” and I kinda fell into EPIC because a friend said “Come and interview - this is a great program!” And then I was sold on it by the end, by the time I went to Edwards, but I didn’t start out like that.

Jerome: Sort of serendipitous.

Beth: Yeah (laughs), exactly, being at the right place at the right time and not really knowing what you’re doing, but definitely, I mean I fell into it. I mean going on my ninth year, now I honestly know that that’s [the alternative methods taught in EPIC] the best way to get 95 percent of the population to understand content and to be able to go on because you can successfully do that if you have the right approaches. I mean I know that now but at the time when I was first seeing it I had never seen a classroom like that because I hadn’t personally experienced it. So I was just watching all these neat things that these kids did but I didn’t think that it was something that I could create.

It is obvious from the discussion above that in her pre-service training, Beth began a transition from a traditional view of teaching and learning (“straight rows - the way I was taught”) towards a more contemporary student-centered view. Her words suggest that in those early professional years, an interest in student-centered instruction was kindled, but as will be illustrated, it was met with a false sense of reality and a lack of confidence that it was something she could create.

First Two Years Teaching / Unrealistic Expectations

In her first year two years at Jefferson Heights, the literature based alternative school, Beth enjoyed the comradeship of her peers.

Beth: When I first started teaching at Jefferson Heights, those people were great. I learned so much from them and they were really different; they were definitely out there in the front of the educational movement and I was
learning from them. Then when I went to the suburbs because, I don’t know why I left, but I left, probably because it wasn’t a realistic situation ...

She left because of what she viewed as an extreme unrealistic situation that made it very difficult for the teachers to perform their jobs. Her decision to leave must have been a difficult one because she did value the support of the staff at Jefferson Heights, reported learning a lot from her peers, and many aspects of the alternative approach used at Jefferson Heights were consistent with her own informal training. She described the unrealistic nature of the school as a factor that eventually caused everyone to leave.

Beth: When I was hired, I started out subbing there and I taught at Jefferson Heights, which was a literature based school and they had just opened up and the principal didn’t believe in any textbooks so we didn’t have any textbooks; that was my first experience. She would give you all the pencils and paper you wanted to use but, and we only were allowed to have ten thermal-faxes a month. She even looked at your dittos (laughs), you couldn’t run off dittos galore either so we used chapter books and that was the first year that I taught. I don’t think it’s realistic though because I remember that I worked the first year, it was real common for the entire staff to stay until 10:00, kinda trying to reinvent the wheel and I don’t think that’s practical, now, I kinda knew that someday I’d have another life, but for me it worked out really good because I didn’t have kids or have a family, and it made a real solid foundation for me, but it was a lot of work and we spent a lot of time there.

Jerome: You mean the student teachers stayed until 10:00?

Beth: The teachers. We stayed, it wasn’t uncommon to walk out of there at 9:00 at night and there were a group of us, like five, that were always there, you know we were always pulling late nights, it wasn’t uncommon, or coming very very early in the morning, because we didn’t have any textbooks and we had to integrate everything and we only had those chapter books and you had kids here-there-and everywhere so we did what we had to do.

Jerome: That will wear you down in a hurry.

Beth: Yeah (laughs) it was a lot of work. I mean people were putting out an unrealistic amount of effort and energy, everybody left. Two staffs were replaced there because of people not being able to cope with the situation, and that’s why I am, I’m realistic now. I don’t throw out the textbook and I never stand here and say I can do it all. I pick and choose and I make the professional decisions to say this is more important so I’m going to do this because this is how much time I have in a day. But when we were at Jefferson Heights it wasn’t realistic; we were going to do it all. There are different points in the process, she (the principal) wanted to be all out too and you know we were all growing but unfortunately sometimes you grow apart instead of together and that was an unfortunate situation because I’m still really good friends with a lot of people on that staff.
Third and Fourth Years Teaching / Lack of Collegial Support

Beth’s subsequent move to a suburban school turned out to be a shift, not only in the type of instruction that was going on in the school, but more importantly the level of collegial support. This following discussion is a powerful statement about the importance of collegial support and how in spite of great student, administrative, and parental support, how one is received by one’s peers may be a decisive factor in one’s satisfaction. According to Beth, the teachers at her second school ostracized her because her student-centered teaching style clashed with the traditional approach that dominated there:

Beth: And then when I went to Swain Valley, I was really solid then, I mean I knew how to put the stuff on the table because I had done it now for three years and uhm I was odd man out. All of the teachers hated me, I mean I was, I mean unfortunately I look back on it now and I fault myself. I didn’t include them, I was out there, administration loved me. I took my kids camping, I went by myself. I did a lot of different stuff but uhm I didn’t have anybody that I conversed with on that staff. And that’s really unfortunate but...

Jerome: And was anyone there doing alternative types of things?
Beth: No, very traditional, and it was really ugly because parents loved me and the second year I had over requests in my room and unfortunately because it was small town, small atmosphere, if they wanted to be in my room they could, so I ended up getting all these good kids. I had a great class the following year. I mean it was wonderful. The parents loved me but the teachers were trying to crucify me, and when push came to shove, parents were requesting me. I could have stayed and kept the strokes. I mean really, the superintendent came to my room and I mean I got strokes from different people and the superintendent still will call. He paid me money to inservice teachers. I mean here I was, having taught for three years, going “wait a minute, I’m three years teaching and you are asking me for my expertise, I don’t think so.” And I mean I knew how shaky I was but uhm I mean I was doing, I was all out, and I was definitely sore thumb out.

Beth continued this discussion by explaining that the level of collegial hostility was of such significance, in spite of good administrative and parental support, that she decided to quit her job at Swain Valley:

Beth: I didn’t have any friends, I was in my own room and I realized, well I learned a lot about having to balance the two and unfortunately I had to leave. I mean I quit that system and I had to leave and it’s funny because after two years, in the second year I had the dream class, and I tried to tell the
administration “please don’t give me all the good kids.” “Well they’re requesting you, these parents will be mad.” And I did, I had over requests and it was a slap in the face to the teachers who were there. They were not ready to move that fast and honestly I got paid $500 a couple of weekends to inservice, was pulled by the superintendent, he would come in, I mean it was great strokes, I mean any teacher could live like that forever but I also, because of the person that I am, there was, I mean a lot of teachers I think would have stayed and never left because I mean I had parents that would give me money - a hundred dollars to spend on classroom supplies, I mean I had it all but uhmm also saw the teachers around that I was this major major threat and that even though I saw them as people that they wanted to move in that direction, but they had no training what-so-ever, they had no guidance and it was like “Here’s Beth, this is where you are headed” and they were like still in straight rows with all the textbooks, so I left, I mean the superintendent was devastated when I handed him my resignation. He called me up and said “I can’t believe you did this,” and I’m like “I can’t stay, it’s not fair, I mean you have to move a whole building” and it was no way, so I learned from that.

Transition Towards Using Alternative Assessment

Beth’s initial interests in alternative assessment were embedded in her transition towards a holistic, integrated, student-centered approach. That transition was grounded in the student-centered philosophy that was developed during her preservice program with EPIC. Beth, however, indicated that her preservice program did little to help her develop assessment strategies. Beth attributes her development towards using alternative assessment to other things such as professional readings and attendance at conferences.

Jerome: So would you say that your undergraduate program helped prepare you for assessment?
Beth: (Shakes head no) I can remember spending more time on discipline, classroom management, but not on assessment. I think most of my alternative assessment comes from my professional reading, reading in professional journals since then [preservice training]. I think I started to pick that up after I started teaching and so my knowledge comes from that.

Professional reading. As she reports below, she was reading a lot of literature that dealt with children’s literature and an integrated curriculum; an approach that she describes as being whole language.
Beth: When I first started teaching I was probably more concerned with language so I read a lot of literature, so I was up on all the children's literature and things like that. I know when I first started reading, I was reading more stuff on the holistic approach and how to tie that in. And then the science stuff has come down the road but it is all related, it's all integrated, and it's all holistic, so you know you kind of read it in different context in different areas but it's the same stuff. So I probably, when I first started seeing it [alternative assessment] when I was teaching, was probably because I was looking at whole language kind of stuff. I was looking at literature based and in fact I know because I have in my room, I bought a couple of books on how a literature based classroom works and the components. In fact I have a book at home on assessment of the literature based classroom that I bought so that I could have those components.

It is not surprising, given the literacy emphasis of EPIC and the literature based alternative school where she spent her first two years, that initially Beth's focus was centered around literature. Her passion for science, emerged over time and was supported by peers who perceived her as the "science person."

Beth: My first couple of years I was probably more on the literature end than I was on the science end. Because when I first started teaching, being that I was in that literature based school and coming out of the program that I came out of which was literature across the curriculum, uhm I was looking more at literature and holistic literature based classrooms then. I wasn’t really looking at my interest which was science.

Jerome: Yeah

Beth: Although, I mean I was the first one, it was funny because on the staff I was always know as the science person because whenever I got my chance to pull in my science I would. So it kind of grew out of, you know that’s where I am now.

As the centering theme of science began to emerge, Beth reports that she began to read *Science and Children*, the journal of the National Science Teachers Association (NSTA), written for elementary teachers. In fact, Beth joined NSTA and is still a member. Although she was not initially reading the journal specifically for ideas on assessment, she describes that it was a recurrent theme in many of the articles.

Jerome: You started to mention professional journals. Can you think of particular ones that helped you with the assessment?

Beth: *Science and Children*.

Jerome: OK

Beth: It always comes out, they always have articles almost every month and I didn’t pick it up for alternative assessment, I picked it up for the interest in science. Then as I read, because you know I read, that's the one thing that I
get once a month and I've always read all the articles so. And there's always stuff in there, so I think most of that is coming from *Science and Children.*

Jerome: OK, so it's sort of related to the content of science, but then are you able to take that and generalize?

Beth: Yeah, Yeah, it's real general. I mean the stuff that I read now is coming out of *Science and Children,* but when I first started it wasn't *Science and Children,* I didn't even belong to that [NSTA] when I first started.

**Professional conferences.** Beth attributes another part of her professional development towards using alternative assessments on her attendance at professional conferences. In similar fashion to the way she started out with her professional reading, initially Beth did not attend the conferences specifically looking for ideas on alternative assessment.

Jerome: At the conferences, do you seek out the presentations that are dealing with assessment? Is that a focus for you?

Beth: I have. I've gone to some sessions yeah. I didn't at first. When I first started teaching I just was looking for more ideas, more different ideas, but now, especially with conferences, because I've been so many times and when you go to them you kind of see the same things over and over again. So now like when I went to SECO [Science Education Council of Ohio] I went to the training for, which probably was an assessment, uh huh for science fair, to look at what they looked for in a project because, yeah, so that's a type of assessment. But I went to the one on science fairs and judging and what the criteria are and what they look for and how they score those, so I guess that's were my interest is now.

**Inservice training.** Beyond the EPIC program, which developed her philosophical foundations, and the professional readings and attendance at professional conferences that she had sought out on her own, Beth did not credit anything else for her development in the area of alternative assessment. It is worth reiterating that the EPIC program did not deal directly with alternative assessment, although it did develop a mind-set towards alternative, holistic, integrated approaches. Her view of the district inservice trainings that have dealt with alternative assessment was far from favorable.

Jerome: Alternative assessment is a theme, a common theme in inservice trainings. Have you been exposed to that in inservice? Either here at the school or with the district?

Beth: Yeah, I've been exposed.
Jerome: Could you describe what those are like?
Beth: They're not very good. Someone gets up there and it seems they don't have any credibility what-so-ever and they say "I do this this this and this." Oh I get a lot of people who say "Oh we do journals for this and we have portfolio for that," and I'm thinking how in the world do you organize all of that. "Oh I take all those journals home," and I'm thinking "yeah, I've been there too but that, you really don't do that." It's just like an overwhelming amount of paper work if you know, and I mean the people that I've been exposed to will stand up and say that but they never show you samples. They never really show you what they are doing with their kids and uhm, I mean I listen to them but I think, you know it's very clear that they've been pulled out of the classroom and they give you a spiel and they really didn't have it all together. I mean that's kind of been it. So people will stand up, give their spiel, and say "Oh yeah, this is wonderful and this is what I do" and I mean I always kinda sit back and listen to it and I always wonder "how are you juggling all of this?" Because I just don't think it's realistic.

Contextual support. Beth's transition towards using alternative assessment was without a critical incident that she can point to and identify as a major turning point. There was not a particular person, article, presentation, or class that served as a genesis for her transition. She did state that she made the transition because she wanted her alternative approach to teaching and her philosophy to match, or as Beth said: "Practice what you preach."

At the time of this study, Beth had not officially started her Graduate program, although she had plans to begin soon. Another area that one might expect to impact one's professional development, administrative support, was described by Beth as being neutral. Neutral in the sense that she did not have administrators either pushing her to use alternative assessment, or pulling back on her movement towards using such techniques. The same can be said about the level of parental support which she describes as being positive and supportive.

The third level of support, apart from administrative and parental, has been a mixed bag. Depending on the school, the collegial support was described as either great, terrible, or neutral. As was described earlier, the collegial support at her first school was
positive. However, at that early point in her career, Beth was not professionally ready to
meet the incredible challenge posed by that situation.

By the time she moved to her second school and was starting her third full year of
teaching, Beth had the experience and was developing the confidence to move towards
alternative methods of instruction and assessment, but her efforts were met with horrid
collegial support. The impact, as noted above, was great enough to force yet another
move after just two more years. In her next two schools, the middle school where she
taught for three years and her present school where she is in her second year, the collegial
support has been good, although neutral. At her present school however, there is an
excitement in Beth's descriptions of the collegial support that indicate a new role for Beth.
She sees herself as an agent of change in a school that Beth describes as being "ripe for
change."

Beth: I mean that's where I'm at right now and it's all happening because we are
identified and I mean I am FACULTY REP (laughs). Voted by all faculty, I
mean you see what I mean? So I mean it was an evolving process for me, I
mean I love the staff here, the people that are here right now are really trying
to put neat things on the table, they are trying to do it and they are getting
support from the outside and that's just now coming in my teaching career so
I don't know, I mean ...

Jerome: Are people here doing alternative assessment?
Beth: Yeah, there are ...
Jerome: I realize that alternative assessment is not the main thing but ...
Beth: Yeah, right, yeah there are, there are a lot of them, you should check it out.
There are a lot of exciting things happening in this school, a lot of exciting
things. A lot of teachers are doing teaming. I teamed, last year when I came
here there wasn't any teaming and I teamed with Graham and we do first
grade buddies and fifth grade buddies and we do a science lab once a month
together and it's like really fun. Like last month we put goggles on and we
did a chemical reaction and the kids, the first graders had to use their five
senses to describe both of the elements in the compound. And then my kids
had to actually deal with what was happening in the science, so they got both
of those components. Just last week we did pumpkins, we cut them open,
observe them, and did all that stuff and then we also buddy up for reading
and we are looking at their portfolios. My kids are going to try to take over
their portfolios to start charting what they are doing to help them so that when
they get to my grade they will have these reading portfolios that will already
exist because my kids do their own portfolios on it. So we are starting to do
that with reading and then, we did that last year and this year there are three
other teachers down there that are starting to team up so a lot of stuff is really
starting to happen here.

Jerome: That's a great compliment when you see people picking up things that you
are doing.

Beth: And they are. They are picking it up, and teachers, there's one teacher that's
very traditional, she's wonderful, but she's very traditional, and she's
teaming with a kindergarten last year from that teaming and they're doing it
minimally and she's like "oh don't we do it all out like guys are doing it but
we are starting," and I'm like "that's great, you know you guys are starting"
so there's, that's what I mean a lot of things.

A developmental process. I suggested above that Beth was not professionally
ready in her first two years of teaching, in spite of the great collegial support, to meet the
tremendous challenge in that situation and to focus on the individual child. She described
spending those two years in somewhat of a survival mode; dealing with getting the
lessons out and managing the classroom. Her description of this developmental process
is candidly laid out below:

Jerome: But on that whole staff at Jefferson Heights, were a lot of you using
alternative assessment strategies?

Beth: We were all using alternatives and it was a great opportunity for me coming
just out of college just to see people doing it and making it happen.

Jerome: How important was that to you for you to also do the alternative
assessments?

Beth: At that time?

Jerome: Yeah

Beth: Truthfully, at that time, I was just trying to get the hands-on lessons out. If I
look back at the beginning, those first two years, I wasn't really servicing the
individual child. I was trying to deal with the group dynamics, trying to get
lessons out, and that was the foundation. I was not concerned at all with
assessment and the individual. I was more concerned with how to get my
classroom together, you know, how to get hands-on, how to make it work
so that we can all manage through this and yeah, I probably looked at the
individual but I can honestly say not very much, really I didn't.

By the time Beth left Jefferson Heights she had been through an induction period.

It was an induction period only by name, as for the most part she was left to her own
devices and did not have any of the formal assistance that one might hope to receive
during those critical formative years. When she arrived at Swain Valley, she reports that
she was ready to make the types of changes in her teaching that would be more consistent
with the foundational philosophies formulated in her preservice experience with EPIC. However, as was described above, her efforts were met with such hostility by her colleagues, that she could not exist in that school culture. That is not to say that she didn’t begin to make those transitions, but she could not continue to teach towards her philosophical underpinnings and stay at Swain Valley; something had to give.

Beth’s solution was to move again, the third time in four years, with the sole purpose of finding a school culture that would support or allow her to teach to her philosophy, somewhat of a pilgrimage - in search of teaching freedom. This third change turned out to be crucial for Beth’s transition towards a focus on the individual child, and it was facilitated by the fact that she ended up at a middle school.

Beth: … so I learned from that, I went to a middle school, and in middle school I concentrated on kids, it was great, I mean I learned to have good connections for the first time. In middle school I realized that teaching my hands-on and putting out something was not where it was at, but working with the individual was. I mean my middle schoolers screamed in my face, “No, you are not going to do this hands-on stuff, I’m here and you are going to recognize me,” and so then all the sudden I started to see my class as a bunch of individuals, and that’s when I started looking at individual programs and really looking at how I could do what I do already and put that in so that the individual also is excited to be there and then I kinda put the two together and I’m here. I mean that’s where I’m at right now.

It was during her experience at the middle school that Beth was able to align both her philosophy and theories of education with her actual practice. It is clear from the quote above that Beth began to focus on the individual and less on the task of teaching. That is not to say that she abandoned the alternative informal methods taught to her in preservice, but she saw the greater purpose in using them; to reach each individual child. Two obstacles that had been in her way, the developmental process of beginning teachers and a hostile school culture, were no longer present and Beth had made a crucial step towards the alignment of theory, philosophy, and practice. Before this happened, Beth did not have a real need for a rich repertoire of alternative assessment strategies. Once she
began to focus on the individual student, a need existed for strategies that would allow her
to collect the types of data that would inform her subsequent instruction.

Beth’s Philosophy of Teaching and Learning

Beth’s philosophy of teaching is grounded in her experience with EPIC. It is a
student-centered philosophy which values the individual student. She sees kids without
labels or limits, which motivates her to teach in the ways that she does:

Beth: ... the most important things is I see kids without labels. And I think that we
tack those on very quickly when we start to formally school them. My view
of the child is it is really limitless and that I don't think there is a kid that can't
be reached. Well again, 99 percent of them, there are a few in society that
truly can't, but those kids are not the ones that come to public education.
Probably one of my biggest philosophies is that kids fail because of the
program and not because they are failures.

Jerome: Do you mean the teacher's program?
Beth: Yeah. The political system that's set up. I think that they fail because of
that. And, oh I don't know, let me think (very quietly).

Jerome: So what do you do to avoid that, avoid the built in failure?
Beth: I think that by providing an alternative program and I think that the biggest
alternative program that I provide is that I don't teach fragmented isolated
skills. I guess on the outside, if someone asks me if I teach science, math,
social studies, and health, I do, but those are not in isolation. I would rather
say that I am teaching students to go through life and just live it in a more
productive manner and to use their mind. Personally for me, learning is
everything and that's where life is as far as I'm concerned. I don't see things
in boxes. In my view, all of those things are related together and so in the
classroom, I guess the old ways of education don't really work and I think
kids have challenged us time and time again to say that these old ways and
these old methods of this textbook that fits in this group and this textbook
that fits here isn't really where it's at and I think that we limit the individual
when we do that and I think that it's very important that we get out a lot of
information and that they use these different resources, but I don't think that
life should be in isolation. I think that when kids are experiencing things
they should experience them to the fullest.

Beth further explains her philosophy in the following excerpt as being one that
tries to mirror things as they are in the “real world.” It explains her emphasis on
cooperative grouping and addresses her reasons for having students engaged in
collaborative efforts.
Beth: My philosophy of the child is that all kids can learn and they can learn to 100 percent and I think that is key. And then probably all the strategies that I use, I think cooperative learning is important, not because it seems to be the biggest catch-all in education right now, but because in the real world, and I probably got to this before cooperative learning was really a big deal, because in the workplace our kids are going to have to be able to collaborate. They are going to have to learn to collaborate. They are going to have to learn to pull information from a lot of different resources ...

Referring to the workplace as the real world, Beth frequently connected the things she does in the classroom with what she feels her students will eventually do in the real world. Specifically, she thinks that kids will need to get along with others, use resources, be able to contribute something special, and solve problems. Her philosophy in turn is then reflected in the way she approaches teaching and in the types of things she has her students do. Beth mentions the “company” or the workplace several times as she explains her grouping and assessment.

Beth: So the involvement is very important but I know in the workplace, I mean companies rely on people being experts in particular areas and they expect them to come to a group and be able to get the job done, whatever the task is and everybody puts input or they fire them so when I try to group kids, I try to group them not by the level of reading, because I don’t really care, I don’t do a high, medium, and low, I mean I literally throw them together. I change their groups often.

Continuing with this idea, she states:

Beth: I think the individual needs to stand on their own because grouping is great but I think a teacher can get carried away with it and say "Oh group, isn't that wonderful," you still have to grade the individual. And I think it's important because the company does. I mean if you are not pulling your own weight, and it doesn't take an idiot, in a company when you have a group of five people that will put their minds together and this is the wonderful product they have, it doesn't take any adult a bunch of paper work or a bunch of proof to say you didn't do what you were supposed to do.

Instructional strategies. As a teacher aligns her teaching philosophy and her teaching strategies, it becomes more difficult to separate them from one another. As one reads Beth’s descriptions of how she approaches teaching, one becomes implicitly aware of what she values. Beth sees herself as a learner who is a creative and flexible teacher;
constantly assessing her students, herself, and her teaching. The product of her assessments and reflections is a fluid approach to teaching that is in a constant state of flux:

Beth: I use a lot of creative, just off the cuff kind of stuff and whatever works. I grow with the group, I'm always changing, I read the group, I assess when I'm doing, I do that, it's an on going thing, it's not, you don't get it out of a textbook. As a teacher I think it is your responsibility to be creative, I mean I think probably my strongest strength is not one strategy but constantly being able to throw in "here's the next wrench," you know, I throw in the wrenches to constantly make the learner in this classroom change and to make them move and I want them to move so that they are constantly thinking, because I am. And if I am modeling that as my prime thing and things are not stagnant in here as in a textbook when we go from this chapter to this chapter, if I'm modeling that as a teacher then the kids are going to pick that up from me in a very indirect way. Because I don't ever stand up to them and say "Well you know, I want you to know that I'm creative and I thought this up and I expect you to be that way." You get your compliments when they see your final products and they helped to go through that process. So if I do anything, it's not just one strategy, because probably the greatest thing that I do is constantly assess what I'm doing. I have a twenty minute drive home every night and every night before I walk in the door I have another life, but I'm so glad that it doesn't take me five minutes to get home because that twenty minutes is always a re-cap of how I'm going to come back at them the next day.

A consistent theme that runs through Beth's descriptions of her instructional strategies is one of teaching for understanding. She holds little respect for the type of teacher who decides that a subject is covered merely because the page or chapter is finished. Beth constantly strives to have her students understand concepts and be able to apply the understanding to new situations:

Beth: We all learned to count the same way. We all learned, and I think teachers don't really think about this stuff but it's really true. We all learned how to count by memorizing. We never understood the progression from one to two and certainly not the progression from nine to ten which is very sophisticated. I mean that is really heavy. Even in graphing, all my kids can read them and I know because they produce them. Ask a kid in younger grades, that are doing the textbook and that have not developed one graph with the teacher all year long, to create a graph about anything, they cannot do it. And that is like a level of understanding that is higher, because to me it is not just good enough to have an understanding of it, because even with my lows then, technically when we go back to the traditional stuff, my lows then can look at a book and go "Oh, I know what's going on!" My expectations are of producing and true understanding and not just "You can count to ten
Johnny, that’s great!” But mine is, I want to know “Do you understand what happens between nine and ten, and how dynamic that really is, and how really special that is?” Because that’s understanding of place value. How many teachers have you seen, and I mean I went through this, I didn’t understand place value until I was much older. How many teachers have put up “This is the tenths, this is the hundredths,” and you named it and thought “Big deal, I still don’t get it and I still don’t know that between zero and one, when I hit somewhere on the number line that’s somewhere different?”

As a way of assessing how well Beth has reached her goal of having her students understand, she oftentimes has the students apply the knowledge in a new or different situation. If the students are able to apply the knowledge in that new situation then she is confident that she has met her goal.

Beth: When I plan, and the example is like if we are doing graphing, we will start it out, we will take whatever, in science, whatever and we will graph it if I decide, because on the course of study, bar graphs have to be covered. OK, we’ll do bar graphs, we’ll do something together and so we do it together and uhm we just pull the data together, we get the kids up, everybody does it, it’s one big group. Then my next step is I will break into groups of small groups, four, five kids to a grouping, and give them something totally different but with the same outcomes as the prior but not at all related.

Jerome: Where they have to apply?
Beth: Where they have to apply what they saw in class, take that information and apply it with the group, and I mean it can be totally off the wall.

Assessment Strategies

Beth’s assessment strategies are as varied as her teaching strategies. They vary from a very traditional approach in spelling where the kids take weekly spelling tests, to creative techniques such as “battling,” which is an instructional and an assessment technique. Just as one’s teaching philosophy and teaching strategies are hard to separate as they become aligned, teachers can have teaching and assessment strategies that are seamless, and thus are hard to separate. Battling is just one approach used by Beth in reading:

Beth: We just finished “From the Mixed-up Files of Mrs. Basil E Frankweiler,” and the students had to do group presentations on those and then we do a battle of the book kind of thing where they make up different types of comprehension questions. I teach them throughout about the levels of questioning and they have to have all levels in there. They have three questions per chapter and
they make those up throughout the whole book. Then at the end we battle
their books against the other groups, and the interesting thing is I have
parents in here thinking "My kid's not learning anything." Well if you come
in on a battle and you listen to the questions that kids have written and you
look at presentations, it's very impressive but not only is it very impressive,
you can look at the group of five kids and every kid knows what's going on.

Beth has two different levels of assessment that she employs as part of the
described battles. At one level, she holds the group accountable for every member’s
having an active role. This involves looking through a group folder to make sure that the
group is covering whatever aspect has been focused on; it does not involve grades of any
sort. At the other level, Beth assesses the individuals to see specifically what they have
accomplished and contributed. According to Beth, “The individuals are always required
to stand on their own.” Her data on what individuals accomplish comes from the folders,
the presentation, and the actual battle.

The school district that Beth works in has initiated an alternative assessment
program in reading. It is designed to accompany the adopted reading program and
focuses on the students being able to identify the plot, the main idea, theme, and
prediction. Beth uses the district alternative assessment materials but she adapts them to
fit what she is teaching.

Beth: It's an alternative assessment from Henderson that you get trained and it
allows you know instead of doing the text, because I don't teach the textbook
so if you don't use the textbook then it's very hard to go in there and take
their tests off the textbooks so you do alternative programs like I do because
right now we are doing Number the Stars, and I stick with those books and
we do chapter books and we don't read from the textbook, then, I can give
you a copy of the test, but the test is so general that you can apply it to any ...

Jerome: But it is a Henderson Public ...
Beth: It's Henderson Public's alternative assessment.
Jerome: OK
Beth: So they do take that.
Jerome: But you have molded it to fit your needs.
Beth: I've molded it quite a bit because it's limited as far as, all the kids have to do
this on there is a plot, a main idea and a prediction.

There are yet other approaches that Beth utilizes for assessment in reading. One
method takes on somewhat of a traditional flavor and involves weekly quizzes that all the
students take. The quizzes, however, are teacher made and serve the purpose of giving the students feedback and holding the students accountable. Interestingly, the quizzes also serve some function to balance out the fact that Beth has "... given up the right to lead reading groups." As such, it is a reaction to a transition brought about by Beth following her philosophy.

Beth: On the reading, on everything, yeah, and it's combined but there is always a reading quiz, I have several reading quizzes that, you know whatever they are doing in group and talking and discussion so that then I know that they're really doing it and then I give them feedback weekly on that.

Jerome: Which requires that you know the book.
Beth: Right (laughs)
Jerome: Or have read the book.
Beth: Yeah, because I mean 1, and the thing about it is it also requires because I've given up the rights to run a reading group, in the traditional sense I still have to be accountable that the group is really doing something and it is probably I'm giving them that responsibility so they have to be responsible in the group and they have to participate because they can't pull the grades at end of the week, and every week they are assessed on that.

In a later discussion about the book that the students in her class reads, Beth explained her efforts to prepare for the assessment of her students' reading:

Beth: One summer I read 25 popular chapter books and broke them down so that I would know each part of the book. I placed key summaries and questions on index cards so I could assess students at different points of the book and not have to wait for the entire book to be read.

Reading Conferences

An additional major source of data about student performance in reading comes from individual reading conferences which occur on an unscheduled basis, usually in the morning while groups are working at their centers. The conferences may run anywhere from five to fifteen minutes and it's a one on one dialogue about the major elements of the book. Beth also takes that opportunity to listen to the child's oral reading. Data from those conferences are kept on a type of teacher reading log.
Writing Conferences

Writing is another area that Beth collects a lot of data about student performance. The students write daily, sometimes continuing a story over a long period of time, and other times responding to a prompt given by the teacher. In a similar fashion to the reading conferences, Beth conducts writing conferences on an unscheduled basis. They, too, may last five to fifteen minutes, are individual, and are documented in a type of teacher log. Part of the conference involves Beth’s reading the student’s work back to the student. A by-product of the conference is notes from Beth in the student’s writing journal which can be later used for additional data or for parent conferences. Student work in writing is kept in folders or journals and contains all drafts through the writing process.

Assessing Project and Center Work

Most of the student work for math, science, and social studies is spent on integrated projects that involve hands-on activities. For example, while I observed in the classroom, the students rotated through a center where they were to weigh various gourds that they had been working with over an extended period of time. On a regular basis, the students weighed the gourds to compare the weight over time. Obviously, one of the goals was to see that over time the gourds would lose weight as they begin to dry. The data that the students collect is transformed into various graphs. Students conduct research on gourds by consulting books that Beth has made available, by searching for reference material on the computer, and by referring to information that Beth has brought in that she collected over the internet.

Beth: I feel like I’m just right here with them, that although I’m putting this stuff on the table and we are drying that stuff (gourds) out right now, I have no idea how it’s going to turn out. I got five books at the library to see how are we going to dry these things so they don’t rot, and the questions that kids are
asking, I have the same questions and I don't know the answers but I do
know how to take them through that scientific method.

Jerome: Do they see you going through that process? I mean do they realize you are
going through that process
Beth: They do, yes they do. [...] And that's pulling in everything, that's reading,
it's math because they are going to graph it, it's science, I mean I don't know
what it isn't because it's all subjects, so technically when you start gearing
your strategies, I guess if you want to call it a strategy, when you start
gearing your things towards real life problems and you start looking at that
stuff, your classroom becomes very dynamic and it's just an on-going
process that you go through with them.

As the students are engaged in projects such as the gourd activity, the teacher no
longer can rely on traditional measures of student achievement. A traditional teacher
finishes a math chapter and there is a test in the book, or she finishes a social studies
chapter and there's a test in the book.

A Need for Alternative Assessments

A teacher like Beth, doing projects that are integrated across the content areas, all
the sudden is left with a void. She still has to assess the students but she does not have
access to text embedded or curriculum embedded tests. In this type of situation,
alternative assessment is not as much of a choice, as it is a necessity. Beth has to have
ways to collect data on what her students are doing in various contents areas such as
math, science, reading, and health. She accomplishes assessment through several
methods such as facilitating the small group work, daily observations, anecdotal records,
and collections of student work - often kept in various types of journals. Much of the
collection of data actually serves a function of accountability.

Jerome: And, when you do that, all of the sudden you do not have available the types
of tests that a traditional teacher has.
Beth: I do, and I mean this has only evolved and it is still evolving but I have
portfolios and I keep samples of work because probably the most important
thing to me because I do teach the way that I teach is that I have to prove that
we are doing something here.
Jerome: Prove to who?
Beth: Prove to, I think parents is my number one concern, because if I was a
parent, I mean you know, administration is a part of the checks and balances
but if I was a parent I would want to know, you know, is my kid really
doing something and if so what are they learning. So I think that is probably
the first people that I have to be accountable to.

Accountability

This last point, about “proving” to the parents, illustrates how some of the
assessment strategies actually serve a dual role of accountability. Although the main goal
of the collections of journals, folders, portfolios, and student work is to inform
instruction, they also serve to prove to parents, administration, and colleagues that the
different ways of doing things in Beth’s room are effective and that the students are
learning.

In Beth’s view many teachers are migrating towards alternative assessment to
show people that their kids are doing better than other, more traditional measures would
indicate. She recognizes that the alternative assessment strategies fit with her philosophy
and her ways of teaching. Beth feels that the other teachers, those who are seeking out
alternative assessments as a way to make their kids look better, are setting the kids up for
failure when they take the mandated standardized tests.

Beth: Yesterday I went to an alternative assessment training for reading. In this
district you have to be trained in that if you are going to use it. I have taught
the philosophy all along, so I go in there and there were probably twelve
other teachers. But I noticed that the reason that teachers were there, most of
them I would say, were there for a different reason than I was. They were
looking for a way to make their test scores look better. You can take
alternative assessment and say I want to prove to my principal, because test
scores are a big thing, I want to prove to them that my kids can really do this.
But the joke is that if your kids can’t flip back into standardized then you’re
not proving anything.

As Beth continues, one sees that she is uncomfortable with teachers “changing the
rules” of assessment for the purpose of making student performance look better. To
avoid that happening, she surprisingly expresses a need to hold teachers accountable to
the same standard, revealing perhaps that she does indeed also value standardized tests:
Beth: The problem in education is people are not held accountable to the same standards. There are some teachers who say “See I knew Johnny could do this all along. He has great comprehension but he can’t read. I can read the story to him but he can’t read,” you know, have you heard that with first graders? I’m thinking that’s crap! Because if you can’t read it, I don’t care if you tell them the story every day, yeah, there’s no doubt he comprehends but he still can’t read. And if you put him in a traditional classroom and the teacher doesn’t read it to him, he can’t comprehend it. So you lose! You’re missing the boat when you’re saying “I’m going to an alternative assessment for Johnny because Johnny can’t read the test.” What you are really doing is changing the rules, and I have a problem with that. An alternative assessment for many teachers is “Let us just change the rules a little bit so we look good, we look like we did something, but what we really did was we read the story to Johnny; Johnny still can’t read the story but he can comprehend now.” That’s a crock (laughs). And you know what I’m saying, that’s what a lot of teachers were doing.

Jerome: That’s a matter of people misinterpreting what alternative assessment is all about.

Confidence

In the following two excerpts, two important issues surface. Using alternative assessments frees Beth to teach in a way that is consistent with her philosophy. Perhaps more importantly, Beth has a strong level of confidence that she can teach with alternative methods and assess with alternative methods and that when it comes time for her students to take traditional measures of achievement (like the statewide fourth grade proficiency test), her students will perform at their best. She believes that they will be able to apply their deeper levels of understanding to such tests and her style of teaching will be validated:

Beth: I have no problems going to a standard benchmark because I really think that I can be alternative every day, and I do not fear fourth grade proficiency, because my kids are going to pass that, and that’s a goal as the part of it. But let me teach it the way that I think that’s fit and then if my kids fail it, then I need to look at what I’m doing because obviously something is wrong ...

It is interesting that here, Beth reveals that she holds some value and faith in the standardized tests. If her kids did not fare well on them, rather than thinking there is something wrong with the test, like many teachers who use alternative assessment might argue, she would look inward to see what is wrong.
In this closing passage, Beth speaks with a level of confidence, about what she does in her classroom, that one may not find in many teachers:

Beth: And at this alternative assessment training, I was sitting there and I saw a lot of people that were afraid to put their philosophy on the line because they were looking at something to say “see I really do something.” It was like they were trying to prove “I really do something in the classroom.” I’m not trying to prove that! I have nothing to hide. If you want to assess me, and you really want to look at what I’m doing, come on in! You know, that’s the issue, come on in! Take notes. Look at kids. You can pull any individual you want to. That’s the most powerful type of assessment, and that’s very alternative. But how many traditional teachers do you really think would be comfortable in saying “You just taught place value, oh I see they did well on the test, that means I can pull any child out of your classroom and ask them?” Many teachers would say “Wait a minute wait a minute, let me call CEA,” you know ...

Jerome: CEA, what’s that?
Beth: (laughs) It’s the union. “Let me call the union, I don’t know if you have any right to do that. I gave you the test score.” And so I think many people are trying to play a game. Alternative assessment is a way for me to get to continue to teach the process of learning. It goes with my philosophy, I can continue to teach and I don’t have to take time out to do standardized testing. And then when I have to do standardized testing, which I call a waste of a week, no problem; I take that time out. But the beauty of alternative assessment is that it’s a way to incorporate teaching into your philosophies, and it’s a way to allow you to teach through the tests and truly continue that as a process of learning and development of understanding.

Shirley

Introduction

Like Beth, I first met Shirley as a fellow student in a graduate level course at The Ohio State University. The course dealt with change in the elementary school and was designed to allow for student discussion, participation, and presentation. I, like many of the other students in the class, was impressed with her discussions of the types of things that were occurring at her school. A very articulate individual, Shirley spoke about school wide initiatives in alternative assessment, multiple intelligence, and several other contemporary ideas. Based on Shirley’s experience with alternative assessment, her
ability to articulate her views of teaching and learning, and her vast background, I was
pleased when she agreed to be my second participant.

Shirley is a veteran teacher of thirty-one years. She is currently working on her
Master of Art degree at The Ohio State University. Her years of service in education
include experiences in five different schools, and three different countries. Upon
completing her Bachelor Degree in elementary education at The Ohio State University,
Shirley was employed by Henderson Public Schools where she taught for two years.
Taking her retirement money and going overseas with the Department of Defense, Shirley
spent the next two years on a military base in Taiwan and then three years at another
military base in Germany. When she returned to the United States, Shirley was again
hired by Henderson Public schools, where she has been ever since, although at two
different schools. The first four years after her return were spent at Watson Elementary,
an inner city school. It was in her fifth year at Watson that Shirley made the last of her
moves and has been at Stevens Alternative Elementary ever since - for twenty-one years.

Stevens Alternative Elementary school is also an inner-city school. It was built in
the 1970’s incorporating the then popular open architecture design. Unlike many such
buildings where either teachers have erected makeshift partitions or the administration has
funded the addition of internal walls, Stevens remains truly open.

At Stevens, there is a library in the middle of the school that is open to the two
levels of the building. The students are in multi-age groups and stay with their teachers
for multiple years. The youngest group of five, six, and seven year olds and a cross over
group of ages that range six, seven, and eight are both housed in the lower level of the
building. On the second level are two groups of what are normally called third, fourth,
and fifth grades, but at Stevens are recognized as eight, nine, and ten year olds. Shirley
works with one of the eight, nine, and ten year old groups on a team of three teachers.
The students have "home base" teachers but they break out into various groups sometimes during the day for different types of instruction, usually math.

The open architecture of the school has pushed the teachers to think of ways to use the space and led to the decision to use multi-age grouping, which in turn has spurred other initiatives such as team teaching, thematic units, multiple intelligence, and portfolio assessment. All those initiatives tend to be interdependent on one another and lead to other changes, for example, developing an alternative grade card that reflects what the teachers are doing. One of Shirley's colleagues explained the changes, which have taken place at Stevens, as being evolutionary. According to her colleague, people started with centers first and moved off really quickly from centers into individual projects. Teachers still have developmental learning centers but there has been a general movement, especially at the higher age levels towards individual or group projects.

The Classroom

Although the space that Shirley teaches in is more accurately described as a pod with approximately 70 students and three teachers, this description focuses on the "home" area where Shirley is most often found. Student movement is normally accepted and since typically the students are working together, discussing their work, a low level of active noise often permeates the area. The textbooks that one normally finds in students' desks were piled in corners or in cubbies, and as such, the piled books served only as a resource for the students; if they wanted access to them, they were available but the books were not relied on or used for instruction.

Arrangement

There were no student desks in the area. In their place were six sided tables with student chairs placed around them. Students kept their personal belongings in tote trays
which they stored in cubbies. Since students in the pod moved from area to area, this arrangement helped facilitate that movement. In one section of the area, near the wall that opens to the library below, a large area was open for group meetings on the floor. Just behind that large floor area was a reading loft constructed out of pine 2x4's and plywood. The loft had two areas that measured approximately 10'-0" square, each. Both levels were elevated above the floor and one level was about three feet higher than the other. As if the loft area itself was not enough of an attraction for children, pillows furthered that attraction.

**Children's Literature / Visuals**

Shirley had accumulated an impressive collection of quality children's literature. Some of the books were displayed in old milk crates while others were found on shelves. Elsewhere in the pod were numerous other books for children to read, many of them in multiple copy. Distinctly displayed around the room were posters about the multiple intelligences (as described by Howard Gardner). The posters drew attention to the seven intelligences and gave examples of types of things students might be doing within each intelligence. With the absence of walls dividing the rooms, there was little remaining wall space for other types of posters or bulletin boards. Those that were displayed focused on the writing process, world geography, or inspirational quotes such as: *Whether you think you can or you think you can't, you're right.*

**Manipulatives**

Around the room were various centers that the students could access. Although not elaborate, the centers were equipped with a nice selection of manipulatives. At the math center there were posters about temperature, time, weight/mass, and famous mathematicians. Included in the types of manipulatives were geo-boards, unifix cubes,
calculators, tapes, and math games. All these were available so that students could access them at any time, not stored on high shelves or cabinets. A listening center included a tape recorder, headphones and posters about music. Several types of encyclopedias and dictionaries were also located in the room. A more extensive science center was set up in a shared area of the pod and it included again, a nice variety of visuals and manipulatives for the students to use.

A Day in Shirley's Classroom

Morning

Typically, the students start the day in Shirley's area by coming in, getting settled, and spending the first 30 minutes working independently at tables on their learning logs. It is the only time during the day that the students sit in assigned places.

Shirley: They come in, I'm downstairs doing the breakfast and they come up here and at 9:00 they have what we call learning logs and in their learning logs they, sometimes I give them something to write about and sometimes they just write about whatever they want to write about. And today they've, we just got our Scholastic Newspaper today and so they were reading over the newspaper and then they're going to write, design a web, a word web, so just use a lot of the important words that they found while they are reading. Do a word web and then we met at 9:30 in circle and talked about what we're going to do for the morning.

When the students come to the floor to meet in circle, they come with their learning logs which they heap in the center of the circle. Shirley spends the short time with the entire group explaining any new activities or assignments and going over the day's schedule. The word "schedule" perhaps conjures up images of a minute by minute account of what the students will do all day, for example:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Activity</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>9:00-9:30</td>
<td>spelling</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9:30-10:30</td>
<td>reading</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10:30-11:30</td>
<td>math</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
This however is not at all what the day looks like to the students. The schedule that the students do adhere to is a structured time frame when they rotate in different groups within the pod of 70 students and three teachers for math instruction. After Shirley briefly meets with the group, the students retreat to the tables, selecting where and with whom they want to sit. They spend the next two hours engaged in independent work. While it may be hard to imagine a twenty-three eight, nine, and ten year olds being on task in meaningful ways for two hours, it happens. Although the time is unstructured, the expectations of the students is not. Much of the student activity is directed by integrated thematic webs which the teachers collaborate on and design together.

**Integrated activities.** The web is a collection of activities the students can choose to do that are all centered around the current theme. It is worth noting that Shirley has written a practitioner book on thematic webs that has been published and is currently in its fourth printing. The web activities that she uses in her own teaching cut across the curriculum and are designed so that students can work independently or in small groups with minimal direction, if any, from the teacher.

Shirley: We have a whole unit that we put into what we call the web. Right now we’re studying immigration and so we call the web “Coming to America,” and there’s like 27 activities that they can choose to do. So they choose whichever ones they want to do. They can go off and work in the library or any where in the area. I usually sit at tables with them and work either with two or three at the table or I work with maybe one and they show me what they are doing and I, you know, if they need some help with some cursive writing or they need some help with some spelling or what ever they need is what I do with them right there.

**Role of teacher and students.** The students do not have to complete each of the activities on the web. This allows for individuals to proceed at their own levels and abilities. Also built into the design of the webs is the flexibility for students to add to the
web. This further allows students to pursue their own interests and is an effective way to challenge students to go beyond what the teacher generates:

Shirley: So in other words, they don’t have to do all of these. This is just to get them started on ideas. Some kids will finish the whole web. They just love it; it’s really interesting to them; they go crazy with it; they finish the whole thing and then they say “You know what I’m really interested in is the Statue of Liberty. Can I do my own individual web on the Statue of Liberty?” “Sure, go ahead and do it.”

Shirley spends the entire time moving from table to table, group to group. She spends approximately 10 to 15 minutes in a spot before moving on. During that time, she has ample opportunity to assess what the students understand about the work they are doing. She sometimes goes through the students’ learning logs with them and further assesses their performance. In the learning logs she can assess the students’ writing and spelling, as well as gaining further insight about the student through what they have written. During this two hour block of time, students occasionally approach Shirley to “check off” an activity from the web.

When students finish an activity or activities from the web, they show the finished product to Shirley who takes time to assess the work. If the work meets Shirley’s expectations, she checks the activity on the web sheet and makes any comments either on the paper the students have been working on, or in a notebook that Shirley keeps containing anecdotal records. An example of an activity the students might engage in is to create a word find with words they have “collected” while working on the current theme. Once created, the word find can be given to a fellow student to complete. The word find itself, while not lending itself to a percentage grade, can reveal valuable information to the professional for assessment purposes.

In comparison to what may be considered a traditional classroom, these students do not have formal spelling instruction out of a typical five-day spelling sequence. Spelling is dealt with at the individual level.
Shirley: When I read their learning logs, their journals, if they write and spell words that are wrong, sometimes I'll sit down with them and we go over those words. If I notice that they're spelling the same word over and over wrong, I'll sit down and give them a list of word families with that word. And so it's really individual.

Reading instruction is not delivered in a traditional sense either; students are not put into reading groups for reading out of basals. Rather, the students have silent reading every day after lunch.

Shirley: And reading, I don't have formal reading groups. They have reading right after lunch, silent reading time where they read their books.

Jerome: Literature based?

Shirley: Literature, uh hum, individual copies of books. They can choose what books they want to read. I keep a list of the books they read and if I see that they are reading all fiction I try to get them into some non-fiction. I try to give them some different choices with books. Try to give them some different ideas of things to choose.

Jerome: Do you also consider the reading level?
Shirley: No, I just look at interests
Jerome: OK
Shirley: I don't make them read something, if they want to read something that's really easy for them, so what. I mean when I go pick a book to read for fun I certainly don't pick something that challenges my brain you know, that's just not, I think they get the challenges enough when they are doing their research and working on their unit work and so I let them read for enjoyment and we discuss the books and sometimes two or three of them will read the same book and then we sit down in a little group and we talk about it and sometimes if we're talking about a certain subject I'll get multiple copies of a book and they'll be five or six of them that I'll have read the book and then we'll talk about it but usually it's just mostly independent reading.

Individual instruction in reading also takes place during the two hour block of individual work time in the morning.

Shirley: When we start a unit like this unit on "Coming to America" and immigrants, I gave them a list of vocabulary words that they will be using and we went over those words and there may be an assignment like choose five of those words and write a question or write some sentences or make up a story using some of those words, just so that I know that they are learning some of the vocabulary.

Curiously, the math instruction is the one area that the students are split into ability groups and potentially meet with another teacher. The math instruction may come closest to a traditional method, but it still has an alternative flavor. Shirley stays consistent with
her web approach and provides students with choices of math activities to do. While math is the one subject that is somewhat fragmented in the students' day, it is also integrated into the morning two hour individual work time:

Jerome: What about math?
Shirley: If math is somehow connected to the unit then we do it whenever, but for formal math lessons we have the kids divided into groups and most research says that math is one of the places where you can divide them into skill groups if you want to and I think because we have grades three, four, and five up here that you have such a huge range.

Jerome: Oh yeah, certainly. As if there's not enough variance in a straight third or straight fourth.
Shirley: Well right, and Marilyn Burns talks about, you know, she doesn't like to put them into groups, but that's one grade level, so when we find three grade levels together, we find that we need to put them more into similar ability groups, and we do that for math. Not all the time, not everyday of the week, but we do that, and my math group has a math web that has twenty activities on it that they can do, they can work on any time. I do some formal teaching lessons with them. We do a lot of writing in math. We do a lot of hands-on manipulative type of things and [interruption] so it's a lot of hands on manipulatives. There's very few dittos, paper work. A lot of it's done mental math and working in cooperative groups and using literature. Right now I'm doing a lesson with them on the book *Jumanji* which is just coming out to a movie and there's one part where they play the game, they throw the dice and the girl has to get a twelve to win, so we're doing probability. "What's the probability of her getting a twelve on the dice?" And so we're rolling little, well you see the math cubes are right there, so we're rolling the math cubes and doing probability and then the kids are writing about it. So that's the kind of stuff we do for math.

Afternoon

The students' day is rounded out in the afternoon with an hour of work on independent projects. The work is either individual or small group and involves research, completing the project, and presenting their work to the class.

Shirley: After math in the afternoon for the last hour, we do what we call independent projects or cooperative projects. If you want to do it by yourself you can or if you want to work with one person or two or three people you can do it. The kids can choose anything they want to study. And some of the subjects that they pick just blow my mind. I mean very interesting.

Jerome: They really have a chance to express their creativity on something like that.
Shirley: Right and what they do is they choose something that they want to learn about and then they have to go collect facts and do research, gather information, they can interview people, they can call, they can do anything...
they want to get their information and then somehow they have to present that to the class when they're ready and they present that to the class and the class, if they want to, some of them take notes and then when they're finished with their presentation they can ask the class what kinds of things did you learn, what did you like about my presentation...

Jerome: The one who presented is the one asking those questions?

Shirley: Yes, the one who presents asks the other kids, the other kids tell them what they liked about it and then they ask what could I have done to improve it and the other ones give them suggestions. But anyways, so when they do these projects, they work all afternoon, it's really independent, people are off working. Some of them work in small groups, some work in bigger groups, some want to do a project by themselves.

Just like in the morning, Shirley assumes a role of facilitator and assessor during the independent project time. And just like the rest of the day, there is very little time that Shirley assumes a didactic role where she presents teacher-led instruction. She may pull small groups together and help them with a skill when she recognizes a common need. Sometimes she will seize a "teachable moment" and instruct the whole group when she has assessed a need to do to. The following discussion below illustrates such a case.

Shirley: Sometimes if I see that the whole group needs help with something, I need to pull them back and we need to sit down and talk. "OK, what is happening here?" And some kids will say "Well I'm having trouble finding this," and so I say "Well let's go down to the library and look at the library and how can we use it, what kinds of things are down here?" Because a lot of them will just go down and look in encyclopedias. So then we go down and do a lesson on different kinds of research books. So sometimes there's a whole teacher directed lesson like that. So it gives me the chance then, and to work with kids too.

Jerome: It does sound like those lessons are very purposeful then.

Shirley: Right

Jerome: I mean you see a need and then address it.

Shirley: For instance, a couple of them were doing projects where they needed to write letters for information. So I said to the whole class, "Well everybody's going to be writing letters, right? So let's just do, let's just talk about how you should write a letter and what it looks like." And so we did a lesson on letter writing. Did they all pay attention and care about it? Yeah! Because I said if you don't write your letter correctly they might pull it out of the envelope and throw it away if they can't read it. So then we did some cursive writing and practiced our cursive writing and they wrote their, and did I have to make them write the letter over? No! Because they wanted to, because if it wasn't clear and the words weren't spelled right, so they were really struggling with the spelling and looking it up and so they were making sure that it was really a good letter so that they would send it and get an answer back. And a lot of them do that, so that, it's like a teaching moment where you can say "OK, here's what everybody needs, let me just do this
now,” rather than what we used to do in school: “Take out your English books, turn to page forty-two and copy the letter, the friendly letter.”

Jerome: Right, “Because yesterday we did page forty-one and now we’re on forty-two.”

Shirley: Right

Shirley’s Professional Background

Preservice Training

In the introduction to this case, Shirley’s years of experience and where she has taught were briefly laid out; a more detailed explanation follows: Shirley did her undergraduate work at The Ohio State University thirty plus years ago. She describes her preservice teacher training as rather general, with no particular theme or focus except that it was elementary education. The students were not grouped into cohorts but rather went though on their own “taking a lot of classes.”

Shirley: It was just elementary education, everybody took a certain amount of courses and in your fourth year in the spring you student taught. The first two years were social studies, psychology, a lot of classes like that, writing, literature classes, nothing to do with teaching school, just taking a lot of courses. And then in the third year you’d start doing some observations at schools but mostly you just went out and sat in the corner and watched, you didn’t get to do any thing. One time I remember the teacher let me give a spelling test and he walked out of the room and the room went into chaos. (laughs)

Jerome: “Don’t go away!” (laughter)

Shirley: And then I did work in a kindergarten room one time observing, I mean and I helped with some of the things but I really didn’t teach much in the classroom until student teaching.

When asked whether or not her preservice training dealt with issues of assessment, she replied that it did not. Likewise, Shirley does not credit her preservice training for developing her current philosophy of teaching and learning.

Jerome: Now I know this was thirty years ago ...

Shirley: Right

Jerome: Do you remember anything from the preservice particularly that, well first of all do you remember having any training in assessment?

Shirley: No, no
Jerome: Which is not unusual at all. Do you remember anything from preservice that really impacted the way you teach or maybe helped to shape your philosophy of teaching and learning?

Shirley: Not really, because everybody went through the same program. There was no training on discipline or how to manage a classroom and there was no training at all on how to grade the kids, except that, I believe in one of the classes, they did say 90 to 100 is an A, and 80 to 90 is a B and they talked a little bit about grading on the curve if you wanted to do that, but there wasn't, that was about all that was mentioned.

Her student teaching was rather typical in a traditional sense. She reported that what she did learn about teaching and assessment, like many other preservice teachers, she learned from her cooperating teacher.

Jerome: Was your student teaching in a pretty traditional setting?

Shirley: Yes, extremely traditional inner city, very rough classes and really what I learned about teaching or assessment was from my cooperating teacher. You know, I watched what she did and how she marked things down in her grade book and then that's how I learned, that's how I did it, because I hadn't seen anybody else do it or wasn't trained in an assessment.

Jerome: Would you describe her assessment strategies as being alternative?

Shirley: No.

Jerome: So very traditional?

Shirley: Very traditional.

Shirley's Early Years Teaching Overseas

Shirley's experience over seas with the Department of Defense schools, in Taiwan and Germany, was certainly mixed. During the two years in Taiwan, the teachers either did not give grades or pretty much did what they wanted with grades and report cards.

The experience in Germany, however, had a structured system for assigning grades.

Shirley: And I went overseas and actually I cannot tell a lie, the first school that I was in was a school in Taiwan. It was during the Vietnam war and the school had all the teachers, the staff at the school the year before had been dealing in the black market and they had sold all the equipment on the black market. So we came into a school that was pretty much ransacked and the principal was very lackadaisical, this was a new, everybody was new, he was pretty lackadaisical and actually the first year, we didn't have to do grades, grade cards, no permanent records, and then finally, I don't know who said to him that we had to start doing something, so pretty much everybody just made up what they were doing.

Jerome: Was that a Department of Defense school?
Shirley: Uh hum, yes. That was very interesting. When I went to Germany then, they had a set way to do things and we did give “A”s, “B”s, “C”s and I pretty much just did it the way I had been doing it, the way that the cooperating teacher showed me, you know, 90 to 100 is an “A” and 80 to 90 is a “B.”

Jerome: Right

Shirley: I never thought anything about changing it and when I came back to the states I went back into inner city schools and I just did what everybody else did.

Jerome: Which was still a traditional focus?

Shirley: Right.

Transition Towards Using Alternative Assessment

A Critical Encounter / Curtis

Unlike Beth, who does not identify a critical incident in her development and transition towards using alternative assessment, Shirley can point to one individual, and in fact, one moment that was the greatest impact on her transition. By her own account, Shirley had been very traditional in her approach to teaching and learning during her first eight years of teaching. In her ninth year, when she was at an inner city school in Henderson, the school hired a new teacher, Curtis, a male, who caused quite a stir. Her reflection about that teacher follows:

Shirley: Then this, about the third year, no, the second year I was at an inner-city school in Henderson, a new teacher came and everybody talked about how different he was. You know, he had a little longer hair and he was kind of a bizarre guy and somebody said “You ought to go down and see his room.” Now in my room the kids weren’t in rows, but they were at little tables; I made the desks into tables. I went down to his room and his room was wild! It was centers, the kids were all doing, it was like cooperative learning. He was doing things that people are talking about starting to do now. And I went into his room and I said “Man, there is something in here I like!” But I had no idea. He was doing individual math notebooks and giving kids individual problems and assessing them that way rather than doing it the other way. And so I really liked some of the things he was doing, so I started trying and I would talk to him and I would try some of the things he tried and then when Stevens was going to start, and the vice principal at this school was going to be the principal at Stevens ...
A subsequent move to an alternative school. At this point in our discussion, Shirley recounts how the district was going to open up a new school, Stevens, which would be an alternative school. She decided to apply for one of the positions at the new school and saw that as an opportunity to be on the “cutting edge.” She also describes how she used what she had seen of Curtis’ instruction, to respond to a writing prompt which asked applicants to describe how they would set up an open space classroom:

Jerome: When you say starting, do you mean open up?
Shirley: Open up. They were building it and they were going to open it up and people, they were taking applications for teachers and I knew that I was not on the cutting edge of anything and I wanted to be, and I didn’t want to go back to school, because I’d had a bad experience in college and I really didn’t want to go back and so I decided to apply for this new school and this teacher [Curtis] that I watched all the time applied and he was going to be at the school and so …

Jerome: And you knew at that point that Stevens was going to be Alternative?
Shirley: Right
Jerome: OK
Shirley: It was going to be open space - team teaching, I knew nothing about that and so we, I had to apply for the school and you had to write a paper. We were all in a big auditorium and everybody had to write and the question was something like “If you were going to start your own open space classroom, how would you do it?” And I just wrote what I remembered from seeing what he did. And that’s what I did was write what I remembered from him, and I got the job; I got in.

Jerome: Did he?
Shirley: Yes he did.
Jerome: Is he still here?
Shirley: No, he’s at another open space school. He’s the one that got me going on all this stuff.

Influence of Curtis. In each of the three interviews that I had with Shirley, she mentioned his name and gave him credit for changing her own practice. In this next quote, Shirley reflects on how her exposure to Curtis played into her decision to leave Watson and apply for a position at Stevens; the alternative school. The second quote speaks to her marvel that Curtis was able to walk into a traditional school twenty years ago and make the types of changes he did -- even though he was getting “flack” from the principal, the custodian, fellow teachers, parents, and even some of the kids:
Shirley: Well, and so I knew, you know I had those little blurs of thinking to myself this isn't right. Then when I saw the things that Curtis was doing, I thought boy, there's something here and I didn't feel like I could go back to the university because I had struggled so badly when I was here before, and so I thought going to this new school, where they said they were going to have a lot of workshops and do a lot of in-service would be my way to learn, and so that's why I went to Stevens.

[...]

Shirley: Yeah, I think about Curtis, because there was that school, everybody had the kids in rows, we used textbooks, reading was 9:00 to 9:45, language 9:45 to 10:15, spelling 10:15 to 10:45, I mean everything was just like this ...

Jerome: Fragmented

Shirley: And Curtis came into the school, got the job somehow, interviewed, got the job, went into that classroom and changed, I mean it was bizarre to walk in there and see that. It was like "What!" I mean there was no, he put the teacher's desk as a center. "Well how can he not have his teacher's desk," I remember the teachers sitting in the lounge and talking about it, "Well he's crazy, look at all the stuff he's doing," and so he got some, he got a lot of flack from teachers.

Jerome: Oh I'm sure, which I think is another obstacle to change.

Shirley: Right, but he also had teachers like me and other teachers that looked at the stuff he was doing and said "How do you do that? That looks really interesting." And so there was some discussion, so if he could look at the positive side, but he had the principal fussing at him, and the custodial went crazy because "There's always stuff all over the floor" and you know an open classroom is always a mess.

Jerome: "I can't get my little mop through there in neat rows."

Shirley: That's right. So there was flack, but he put up with it. I asked him one time how can you take all this flack from the parents, from some of the kids, from all, from the principal, from some of the teachers?" He said "The kids love it." He said "The kids are doing great." And that's what he looked for.

Jerome: [talks about another subject that had the same type of flack at a school due to her different ways of doing things]

Shirley: But it's tough.

Jerome: Oh yeah.

Shirley: It's tough when you have to fight that.

The influence from just looking in Curtis' room, watching him, and talking to him were powerful enough to set a major shift and transition into motion. A sense of wonderment had set in and Shirley was able to start thinking differently about teaching and learning. Shirley's philosophy of teaching and learning may have changed practically over night, but the actual transition of method was naturally more drawn out.
Influences at the New School

The first step towards that goal was to get hired on at Stevens. As was recounted in a quote above, Shirley got a position at the newly built alternative school after writing about how she would set up an open space classroom. Her writing was entirely influenced by what she had seen of Curtis' teaching. Once hired, the staff decided upon some major philosophical decisions and set up a framework for how the school would operate. Impacted, would be the administration, the teachers, the parents, and the students. Among those decisions were issues of grades, paddling, and use of textbooks.

Shirley: We sat down and talked about how we wanted to do things and we said we don't want to give grades. We are not going to paddle, that's when you could paddle kids, we are not going to paddle, we are not going to give grades, we are not going to teach with books, we are just going to teach the way we've always thought we should teach and I'd never really thought about that except for watching Curtis teach and I saw good things happening in his classroom and there was a good feeling in there and that's what I wanted in mine.

Socially constructed knowledge. And so from day one at Stevens, there were some major changes in the ways that Shirley and the rest of the staff went about the practice of teaching. One of the significant changes, from Shirley's point of view, was the tremendous level of collegial support. During that first year, and every year since, the teachers at Stevens engaged in professional discourse about teaching and learning. They debated issues and ideas; read journals and books and shared their findings; attended conferences and meetings and reported back to their colleagues; and supported one another with a healthy respect for their convictions. In spite of that support, for some it was a rough beginning in an attempt to align philosophy with method.

Shirley: And so at first I had a lot of misgivings and I talked about "Well you guys are just, this is flying by the seat of your pants, this is crazy stuff."
Jerome: You mean here.
Shirley: Yeah, the first year. And I gave them a real hard time, a lot of people, but it was that talk back and forth, that discussion and that support from each other, like "OK Shirley, even though you're saying this is crazy, that's OK, I can accept that. Now here's what I feel. Now how can we come together?"
What do you think?" And it was that talking back between teachers, between professionals and not saying "Well you're just stupid, get out of here," but that constant talking about "What do you think? Well here's what I think. OK, I'll listen to you if you listen to me," and we would come up with, not a compromise but a way to do things that you know, we would say "OK, can you live with it for the next two weeks?"

**Jerome:** Well you stretch each other's boundaries and ways of thinking. A professor last night in class mentioned that if you are in a group with all like minded people, then you are in the wrong group because you won't grow or change at all.

**Shirley:** Well you can't say that about this school. We have some real hot teacher meetings. I mean we go in and shut the door and it's yelling and screaming and fussing and people saying you know, you're an idiot and "Well now wait, let's think about it, let's talk about it," and people here were always reading. And they would run off things that they'd read and put them in mailboxes; professional stuff, I'd never had that before. I'd never read anything on how you should assess kids. And so we were getting all this stuff to read, reading about things, talking about it, we had people come in and talk about it to us, and that's what you know, got me thinking, and it was exciting, and it still is, we're still doing that. We still get things. You go down and here's something somebody found in *Phi Delta Kappan*, they find an article in there or they'll find an article in *Educational Leadership*, and they'll run it off for everybody and put it in their mailboxes and say you know "What do you think? Let's talk about this at our next teachers' meeting," so we do a lot of that kind of thing.

**Faculty cohesiveness.** One cannot appreciate the dynamic situation that Shirley has been in the past twenty years without some understanding of the social fabric of the school; the culture that has been created by the teachers. As pointed out above, there is a tremendous amount of discussion, sharing, and support. One would be hard pressed to find a school that has a staff that works as closely together as the staff at Stevens.

Decisions at the school are made through unanimous agreement. A key element in this constructed culture is the role of the administration; it is an element that potentially could change overnight. For the past twenty years however there has been continuity at that level and it has allowed the staff to become more autonomous and, one might argue, more willing to take risks and continuously change.

**Shirley:** We have always looked at it as we are all equal and no decisions were ever made by the administration. The decisions were made by the staff. The administrator was considered staff and all the decisions were made and
everyone had to agree. We had to come to consensus. We always worked on consensus. If someone did not consense [sic] then we could not do it and we would talk more until everyone, and you had to go around the circle and say “Do you consense [sic]? Do you consense [sic]?” and consensing [sic] meant that you, maybe you didn’t agree with it but you could live with it for “Let’s try it for two weeks. I can live with it for two weeks and then we will talk about it again,” and that’s the way we did most of our things. The administration was very supportive because she was actually a part of us and when we had some of our knock down, drag out, screaming, yelling, fussing things in a big circle, she was right in there with us.

Staff development. Most of all the professional development that Shirley has experienced since arriving at Stevens can be attributed to staff development. As the staff at Stevens has moved ahead, into uncharted waters, so has Shirley. According to Shirley, the staff is constantly trying new things and have been engaged with initiatives like whole language and cooperative learning long before they were popularized.

Shirley: Because we, not that we feel like we know everything here, but we try. Where people are coming up “Oh whole language is so exciting,” we’ve done that for twenty-one years, we’ve always done that kind of thing. We’ve done cooperative learning for twenty some years. We’ve done most of the things that you can mention, we’ve done and what we’re looking for now is to, on top of all those things we’ve done, to make it even better and assessment is one thing we’ve always looked at and have always tried to do something and make it a better way.

A stance on grade cards. Shirley’s transition and professional development towards using alternative assessments began immediately upon starting at Stevens. That transition was as much a by-product of other changes, such as not using textbooks and grouping kids by multi-age, as it was a deliberate choice. From the day the school opened, the teachers had decided not to give grades. It is not too surprising that such a stance was met with reluctance by district officials and even some of the parents. As Shirley explains below how the staff at Stevens and the district administration were at odds with one another over the issues of giving grades, it is obvious that the staff was very strong willed and willing to confront authorities over what they believed.
Shirley: ... and then being at this school is where I really started learning about alternative assessment because this school said right away “We’re not going to give grades, we’re just not going to do it,” and downtown said “You have to,” and we said “We’re not,” and so we wrote letters for every child during time of assessment. They were, and that just took so long, I mean your hand was just about to drop off. And so downtown said “You MUST have some sort of a grade card and give letter grades,” and so we made bizarre letters like “P” for progressing as expected, “N” for no progress seen, “I” for inconsistent, “X” for not expected at this time, and that was just to satisfy downtown, which right now we’re in the process of changing our progress reports because we’re doing all these portfolios. We want to eventually use the portfolio and actually go back to this written and get away from letter grades, but we don’t know, we’re fighting it, it’s been twenty-one years, we’re still working.

Jerome: Is downtown still pressuring the school to use more traditional grades?
Shirley: Downtown is, I don’t know whether I want to say a little afraid of us, because they thought after the first couple of years this school would fold, but what we have is a very strong parental support. They go down to the Board and let them have it you know.

It is interesting to note that the conversation which the staff at Stevens has had with district officials concerning grades has been on-going over twenty years, and yet the pressure to conform still remains. The actual grade card has undergone several changes over the years and continues to change. As it exists now, the card still has the alternative letters as described above but it also allows teachers to add a significant amount of narrative information about the student. Although the above passage indicates that the parents supported the notion of not using traditional grade reports, there were always some parents who had to be convinced. There was some level of resistance from parents who wanted to know “Why are you doing this? Why aren’t you having spelling tests? Why aren’t you giving grades?” Below, Shirley provides a powerful account of a conversation she had with one particular parent who wanted to know why her child wasn’t getting the traditional “letter grades.”

Jerome: So the parents didn’t object to these letters?
Shirley: No, the parents didn’t object, the school board did.
Jerome: How did the parents react to ...
Shirley: Well you know it was so different, it was such a different kind of school. Most parents liked it. I did have a parent come in one time and we were down in the principal’s office and she was just ranting and raving about “This is ridiculous,” she couldn’t tell how her child was doing and she
wanted letter grades and I said "OK, here," and I took a piece of paper and wrote: math, reading, language, social studies, whatever, and I put "A," "A," "A," "A," and handed it to her and said "There." Now I said "Now you tell me what that tells you about your child."

Jerome: Right
Shirley: "Does that say how hard she's working? Does that tell what she's worked on? Does that tell what she needs help in?" Because I don't care if you get straight 'A's, you still need, there's still more you can do. Nobody gets straight 'A's and is perfect and needs no more work." And the mother kind of looked at me and said "OK, I understand" and threw the paper away.

Clearly, Shirley does not value a grading system that simply provides the traditional letter grades of "A," "B," "C," and "D." Part of the dissatisfaction that Shirley and the rest of the staff had with the traditional grading system is that it does not recognize the effort of lesser able students, nor does it push advanced students who can earn "A"s with minimal effort:

Jerome: I guess I can infer from what you were saying earlier about when you first came here that you wanted to throw out the grade cards, that the teachers were dissatisfied with traditional assessment.

Shirley: Right
Jerome: And it's difficult to speak for the whole group, but what do you think those dissatisfactions were?
Shirley: They were upset because kids, there were kids that, and everybody had them in their classroom, and you can, I'm sure you can identify with that, kids that would struggle, that would work so hard and because of the way you were supposed to assess, you could never give them above a "C," never! You could not give them, they could never get an "A" or a "B" because they couldn't come up to what you had to assess. But they were working themselves silly and then you'd have the kid that got the "A" that whipped his papers off in a minute and the kid always got "A"s and the kid never even tried. They did come up, and I don't know if they still do it on regular grade cards, whether you mark it "A-1," "2" or "3," which means "1" means you're really working for that "A," "2" means ehhh, and "3" means you didn't even try and you got an "A." Well you know, if kids don't even try and they're getting an "A" then teachers better take a look at what they're doing because obviously you're not challenging that child. How can you give them an "A" and say they didn't even try? But we used to. And that's why ...

Teacher change. As this discussion about the discontent with traditional grades continues, one gets a clearer idea of just how change oriented is the staff at Stevens. Most, if not all of the teachers had come to Stevens because of a dissatisfaction with the
traditional ways of education. With that in mind, they were willing to keep changing until they found the right mix of methods that they were satisfied with:

Shirley: The teachers that came here were people who had seen a lot of stuff in other classrooms and didn't like it and they didn't like the way education was going and they wanted to change and they were, we were crazy the first couple of years, risk takers. "There's the cliff, better not get too close," and we'd say "Hey, I can do it," and we'd jump. You know, we did stuff like that, we did crazy stuff, because we just, we just didn't like the stuff we were seeing and so if this kid that's doing "C" work, and who says what a "C" is? Please! You know, I read somewhere, that the people that get the "C's" are going to be the bosses of the people that are getting the "A"s. And what they are trying to say by that is, so this kid may be only getting a "C," but they may be very gifted in getting along with people and managing things and just because they can't get an "A" in math doesn't mean they're not smart, that they can be the boss. So we looked at all kinds of things like that.

Not only did it require a strong willed cohesive staff to push a change like the alternative grade card through the vested authorities, it was also made possible by the "alternative" status that the school has in the district. As an alternative school, Stevens is able to hire its own staff, the students are selected to attend by a lottery system, and site based management can more easily become a reality.

The high level of professional development that seems to constantly take place with the staff at Stevens plays an important role in their growth and change. Shirley explained that the staff at Stevens divide equally among themselves, the responsibilities for staying current in educational trends and issues. Some of the staff like to travel and attend conferences while others prefer to read out of journals. Practically the entire staff has their Master of Art degree. The result of accumulated professional development is a unified staff that is always forward looking. Whether teachers at Stevens attend conferences or read journals, they share what they learn with the rest of the staff through either formal or informal presentations.

Inservice Training. The typical type of inservice, whereby the administration decides what the staff needs professional development in, and then asks an "expert" to
come in an inservice the staff, seldom happens at Stevens. On the rare occasion that it
does, it is described as terribly ineffective. Most of the inservice is teacher-led and comes
from the reading in journals and attendance at conferences that was described above.

Shirley: 99 percent of the stuff we’ve done is teacher-led. Because, I mean not that
we think that we’re so wonderful but we did and still do a lot of reading, a lot
of research and then it comes from within. The couple of times we’ve had
speakers come in and talk to us, we were like “been there - done that,” you
know, “Can’t you tell us something new?” And they’re all excited about this
brand new thing to do and we are like ...

Jerome: “Done that.”
Shirley: “Done that.”
Jerome: OK, so in-service in the traditional sense, I think when people think of in-
service, they think about the district sending in an expert and the teachers
have to go. It sounds like that’s been pretty much ineffective.

Shirley: Right. We don’t do that.
Jerome: Don’t participate, or, isn’t some of that forced on you?
Shirley: Well l’llll (drawn out, laughs) Yeah, you can get around a lot of that.
Jerome: And so the teacher-led stuff, is that on a formal basis?
Shirley: Sometimes and sometimes informal, and sometimes half and half.
Jerome: Interesting
Shirley: We respect each other professionally. And we respect each other, sometimes
not socially, and so there are some conflicts there but the professional respect
is what comes out and that’s where people sit around and talk and instead of
getting into big ugly arguments, it’s like “OK, here’s how I feel, I’ll listen to
what you’re saying, I may not agree but I’m going to listen.”

Besides deciding at the incipience that the school would not use grade cards, there
have been several other factors that have led Shirley and the staff at Stevens to use
alternative assessments. The most recent factor has been the school’s focus on the theory
of multiple intelligence, which will be addressed shortly. Although Shirley did not
directly make the connection between the staff’s decision not to use textbooks and their
need for alternative assessment strategies, it is obvious that there is a correlation.

Teaching without textbooks. If the staff began, and indeed continues, to teach
without textbooks, then they abandoned basal readers, and all of the “teacher ready”
curriculum materials that many other teachers rely on. Imbedded in those types of
materials are the pre-tests, post-tests, unit reviews, and unit tests that teachers can use for
their assessments. Also included in those materials are the plentiful worksheets that can be assigned and later graded for data on student performance. Without those materials, which the staff decided not to use, there had to have been a void left for assessment.

Shirley: Well, over there back behind that corner are social studies books, a set of social studies books, I think we have third and forth grade ones and there's a set of math books over there somewhere that the kids can use but the thing is they're not very good as resources because for instance if we do a unit on insects, the science book for the kids, I think third grade has one page, one little page on the butterfly. Well our kids, the unit is called Back Yard Beasties and the kids are, there's thirty activities on there to do and we have microscopes and we dissect some of the insects that they found. We tell them no roaches or water-bugs, but usually we do that in the spring or fall when there's bees and things like that and we do so much more, that the book really doesn't give them enough information. The one book sometimes we use is the social studies book because it, the new one does have some pages in there on special people and we use those.

**School wide alternative grade card.** So the staff initially got around the void of assessment with the help of a report card that was significantly more open ended. Although the grade card is more of an issue of evaluation it does impact assessment because the teachers did not have calculate percentages and determine the traditional "A"s, "B"s, and "C"s. Being free from that burden allowed to staff to assess in alternative ways. One assessment strategy that was developed school wide was the use of portfolios. Students at Stevens all have portfolios which stay with them throughout their years at the school.

**School wide use of portfolios.** Recently, the staff has taken portfolios to a new level; they have started to keep portfolios on compact disc. Actually the initiative began last year with the five year olds and continued this year to include the six year olds (last year's five year olds) and the new five year olds. The plan is to continue with the project so that within a few years the students will have their portfolios on disc.

Shirley: What we want to do is we have been doing portfolios for quite a while. We have working portfolios and then the showcase and now we're starting with
electronic portfolios and we’re putting the kid’s portfolios on the computer so that when the child leaves school, our school at the end of fifth grade, they will have a computer disc that you can put on and look at their progress from kindergarten through fifth grade.

**Multiple intelligence.** The staff at Stevens has also recently embraced the theory of multiple intelligence. As with other changes at Stevens this has been teacher-led. Many of the teachers visited a school in St. Louis that claims to be a multiple intelligence school. Some of the staff also went to a conference in Tucson that focused on multiple intelligence.

Shirley: Well the one we went to in Tucson was about the seven intelligences and so we were really interested in assessment also because if you are going to start talking about seven intelligences, all right now how are you going to assess that. You don’t give that “A,” “B,” “C,” “D.” “Gee, your painting is an A,” please! So you know, so the assessment came in with it and usually the conferences that you go to, no matter what it is, there will be something on assessment and so you look for that, simply because right now we’ve re-done our grade card maybe four times and right now we’re ready to re-do it again and so people are looking and reading and seeing what they can find out.

Jerome: So you are seeking out those sessions that deal with assessment.
Shirley: Right, in fact I just got a paper, maybe I got it out of this *Educational Leadership*, a big brochure about a conference that’s coming up in January I think and I specially went down the list and looked for ones that were talking about assessment.

Besides the visit to the school in St. Louis and the conference in Tucson, the staff has read and studied Howard Gardner’s *Reader* about the theory of multiple intelligence, and teachers read articles from journals about the theory and how other teachers are using it in their classroom or schools. This change is having an impact on assessment in several ways. First, teachers are beginning to use the multiple intelligence language as they write the narrative remarks on the students’ report cards. Shirley was quick to point out that they have not just thrown the multiple intelligence language out there; first they have had small group meetings with the parents to inform them of multiple intelligence.

Using the theory of multiple intelligence as an umbrella theory that informs what the teachers do at Stevens has led them to deliberately include items in the portfolios that
address all of the seven intelligences. Acknowledging that children have different intelligences has meant an increased emphasis on providing opportunities for students to perform or function at each of the intelligences. It meshes well with other philosophical stances at the school, such as being student-centered and integrating the curriculum; each of which also have bearing on assessment. Following a child-centered approach, the teachers at Stevens ask themselves: What is best for the child? What knowledge does (s)he bring to school? What does (s)he want or need to learn? How do you know (s)he is learning it.

**Developing alternative assessments.** The district that Stevens is in already has an alternative assessment for writing. Using that as a model or springboard, the teachers at Stevens are developing an alternative assessment for reading. They view a student’s reading ability as being on a continuum. It is an idea that fits well with their structure of keeping kids for several years. Within this continuum, the teachers have identified the labels: emergent reader, early reader, fluent reader, and exceptional reader. The assessment, which will be a reading portfolio, will use those labels as rubrics. The writing portfolios that the teachers at Stevens use are an alternative assessment developed by the district. It involves collecting students’ writing and comparing it to descriptive anchors within established rubrics. Being student-centered, the teachers have always valued the children’s writing and as such have an abundant selection of writing samples to include in the portfolios.

The portfolios that Shirley has her students keep include working portfolios and showcase portfolios. The showcase portfolios are later used for parent conferences, which is another new initiative that Shirley is embarking on. This year, for the first time, Shirley set up the parent conferences to be student-led. She scheduled several parent conferences to run concurrently and had students set up at separate tables around the
room. The students led the conferences with their parents as they perused the child’s portfolio. Shirley briefly visited each table to clarify questions or concerns but for the most part it was the student showing the parent(s) what (s)he had been doing and accomplished in school.

Beyond the use of portfolios and the alternative grade card, Shirley uses several other alternative assessment strategies with her home base students. These are considered in the following section.

**Shirley’s Assessment Strategies**

In the preceding descriptions and quotes, several of Shirley’s assessment strategies have been brought to light. As part of a school wide initiative she uses portfolios and within a couple years she will use digital portfolios. Her approach to instruction allows her to assume a role of facilitator/assessor for the majority of day. The assessment techniques utilized during much of that time, that have either directly or indirectly been addressed above, include observing students, conferring with individual students on a regular basis, making anecdotal records, checking student work as they finish “web” activities, and reading and responding to students’ learning logs on a daily basis. The data from these assessments alone could arguably be sufficient to fulfill the role of assessment - the informing of instruction, but Shirley has a deeper repertoire of assessment strategies.

**Student Self-Assessment**

Foremost among the additional types of alternative assessment strategies that Shirley uses is a process called “SELF.” It is a process developed by Shirley and a colleague which they have already copyrighted and plan to do workshops on:
Shirley: ... it’s called SELF, S E L F, an acronym. “S” stands for see, and you say to the kids “OK, when you were doing this, what did you see happening?” And they talk about what they saw happening and then “E” is for experience. “What was the experience like? How was it like, what was it like when I said you have to go off and write this story about so-and-so? How did that feel? What were your feelings? What was it like for you? What was the experience like and while you were doing it was it hard? Was it hard to come up with ideas?” You know, let them talk about it and then “L” is for what did you learn. “When you did this, did you learn something from it? Did you learn about yourself? Did you learn about others? Did you learn something about the subject?” And then “F” is what are you going to focus on now, or “What questions do you have?”

Shirley has found that the SELF assessment process can be used in just about any situation, including conflicts between students. It is not just a coincidence that the acronym spells self. Shirley’s major goal in using the SELF process is for the students to take an active role in their own assessment. She is trying to get the students to assess themselves and not totally rely on the teacher for assessment.

Shirley: ... and if I have them do this SELF processing, then that’s a way for me to assess them because I can see what they think they’ve done.

Jerome: Yeah

Shirley: And they’re starting to assess themselves and say “OK, here’s what I need to work on,” rather than me the teacher saying “Well now that was a really good presentation but you know your poster could have been better” and that’s what I’m used to doing. It’s telling them what to do and how much better is it for them to be able to figure it out themselves.

Jerome: Exactly, because the teacher won’t be with them for the rest of their life ...

Shirley: Right

The SELF assessment process is used every day in Shirley’s teaching. Each morning before the students break for recess and lunch they gather in a circle on the floor “process” the day’s activities:

Shirley: Well, daily we do the SELF process and we always sit before we go out for recess in the morning, we do the processing with SELF, you know what was going on today, what did you see happening ...

Jerome: Did you say they are writing that?

Shirley: No, we talk about it. It’s just a talking. Sometimes at the end of the day they’ll say can I write this SELF in my learning log and I’ll say sure. Sometimes I have them write it but most of the time we just discuss it. But we discuss it everyday. Sometimes we discuss it before we go home, so we’re processing that way, so that’s something we do every day.
Obviously, Shirley places great value on the students taking an active role in assessment. Ideally, she would like to have the crux of assessment placed upon the students. In the following quote, she connects her philosophy of a student-centered approach to education with the idea that students need to be actively involved in the assessment process. As she points out, it does not make sense to be student-centered and still be the outside evaluator:

Shirley: Well, with student-centered learning, I would think, you have to assess that way because student-centered learning is where everything is centered on the student. So then why would you as the teacher step out and evaluate what they’ve just done? Then that’s sort of knocks out whatever they’ve done. I mean if it’s student-centered learning, are they learning anything about what they’ve just done? Not if they haven’t assessed themselves! They have to assess what they’ve done and if you let them assess what they’ve done and then talk to you about it, I mean what more do you need?

Reading Conferences

The assessments that Shirley utilizes for reading varies from individual reading conferences to whole group efforts which incorporate the learning logs. Shirley describes the reading conferences as “two of us sitting down and talking about it.” Two examples of a whole group type of reading assessment are described below:

Shirley: Sometimes in their learning log I’ll have them, I’ll say “Everybody, on the book that you are reading, do a word web in your learning log” and so then I can look at everybody’s learning log and see, and if you have to do a word web on a book you’ve got to know some things that are going on. Or I do things like “In the book that you are reading, choose one of the characters and design a tee-shirt that they would wear.” Now you have to know about that character. For instance, they would know that I would never wear a Michigan tee-shirt, OK so you would not design that kind of tee-shirt to represent me.

Jerome: You must have hated this past Saturday (referring to the loss to Michigan)
Shirley: Ohhh, it was horrible! (talks about game)
Folders and Journals

Shirley has the students keep various types of folders and journals which she then uses in assessment. Although most of the assessment from the folders and journals involves looking at the students' writing, it is balanced with the constant observations:

Shirley: One of the new ways that we're doing is we have math folders where they can write - math journals. I use that a lot for assessing. For instance with this probability, we've been working on this for a couple days and today what we are going to do in math is a type of assessment, I want to see what they are understanding about probability.

Shirley went on to describe that in the activity, she would have the students roll the dice several times and fill out a chart with the results of each roll. She would then ask the students to explain what number comes up most frequently and to support their claim:

Shirley: "What I want you to do is to tell me which number you think comes up the most, and you have to support your argument for that. And so you can do it by drawing, writing, whatever." Then by reading those papers, I can see what they're understanding about probability and rolling the number cubes. So that's one way that I assess, is through their writing. The other way is just walking around watching them while they are doing things and listening to them; a lot of observing. And I have a sheet with all their names on it so that sometimes when I go around and listen I can jot down little things that they say.

Assessment Versus Evaluation

As we talked about assessment strategies, our discussion turned briefly to comparing assessment with evaluation. While Shirley sees evaluation as an end, an activity that teachers engage in when they administer chapter tests and fill out grade cards, she views assessment as an ongoing process that informs instruction.

Shirley: Yeah, evaluate is like a set thing, it's either good or bad, "OK, that's it." Assessment is like an on-going thing, you know, you just keep assessing, "So this is how far you got on this. All right, now we take it to this and that's how far you got on that, all right now let's keep ..." and it's just this continuing, it's like being on a continuum, you know, you just keep moving, where evaluation is, stop, evaluate, "OK, now we start something else."

Again, the idea of self-assessment entered our discussion. This time, however, Shirley portrays an interactive process that has the teacher assessing the self-assessment
of the students. The information gleaned from this process allows the teacher to make informed decisions and to more appropriately guide students in their further learning. In the purest sense, it can inform the teacher's instruction based on what the students assess about their own learning.

Shirley: You let kids assess themselves in a way for you to assess how they are assessing. I mean that sounds kind of crazy but they are assessing one way and you sort of assess it on a higher order because of what you know about teaching and learning.

Jerome: Right

Shirley: So then, you as the facilitator need to be able to help them move to the next step, which children sometimes don't know how to do.

Jerome: You as the professional with the depth of knowledge...

Shirley: Right, you know how to move them. They want to study bats and they are real interested in bats, what's the next step to move them to? You can talk to them about you know, "What was really interesting to you when you studied bats?" "Well it's neat that they live in caves" "Well gee, maybe you could work on caves next," and that moves them to a whole different kind of a thing.

Summary

The road towards Shirley's use of alternative assessment has been a rather long one and it continues to develop. It began with a critical incident in her ninth year of teaching when she stepped into Curtis' room and saw an approach to teaching that seemed to make more sense to her. That eventually led to her moving to Stevens Alternative where the whole process mushroomed. Centered around a student-centered philosophy of teaching and learning, Shirley and the staff at Stevens gave up textbooks, traditional grades and many of the approaches that they were used to. The interconnectedness and interdependence of those choices and the many choices that would follow over the next twenty years would all impact the teachers' need for and therefore decision to use alternative assessment strategies. Shirley uses the metaphor of a snowball to describe the complex interactions between philosophy, change, decisions, and reaction:
Shirley: The whole thing goes like a big old snowball. You can’t just change one thing and say “OK, well let’s do whole language.” I’ve been talking to some teachers that are doing that. It was last year that they started it and the big thing was “Let’s do whole language and let’s have a block out of the morning to do whole language” and that’s the one thing they were going to do and now I sit with them in meetings and they are like “Oh my God, we couldn’t use the textbooks. We had to change. We had to get different books and we have to look at different ways to grade the kids now. We have to do the assessment a different way. You can’t just grade their papers because now they are doing projects and so we have to assess a different way. So we are looking at different ways to assess and the kids don’t understand how to work in these centers. So now we have to help the kids and now the parents don’t understand so now we have to talk to the parents, so that gets the teachers up in front doing workshops with the parents.” So it’s this big giant snowball and the more you change your teaching the more you get that big snowball and you have more stuff you have to do and it doesn’t get smaller.

This discussion continues, but she talks about a second snowball whereby the students’ learning and satisfaction as well as the teachers’ satisfaction grows at a comparable rate as the teachers’ “change” snowball does. If teachers make those choices to improve teaching and learning and in the process they have to keep changing all the connected factors in order to remain consistent with their philosophy, good things happen and the students are the benefactors:

Shirley: But, I think in the same way, the satisfaction that you get out of your job, and the things that you see happening, and the improvements, and the things that you see with the kids, and the learning, and the excitement that happens, and the more kids that are reading, then that’s a snowball effect too. So you know, it’s the old double snowball but once you start it you can’t, you just can’t do whole language and sit back and keep them in rows and grade the way you used to grade and do all that. How can you do whole language and not group them into tables and put them, how can you do that and not do cooperative learning? How can you do that and use the same old textbooks? You can’t!

Jerome: How can you do that and not integrate the curriculum?
Shirley: That’s right! You can’t. It falls right in there. It makes you integrate the curriculum. It makes you find other ways to assess.
Barb

Introduction

Barb was the third participant that I worked with in this study. Hers was the first case that involved a participant that I had not previously met. She was referred to me by two different individuals - both of whom are specialists in alternative assessment. Before arriving at her classroom for the first time, I had wondered what it would look like and what types of similarities and differences I would find between her and my first two participants, Beth and Shirley.

I knew that her school existed as an informal school and based on what I had experienced with Beth and Shirley, I wondered how she would have her room set up. Would the students be grouped, either at tables or at desks pushed together? Would student textbooks be conspicuously missing from their desks? Would there be a plenitude of manipulatives readily accessible to the students? And would there be an abundant supply of quality children’s literature displayed and available for the students to read? These were surface level similarities that I had noticed with the first two participants and it seemed a good prediction that I might find the same in Barb’s classroom.

Like Beth, Barb is a product of the EPIC preservice program at The Ohio State University. An eight year veteran teacher, Barb was the only participant in this study who had not moved schools since she began teaching. Not only had she taught at Balfour Elementary during her entire tenure, she also did half of her student teaching there. The other half of her student teaching was done at another informal school, Highland Park, utilized by the EPIC program.
The School

Balfour Elementary is an inner-city school and can accurately be described as both urban and informal. Within the Henderson Public Schools system, it is also recognized as an alternative school (just like Stevens, where Shirley teaches) which among other things means that students are selected to attend through a lottery system. It also means that the school administration has the authority to recommend candidates for employment to the board of education. At Balfour, as is the case at Stevens, that authority is shared with the teaching staff; the teachers at both schools participate in group interviews of prospective new teachers.

The students at Balfour Elementary are multi-age grouped. There are at least two grade levels in each classroom, but the teachers do not approach the groupings as traditional split classes. Rather, they consider them family groupings and see the students in the groups on a continuum. Barb mentioned that she would prefer to have a looping system that would allow her to keep the same students for a three year period. The school’s philosophy is very child-centered and child-focused and allows for student choice:

Barb: I don’t mean that they are choosing to do math or not do math, but they have a lot of choice within, and the philosophy behind that is for children to learn to be good problem solvers and decision makers they need to experience it in every facet.

Jerome: Yeah, they need practice.

Barb: We’re a lot based on experience and discovery in learning. We used to believe in a lot of field trips but something doesn’t encourage or allow that as much as it used to, although people still get out a lot, I mean all the time, we don’t wait until the end of the year and go to COSI one day or the zoo. I mean we are out there, there are six classes out of the building right now and that could be on any given day. We believe in children taking responsibility for themselves; not just educationally but also behaviorally and we teach through literature.

According to Barb, as indicated in the excerpt below, about half of the current teaching staff at Balfour came through the EPIC program, yet they all share the informal philosophy. Like Barb, many of the teachers had been non-traditional students in their...
preservice training programs. Barb speaks to those aspects in the following excerpt. She also makes the point that unlike many schools, one can never be sure what one will find when visiting any particular classroom at Balfour, except during lunch, recess, and the school wide silent reading program:

Jerome: And have almost all of the people here come from an informal program?
Barb: No, I'd say not as many as some of the other informal schools; probably half. But a lot of them were non-traditional students who came to this job late in life, later in life; like I was 28 or 29 when I started and I know a lot of other people that came about when I did or since then or the same.
Jerome: Yeah, and I don't think that you would have to go necessarily through EPIC, you could still have that same philosophy of teaching.
Barb: Everyone here does have that philosophy and they practice it to varying degrees, the informal part of it, they practice it to varying degrees but everyone, I can say we're all linked with a pretty sound philosophy on what we believe about kids.
Jerome: That sure is missing in a lot of schools.
Barb: [talks about her student teacher who was visiting another, more traditional school for a week]
Jerome: Well in some of those classrooms you know that if you walk in at 10:00 you know what you are going to see.
Barb: Yeah, and you will never see that here. I don't know anyone, except for the whole building does silent reading at 1:00. That's the one thing, that, lunch, and recess are the only things that you will see at the same time every day.

The Classroom

Arrangement

Of all the classrooms visited for this study, Barb's was the most informal, least traditional. That aside, there were striking resemblances between her room and the rooms of both Beth and Shirley. A feeling of openness was enhanced by its tall ceilings, large windows that towered to 10 feet and ran the length of the long northern wall, and the spaciousness of the room. This was augmented by the layout of the classroom which included a large carpeted open area in the middle of the room, flanked on both sides by a few round tables for students to work at. The position of the six tables in the room made up no particular pattern.
Visuals

During the time of the visits to the classroom, the students had been engaged in an extended unit on Native Americans. A fire pit had been fashioned in the middle of the carpet area and served as focal point for group meetings on the floor. As if at a museum of natural history, on a table at the end of the carpet were displayed various artifacts such as: drums, animal skins, antlers, animal skulls, and masks. On a large bulletin board was a map of the United States, and on it were markings and symbols indicating Native American tribes that the class had either studied, read about, or listened to oral stories about. On the same wall was a graphic representation of an integrated thematic year-long unit centered around Native Americans. Arranged in a connected circle were the following topics: peace, geology, geography, Life on Turtle Island, primitive-prehistoric people, historic Native Americans, astronomy, immigration, conservation, stewardship, the future.

Art work from students, both past and present, was prominently displayed on the walls around the room. Much of the art work either had a multi-cultural or an environmental connection, providing a visitor a sense of what is valued in the classroom. Proverbs and Native American sayings were artistically prepared and hung on all the walls.

Besides the students’ art work that was visible around the room, many student projects could also be found. While they were in various stages of completion, it was obvious that students were actively engaged in prolonged projects. The variation in the types of projects indicated a classroom where students had choices about what to work on. Just outside the door, in the main hall of the school, a student’s model of a mastodon was proudly displayed. The student had used a combination of paper, tape, sticks,
fabric, and papier-mâché to create the impressive model. Together with the display were labels made by the student and descriptive writing describing the mastodon.

Although there were several chalkboards in the room, all of them were covered either with paper, students’ artwork, webs, or any other works in progress. On one such sheet of flip chart paper were the class rules, signed by all the students in the room. Barb made use of an easel at the front of the room on the edge of the carpet when she needed to display schedules, directions, or other information one might normally find on a chalkboard. Large sheets of flip chart paper were held firmly in place on the easel by large oversize mega-paperclips.

Manipulatives

An art center contained items such as: spray paint, beads, pipe cleaners, tongue depressors, pop-cycle sticks, glue, brushes, markers, crayons, contact cement, paint dishes, and lots of paint in bottles. Elsewhere in the room was a cubbie filled with various types of paper for the students to use. The students also had easy access to a wide assortment of manipulatives for math and science, as well as a few games. There was a terrarium displayed on the perimeter of the rug area near a science curriculum kit, and across the room near the door was an aquarium.

Children’s Literature

The students each had a cubbie to store personal items. Missing from the cubbies, however, and from the room altogether, were the traditional textbooks for the various content areas. An abundant selection of children’s literature, on the other hand, was displayed and available to students around the room. Short bookcases which lined the north wall were filled with books grouped into areas such as science, social studies, fiction, non-fiction, and chapter books. On one particular book rack were displayed a
collection of books from the public library on Native Americans. Books produced by students, again, both past and present, were displayed at another location in the classroom.

A Day in Barb's Classroom

Morning

The day begins comfortably with students working either in groups or individually. They sit at round tables positioned on the perimeter of the room or they choose other, perhaps more comfortable places to work. One cannot determine simply by glancing around the room, specifically what the children are working on. The soft sounds of Native American flute music permeate the room. Barb moves amongst groups and individuals helping, answering questions, and asking questions. The teacher's desk, covered over with various objects does not appear as a place where someone sits and spends time. Although there are additional chairs stacked next to the door, there are fewer chairs being used than there are children in the room.

Nearly a full hour into the school day, Barb brings the students together on the carpeted area for announcements, the day's schedule, and some direct instruction. The students come to the carpet area quietly in an extremely smooth transition. The schedule, which is displayed on an easel, includes two brief "rug meetings," ample project time, sustained silent reading, story time, a 45 minute slot to be announced (TBA), clean-up, choir, and the anchors: lunch and recess. Also on the schedule are circled reminders or announcements concerning various due dates. One of the students reads the schedule to the rest of the class and another reads the bubbles.
Role of teacher and student. The most striking observation made during this typical day is the amount of time that Barb spends in a didactic role. Seldom does she address the entire group in direct instruction. Rather, her time is mostly spent facilitating and monitoring student work. Another striking observation is the level of on-task behavior exhibited by the students. They appear consumed by the activities they engage in and yet very efficiently make transitions throughout the day.

The audience for their work is their own classmates. A young boy seen working on a piece of writing, later has the opportunity to share his work with the class during a "rug meeting." The approving audience applauds the effort by snapping their fingers. Barb comments: "Keep that in your journal and you can work further on that in writing workshop." That the class is focusing on Native Americans is obvious by the types of projects they are working on. Two girls ask the visitor if he will accompany them outside so they can collect sticks for the teepee they are making. Armed with a yard stick, they are in search of two-foot long sticks. Another girl sits at a table with a number of books, appearing to be researching. When asked what she is doing, she replies "I am trying to figure out how many sticks a teepee has."

Afternoon

Much of the remaining day progresses in similar fashion, with students making choices and working to meet the various expectations of which they seem very aware.

The types of individual instruction and feedback that Barb is engaged in are typified the following example: A student approaches Barb to ask what time "SOS" [summary, opinion, support] will be:

Student: What time is SOS?
Barb: 2:10. What time is it now?
Student: Uhm, (pause) 1:40
Barb: How long will it be until SOS?
Student: [spends some time finding the difference] 30 minutes?
This method, which appears Socratic, is typical of the ways that Barb approaches her teaching. It also provides considerable opportunities for assessment. Another student approaches Barb and shows her his writing folder. She reads the student's work and writes comments back to the student in his presence, thereby leaving a paper trail of documentation. Throughout the day, the methods and strategies that Barb uses to teach and assess appear seamless.

**Barb's Background**

**Preservice**

As pointed out earlier in this case, Barb did her preservice training at The Ohio State University in the EPIC program. She has completed some course work above the Bachelor level but states that she is not working on her Master of Art degree. Barb described herself as having been a non-traditional student during her undergraduate training, mainly because of her age, which was perhaps six years older than typical undergraduates:

Barb: I was one of those non-traditional college students who had already been in college about seven or eight years at the time and I had a background in art education and also in (laughs), this doesn't fit, natural resources (laughs), agriculture and I kept not finding what I was looking for.

Jerome: Was that at Ohio State?

Barb: Yeah, all of that was, and so ...

Jerome: Actually that sounds like a great background for a teacher.

Barb: Yeah, well the art definitely was ...

Jerome: And I think the natural resources too, just ...

Her interests in natural resources and agriculture were likely grounded in the rural environment in which she grew up. With both of her parents being teachers, Barb jokingly told of how she resisted as long as she could before finally "succumbing" to
pursuing educational course work. The events that originally led her to the EPIC strand were mere chance.

Barb: Well I stumbled upon the [EPIC] program actually.

Barb's decision to enter EPIC. Just as Beth entered EPIC to finish her degree as quickly as possible, Barb was directed to EPIC because it was a shorter program in duration. She had already spent more than the typical amount of time at the university trying to decide what field of study to settle on, and as such, she and her advisor looked towards programs that would only take three quarters rather than the four or five quarter programs that also existed. EPIC was one of the programs that lasted three quarters. However, once she found out more about the EPIC program, something “clicked” for her, the program made sense, and she made a conscious decision to enter it:

Barb: So as I got into the education field, I had to pick a strand, and my advisor was listing some options. I had so many course hours that I was like way over the graduation requirements and yet still hadn't done that final core of classes. So he was suggesting the three quarter strands. At the time they had the traditional ones that went four to five quarters long for that last chunk of course work and then there were a couple of three quarter strands and that’s what I knew I had to be in but some of them were filled. So to make a long story short, two of the ones he mentioned sounded interesting. One was LINK, it was Literature Across the Curriculum but in a more traditional setting, and then there was EPIC. I kept pushing for the EPIC and he was like “Oh but I think this,” and I was like “No, tell me more about EPIC” and it became, I came to this school in fact to observe one day just to find out more, because you had to do like an interview process; it was one of the few strands that did interviews at that time.

Jerome: Can I assume then that you were already interested in informal education?
Barb: I didn’t know I was but as soon as I saw this school and heard about that strand, I knew, something clicked, and it became a reason to do this; it made sense, and I still feel that way. I don't know if I could exist in another place.

Jerome: I wouldn’t say you fell into it purely by accident, but ...
Barb: Something led me here.
Jerome: And once you found out about it, you kind of knew that was it?
Barb: It was it, yeah.

Assessment connection. Barb was the only participant in this study to give some credit to her preservice training for any of her abilities in assessment. When asked
whether or not she recalled any course-work that dealt with assessment, her initial reply was “no.” She corrected herself and described a couple of strategies that were dealt with during her preservice training that related to assessment. It is important to note that the techniques only related to assessment and were not directly espoused as assessment techniques. Barb, as a professional educator, has made the connections herself:

Jerome: Do you remember any course-work during the EPIC training that dealt specifically with assessment?

Barb: No, well I do actually, because for example, in children’s literature, one form of assessment that I use is through literature response, response from the children, whether it’s verbal or kind of a written response or a pictorial response, and so yeah, I mean we talked about extensions of literature and all of those are assessments. Those are all forms of assessments, so yeah, we did a lot of that and you know like I know we did a lot of experiential things like field trips and things within our university class and then when we came back, one of the initial experiences was we went on a camping trip and they still do something similar to that, and we came back and did projects. I mean that’s what my kids do everyday and I’m assessing what they learn, what knowledge they gained from an experience through how they express it when they get back to the classroom.

Although Barb has made connections between some of the things that they did in EPIC (such as the extensions of literature and experiential things) and assessment, the fact remains that assessment itself was not dealt with specifically during her preservice training. At the same time, Barb recognizes that when one incorporates extensions of literature and experiential learning, for example, a teacher has notable opportunities for assessment. These two examples of instructional methods can certainly be viewed as student-centered and as such, if her training in EPIC increased the chance that she would teach towards a student-centered approach, then the need as well as the opportunities for assessment would also increase. The need and the opportunities for assessment may not be available if a teacher does not provide student-centered experiences.

EPIC/student-centered philosophy. The most prominent aspect of the EPIC program for Barb was the discussion and reading centered around a philosophy of
teaching and learning. As noted in Beth’s case study the EPIC program dealt with alternative methods of instruction and established a strong philosophical foundation which supported student-centered instruction. Barb’s description of EPIC also reveals philosophy of education that is student-centered:

Jerome: In the EPIC program do you remember whether there was a lot of discussion or talk about a philosophy of teaching and learning?
Barb: Yes
Jerome: What was their message?
Barb: I would say that children learn through doing, through experiences, that you need to build background knowledge for kids to build on, you know, to the next level. Go from the concrete to abstract. That children need a reason for doing tasks, not just “do this,” where they’re given a purpose and an audience or an end goal that makes them need to do the activities that come in-between that and the end product.
Jerome: And did you buy into all of that?
Barb: Oh yeah! It just clicked immediately with me.
Jerome: And I guess they talk then also about what the teacher ought to be doing. In other words, that the teacher doesn’t just stand up in front of the students and... 
Barb: Oh yeah, yeah definitely.

When the discussion came back to the EPIC program and whether or not they spent time with issues of assessment, Barb disclosed that not enough time was spent with it. Interestingly, she reveals her view that teachers develop their own assessment methods based upon one’s philosophy of teaching and learning. Again the importance here is that the EPIC program helped to develop Barb’s philosophy of teaching and learning, and from that, her methods of assessment followed. At the end of the following quote, Barb makes an important connection to the importance of the context; because she is at a school that supports an informal approach to education she is able to teach and assess in a manner consistent with her philosophy:

Jerome: Do you remember anything through that program that dealt with assessment?
Barb: (sigh) (pause) Not enough. I think that’s always been a sketchy area and I think you just kind of develop your own methods that go along with your philosophies of teaching and we are lucky enough here to be able to rely on that most heavily, and to be left to our own devices.
Student teaching. While in the EPIC program, Barb student taught for two quarters. One of those quarters was at another informal school and one was at Balfour. It was entertaining to listen to Barb describe her student teaching experience, which she characterized as being very difficult. It is somehow ironic that given the difficult nature of her student teaching experience and her subsequent vow not to teach in an urban school, nor at Balfour, that she would end up with a teaching position at the school and eventually consider Balfour as home.

Jerome: You said that you did your student teaching here?
Barb: One quarter of it. EPIC did two quarters of student teaching. One of the few strands that did that also, so I was here for one of those quarters.
Jerome: And what was that like?
Barb: (laughs) Hell! (laughter) It was the worse three months of my life (laughing as she says it) I never got a grip on what was going on in that classroom. I was with a teacher who is no longer here and she was really an abstract thinker and I think probably really good at what she did, but I never had a real handle on it and I decided then that I didn’t want an urban school and I didn’t want to be at Balfour.
Jerome: And here you are.
Barb: And here I am (laughter), my punishment for making that rule.

In absence of textbooks. It is not too surprising that Barb would have had a difficult student teaching experience. The colossal challenge facing any student teacher is daunting enough. What experienced teachers might consider simple tasks, such as learning students’ names, learning the daily and weekly schedules, and managing student behavior, often loom over student teachers as tremendous challenges. Typically, student teachers tend to rely on whatever textbooks are used by the school to teach the subject areas such as math, science, social studies, language, and reading. Decisions about what to teach are often averted, and in a sense, various teams of textbook writers in distant locations had already made those decisions for the teacher. The decision of what to teach next becomes whatever is next in the textbook.

That reliance on the various textbooks eases the burden of teacher planning and makes the student teaching experience less formidable. For Barb, however, the
classroom she student taught in did not have the textbooks for all the content areas. Besides dealing with the "simple" tasks mentioned above, Barb was forced to make the more complicated and critical decisions of what to teach. Once those decisions were made she also had to deal with locating resources - another task that is significantly reduced by relying on textbooks. Another significant difference is that teachers at Balfour tend to integrate subject matter rather than using a segmented approach. Our conversation touched on these points:

Jerome: Well you know it strikes me that the more informal it gets, the more complicated it becomes and you really have to be on top of
Barb: Definitely!
Jerome: It seems so much easier to teach math from like 9:00 to 10:00 and reading from 10:00 to 11:00 and spelling from 11:00 to 11:30, and it's easier to get a grip on that.
Barb: Uh hum, and you have that textbook to guide you; we don't have textbooks.
Jerome: So I can certainly understand why that would seem really complicated coming out as a student teacher and feel overwhelmed.
Barb: It's much more difficult, you're basing everything on individual needs and you design projects and work so that whoever it is, because we have family groupings with multi-aged spreads and ability spreads...
Jerome: Is that how it is here? It's multi-age group?
Barb: Yeah. And the ability level is so wide that you're always designing a project that every one can participate in yet at their level.
Jerome: I found that to be the most difficult thing about teaching, was allowing for those vast differences.
Barb: It is. The things we're doing right now, and I do have that spread, but everyone is doing the same project, yet they are doing it in their own level. And also, building in some element of choice you know, so they can feel that want or need to do it.
Jerome: So during the student teaching, it sounds like it was kind of (laughter)
Barb: Yeah

Criticism of traditional student teaching programs. Barb spoke critically about the design of many student teaching programs that are scheduled for spring quarter. It is a common criticism of teacher education but as Barb's words bear out, a spring student teaching experience at a school such as Balfour is particularly difficult. The students there are used to an informal program and as such are probably much more adept with the school culture then the student teacher. Additionally, many of the students have been
with the regular teacher for a year and a half and are therefore probably more set in their ways.

Barb: I've always felt that student teaching in the spring quarter is the most artificial deck stacked against you kind of thing that could ever happen. Because you're walking into a classroom where you have no authority, you don't have any background knowledge of what the kids have done or where they've been, especially in a school like this where a lot of the kids have been with that teacher for two years and they've been in that school for, they know way more about informal education than you do, and they're asking you to assume control of a group of kids that don't, they don't care who you are. [...] So the nice thing about starting when a real teacher's year starts is that they're seeing what goes into that preparation and where you begin. I mean we begin at the end of last year, you know, thinking about the next year, but in a place like this, I have that carryover of kids so really this year started two years ago.

**Induction Year**

Even though Barb told herself during student teaching that she would never teach in an urban school, and specifically not at Balfour, that is where she got her first teaching position, and where she remains today. Upon graduating, with her teaching certificate in hand, Barb reported that she applied to a few informal schools in the area. The school year started and she had not found a position but then a position opened up at Balfour:

Jerome: And then how did it happen that you ended up here?
Barb: (laughs) This is an interesting story (laughter). The girl in the classroom next to me, I student taught in room 10 and the girl who had student taught in room 10 in the fall got a job in room 11 during the spring because the teacher vacated the position. So she and I had had the same woman for student teaching and I used to commiserate with her a lot because I was just like in tears the whole quarter. So anyway, the next fall I didn't have a job and don't know how hard I tried and ... [interruption] What was I saying? Oh, so this girl was in room 11 and in the fall I hadn't gotten a job. I didn't put in all that many applications; I did some at all the informal schools, well actually I didn't even send them to all the informal places, but I had some interviews and stuff and it's a long ridiculous story of the things I got into in some other district because my parents worked there, but anyway, this girl called me and said "The teacher in room 22 is leaving, get your application in and your sub stuff" you know, so and then I called the principal and basically we can interview, we hire who we want to at this school. The district doesn't control that, we do.

Jerome: Which seems to be a big benefit that the alternative schools hold.
Barb: Yes; exactly, that's a really good thing. At that time the four/fives functioned as a really strong team, so that they were basically the people that chose me.
I had like a two week subbing trial period and they thought if I lasted in room 10 for three months, I was probably good enough.

Jerome: What was room 10?
Barb: That was a two / three split, which is very difficult.
Jerome: So you moved up to a four / five split.
Barb: Yes.
Jerome: When was that? Fall?
Barb: It was like the end of October, beginning of November.
Jerome: OK, so you ended up where you thought at one point that you’d never teach.
Barb: Yep, that was my payback (laughter)

For Barb, the first year of teaching didn’t start off any easier than her student teaching experience. She started a couple of months into the school year after the regular teacher had left her position. Just as student teaching can be an overwhelming experience, so can a teacher’s first year of teaching. Not only does a new teacher develop one’s teaching strategies and management techniques, one also spends that first year learning the curriculum and often focuses narrowly on the task of teaching. Going through this induction period at a school such as Balfour offers the additional challenges illustrated above concerning the lack of textbooks and an emphasis on subject integration and the individual. Add to this the complication inherent in assuming a position vacated in mid year by a well liked teacher, and one would not be surprised that Barb’s first year would be difficult:

Jerome: Can you think back to your very first year as a full time teacher and ...
Barb: It was awful! It was very overwhelming! This is the most demanding thing. I have never taught in a traditional school but I grew up in them and I feel like things are so subjective in an informal setting that you really need to have a real clear picture of what your expectations are, and that comes with time. Every new teacher struggles with that and some have more of a clear expectation but I think it’s one of those trial and error things where you just have to get to know the expectations, not just from the course of study but more than that, you know, and so because I began in November, it was really difficult. The kids were difficult because ...

Jerome: The teacher had been here up to the time you started?
Barb: Yes, and she quit for another job and they were really angry. If would have been the same if she had died, I mean they just really had that whole grieving thing going on because they really liked her and it was just real difficult.
Focus on the tasks of teaching. The reflection and conversation about Barb's induction year continued. In the discussion, Barb addressed an important point which is laid out below. She spoke of the induction year as being a matter of survival in which the main task is simply to cover the curriculum. The point has been argued above that there were some aspects of the school culture at Balfour that makes beginning experiences such as student teaching and the induction year even more challenging for the new teacher. Interestingly, however, Barb mentions below that the value which the school places on the "whole experience" helped to diffuse the intense pressure one feels to cover the curriculum:

Barb: I watch when we get new teachers here and it brings it up for me every time. You just remember feeling so driven to cover that curriculum and I don't think it's as bad here as it is in a lot of places because we value more the whole experience than we do those isolated skills, and they're getting away from that in course of studies now too, looking at big things like problem solving and, you know, I just learned that I had to like back off and slow down and really understand about, you know, cooperative types of teamwork things going on in the room; about self-discipline and self-motivation and responsibility, and those evolved into my real goals, not learning the water cycle, I mean, because anybody could learn the water cycle, but if you don't know how to learn, and those became my new goals I think, after that first or second year.

Barb concludes the previous quote mentioning that she set different goals for teaching after her first or second year. In all likelihood it was after her second year, as the difficulty of the first year continued into the second year. The difficulties in the second year were apparently augmented by an additional variable -- a lot of new kids. In her second year, Barb ended up with many kids who were new to the school altogether, meaning that most of her kids were unfamiliar with the informal program. That can be an enormous transition for a fourth or fifth grader who has had five or six years of traditional schooling:

Barb: ... and I just felt like coming in late like that too. I just played catch up the whole year and my second year I had a really difficult class. Just the mix of kids was really difficult; a lot of new kids. When we get new kids to the
fourth and fifth grade, they've kind of missed out on all that bringing them into the informal environment, so it's a little more difficult to get new children at that grade level. I had some new children that were real, kind of jaded (laughter). And it was just really difficult, but by the third year I think all my years since then have all been pretty successful and feel good to me, I mean stressful, but ...

A Transition That Focused on the Learner

Two quotes earlier, Barb mentioned that after her first two years at Balfour she set new goals for teaching. The goals would move her focus or purpose for teaching away from the technical task of teaching and covering the curriculum, towards teaching for understanding and meeting individual needs and differences. When asked during a later interview to expand on the transition towards meeting those goals, Barb described a process that was developmental:

Barb: [Beginning] teachers are so involved in getting to know the curriculum and they can't think beyond that. I think in my case, I began to think about more than the course of study and I began to try to find connections with everything. Like this year is a good example for us because we have this whole year theme where everything is drawn in and it's amazing, Diane (her student teacher) and I have talked about this that it's amazing that everything is so related to everything else and I think that's something in the beginning you don't see that, you're looking at things more segmentedly. Is that a word? (laughs)

Jerome: Very fragmented
Barb: Fragmented, yeah. More the way a traditional school has always been.
Jerome: Yeah, because it seems a lot easier to look at it that way and to plan that way.
Barb: Right, and I think as the years go, you are able to see that there's more at work than just meeting course of study objectives. You begin to look for, to relate it to assessment, you look for more signs of things rather than just meeting, you know, the multiple choice response or the "OK, they demonstrated that they knew what electricity was," but more of how it fits into everything and that's what I've tried to do, it's what I've tried, I feel like I'm talking and it's not making a bit of sense. (laughs)

A developmental process. While the preceding description suggests that a certain passage of time is necessary before one is able to focus on the learner and to begin to meet their needs, there were other forces at work that account for Barb's transition towards that goal. Ultimately, as Barb began to meet her goals and focused on student learning rather
than just the task of teaching, she found a real need for assessment strategies that
provided her data about her students.

Impact of professional reading and discourse. One such force or factor that aided
that professional development was her professional reading, some of which began during
the EPIC program. Her reading of Donald Graves' work provided the foundational
framework for her writing program which included writing folders - a student-centered
teaching technique which Barb has also developed into a form of assessment:

Jerome:  
[reads quote from Barb from past transcript]  
"Over the last few years when I first became interested in doing portfolios, ..." We've kind of talked about
this already but now I want to revisit this to see if there was one thing in
particular or one person in particular that really was the greatest impact or
greatest influence for you starting to use alternative assessments?

Barb:  
No, I wouldn't say one thing, although even when I was at Ohio State and I
was reading the Donald Graves things and structuring my writing program
on, you know, writing folders is what he calls them, that's what I call them
too. That started making a lot of sense to me in terms of the writing process
because it was like keeping all that work and revisiting it.

While the reading of Graves' work began during Barb's time in EPIC, it was just
the beginning of her professional reading. She continued to seek out books to aid her in
her own development, particularly on portfolio assessment. This was reinforced by her
deliberate actions to find people who were using alternative assessments. By entering
into discourse with such people, Barb was supported in her transition towards using
alternative assessment:

Jerome:  
That [reading Graves] was in EPIC?

Barb:  
Yeah, and then since then I've picked up a lot of books on portfolio
assessment and so I guess the writing folders were like a working portfolio
and I was looking for something that was more of a finished representation
of work, a showcase, so we started with our showcase portfolios and that
has come out of a lot of work that I've read you know, and some of it has
been the Tierney and Carter and, what's her name?

Jerome:  
Desai [their book: Portfolio Assessment in the Reading-Writing Classroom]

Barb:  
And other sources too and then just talking with people who are actually
doing it in their schools or in their own classroom you know, and it's just
like a natural evolution from an informal setting because just like we're
integrating everything into a thematic unit, they're also doing that into some
big telling showcase of what they have accomplished during the year and you know ...

**A transition that continues.** At no point in the developmental process that included her preservice training, induction year, and next couple years of teaching, was there an outside force pushing her toward using alternative assessment. Barb was quick to point out in a discussion about the importance of EPIC on her philosophy of teaching, learning, and subsequent strategies of teaching, that portfolios were not talked about. It is clear in this next discussion that Barb is still developing in her use of alternative assessment and that it continues to be a developmental process - one that requires a teacher who views herself as a learner:

Jerome: But the fact that they [EPIC] stressed philosophy
Barb: Yeah
Jerome: seems to have had a big effect on you
Barb: Yeah
Jerome: and I think that’s an important thing to pull out of this study.
Barb: But we didn’t talk about portfolios during that time.
Jerome: Right, but you had a mind set.
Barb: Yeah, because of the philosophy and because of the reading that I had been doing about writing and things and I started just doing writing and I’m still, my goal for myself is to make the portfolios comprehensive with adding in math and I’ve gotten some books recently about math alternative assessments and I’m trying to think how I can structure that into, I’m still not where I want to be with portfolios; I don’t devote enough time to them and the kids aren’t as involved as I’d like them to be.

At this point in the discussion, Barb makes an important comment that there was not a singular critical incident or person that accounted for her transition towards using alternative assessment:

Barb: Yeah, but I, it didn’t, there was no turning point really, it was just like the more I heard and read and saw from other people, it just all kind of started to come together and that’s how most every thing I do is, it’s kind of an evolution.
Jerome: Well you and this other person who came through EPIC are the only ones who give some credit to the undergraduate program for setting the stage for that.
Barb: For me it’s like you said, philosophy was what was stressed, and we really didn’t talk a lot about assessment, as much as, not enough for me to feel prepared. I’m still struggling with that on a lot of levels. I mean we have big
projects that were just turned in and Diane [her student teacher] and I have talked about different ways we may address you know, ...

Jerome: It seems clear from listening to you that for you it's a way of thinking and that has to happen first.
Barb: Uh hum.

**District level assessment initiatives.** More recently, there was a force, a push from above at the district level to begin using an alternative assessment in writing. Barb recognizes that such initiatives that are fashioned in a top-down model are not likely to be effective. She cites a lack of flexibility in mandated initiatives and more importantly a lack of a "match." The match she refers to is an alignment between one's own philosophy of teaching and learning, and one's methods and strategies for teaching:

Barb: Well that's with our district too, with those writing folders that I showed you, they're called writing portfolios, but they're very uhm, there's no latitude for individual, I mean you are just putting in a piece of work each time with some kind of computer scored thing.
Jerome: Like a big paper clip.
Barb: Yeah.
Jerome: And so why have portfolios if you don't have this other, this way of thinking about teaching and learning.
Barb: Right, because someone downtown does have some kind of a grasp on that, yet they're trying to instill it from the top-down you know, when really if you're not you know, I don't know, it's just, it's kind of artificial. Whereas what we do in schools like these, it's more of, you know, a natural match.
Jerome: Right, and since you came right into the informal setting, I can see where there wouldn't be necessarily a turning point because it's been ...
Barb: Really consistent. Yeah.

The district wide initiative in writing assessment mentioned above is not the only outside factor dealing with assessment that Barb has encountered. There also exists a district wide assessment in math, associated with a competency based education (CBE) movement. Just as the district wide writing assessment initiative has had little direct impact on Barb, so too has the CBE tests. Although Barb administers the tests because she is mandated to, she tends to ignore them because they do not provide her with insightful data about her students:

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Barb: We're mandated to do some math tests with our competency based education. (pause) Did you get the eye roll on there? (laughter)

Jerome: "Facial expression"

Barb: And they started out with like a series of 15 per grade level which became extremely difficult for me because I have two classes, I mean basically two grade levels.

Jerome: 15 per year?

Barb: Yeah, then there were eight, now there's eight and now they're talking about four and I think it will all just pass by the wayside eventually. But there are some things that we still are held to district wide and state wide that are traditional forms of assessment. I tend to ignore those even though I give them because they're not asking what I want hear and I can't think about what it's interpreted as being because I don't think like that. Now they're moving toward more and more schools in Henderson doing it, they began or created an alternative informal reading assessment that took the place of some of that standardized type multiple choice tests.

Barb's Transition as an Internal Process

Barb sees the movement towards more alternative assessments, such as the district writing portfolios and the new informal reading assessments (which are in pilot stage) as being positive trends in education. This, however, does not change the fact that for Barb, most of her transition towards using alternative assessments has been an internal process - brought on by her reading and dialogue with other teachers. She does not attend many formal conferences but has gotten much value from informal gathering of teachers where she has a chance to exchange ideas with her colleagues:

Jerome: Do you go to conferences and stuff like that which deal with alternative assessment?
Barb: Not so much.
Jerome: OK
Barb: Not as much as I'd like to. Some interesting things have happened for me over the past few years. We were in a grant with the same EPIC schools across districts, just the informal schools, and it was through the EPA [Environmental Protection Agency] about water quality monitoring [...] So that was a great, that and working with the PDS [Professional Development Schools] stuff, getting the LEADS [Literature Education and Diverse Settings -- one of the M.Ed. strands] organized was a great way to network with informal teachers and we've talked with Becky Kirschner and I and some other people from Arlington have talked about getting something else going that would take the place, because those were reasons for these schools to link together. So I think I've done more things like that where we are just sharing things, then I've done organized kind of conferences. I've always felt like at this school we don't pursue some of those sorts of things, we're
so busy re-inventing everything all the time on our own that we can’t go
outside, plus in Henderson, professional days are non-existent and funds for
conferences and that, so.

In addition to valuing the dialogue with other teachers, Barb has had easy access
to two experts on alternative assessment, both of them authors of a widely read book on
alternative assessment, who both have had their own children in Barb’s school. A
combination of reading their work, attending inservice when one of them presented at the
school, and talking individually with them, has played a major role in Barb’s transition
towards using alternative assessment.

Jerome: What about the influence of reading from different journals, does that play an
important part?
Barb: Yeah, yeah. Over the last few years when I first became interested in doing
portfolios, we’re not doing them as a school but a lot of individuals are doing
them and we’ve had Mark Carter come in and talk with us and Rob Tierney is
a parent here as well. [...] Uhm, so I became interested in that and we’ve had
them talk to us and I’ve talked with them on an individual on-going
classification and also I’ve read a lot of like Rob and Mark’s book and a lot of
other people who have written on portfolio assessment, so yeah, I’m getting
most of my education is kind of like on my own.

Jerome: Through reading?
Barb: That, collaboration, and doing.

An Alternative Grade Card

Because Balfour is an alternative school, they have been able to adopt their own
grade card which varies significantly from the district’s. The grade card at Balfour
utilizes different letters to represent student performance: “O” outstanding, “G” good,
“H” having difficulties, “U” unsatisfactory. It also includes an area to address effort and
for teachers to indicate if the evaluation is based “at,” “above,” or “below” grade level.

Barb explained some other more significant differences:

Barb: The areas we really concentrated on when we developed this, and these are
things that have come from our past ones also, but we’ve kind of simplified
them, a lot of on language arts, reading and writing, and breaking it down
into where kids are with respect to that because that’s how, that’s one of our
big focuses here. But then we also have the math and just the other content
areas which is where our units usually come from and then we felt this is a
really important section, the social development. We put this grade card
together after the district offered us the alternative reading assessment, so it really does speak to that, I mean and it really talks about the things we do and we value here. So I don’t find that it’s really a problem. I mean there’s always too much paperwork and you still end up taking a lot of this stuff out of your head because you’ve just been with the kids so often and so individually that you just you really know where they are.

Jerome: I notice when I go back and read transcripts from other interviews that, we keep crossing the line between assessment and evaluation. Like this, in my mind this is more ...

Barb: It’s not assessment, it’s report.

Jerome: Yeah, exactly.

The distinction between assessment and evaluation is an important one, yet it is one that often becomes blurred. The importance of the alternative grade card adopted by the teachers at Balfour is that it is more closely aligned to the ways that teachers approach teaching and learning at their school. It doesn’t push teachers like Barb to use alternative assessments, rather, it frees them to use techniques such as portfolios, projects, and observations. Barb does not have to produce percentage grades on student work to determine the traditional “A,” “B,” or “C.” She is therefore freed to be student-centered, account for individual differences, use alternative assessments, and still provide the data necessary for the evaluative judgments necessary for the grade card.

**Barb’s Assessment Strategies**

Within the previous description, there was some mention of various assessment strategies which Barb uses; most of them were district or school wide initiatives. For the most part, those initiatives have not been embraced by Barb and have not had a significant impact on what she does in the classroom. On the other hand, Barb has a multitude of alternative assessment strategies that she does use; most of them are strategies that she has picked up on her own through reading, talking to other teachers, or just doing what intuitively seemed right.
Student Self-Assessment

In Shirley's case study there was a description of an assessment strategy, SELF, that she had devised on her own. Barb has also devised an assessment strategy which she refers to as SOS; it is an acronym that stands for summary, opinion, and support. As a reading assessment, students respond to the SOS prompt to reflect on their reading. A poster which hangs on the wall reminds students about the SOS process:

- Summary  What was it about?
- Opinion    What do you think?
- Support    Why do you think / feel about the book the way you do?
             (give at least two reasons - include details)

One can appreciate the rich types of data that a self-reflecting process like SOS can provide a teacher. Students have to respond at a higher level through the SOS process than they would in typical multiple choice type formats. At the beginning of the year Barb had her students go through the SOS process on a daily basis. The types of data gleaned from this assessment enables Barb to guide her students in the reading choices and to better determine how well the students are reading and enjoying their book choices. Barb stated that as the year progressed she cut back on the frequency with which the students responded to SOS. She had found that the SOS process feeds into the new district wide reading assessment very well, and as such the district assessment serves as just an extra add-on.

Reading Folders

In addition to SOS, which makes up a portion of the students' reading folders, Barb has her students keep reading logs which document all the reading they have done all year. It mainly serves as a running account of what the students have read but it also serves to provide at a glance what types of books the students have read. This allows Barb to look for level appropriateness, genre themes, recurrent authors, and it also
provides data for reporting, evaluation, and accountability. The reading folders also contain documentation of any types of reading projects or extensions which the students have completed during the year. Finally, the reading folders house the additional documentation about reading provided by the district reading assessment initiative. All of these data sources make up the reading folder, which is one element of the students' portfolios.

Writing Folders

Another element of the portfolios, the writing folders, are multi-categorical folders that reflect how Barb views writing - as a multi-step process. On a shelf at the front of the room are several trays labeled:

• teacher conference
• edit
• type
• publish
• completed

Within this system, depending on which stage in the writing process the students are at, they put their writing in one of the five trays listed above. For example, if a student has written a rough draft and wishes for feedback from Barb, that student puts the writing in the "teacher conference" tray. When Barb has the opportunity, she pulls the paper out of the tray, reviews it, and schedules a conference with the student. The system reinforces the concept of the writing process and from a managerial standpoint facilitates the two way connection between student and teacher, thereby helping to insure quick feedback. It also becomes a staging process for preparing writing, although not all writing, for the showcase portfolio. The writing folder itself is a working portfolio with all the writing collected from the year, whereas the showcase portfolio is a selection of those pieces deemed worthy of carrying on to a published product:
Barb: The writing folder is kind of a working portfolio and then we also have showcase portfolios here which are student chosen work, best pieces, but the working portfolio, I ask them to keep every piece of writing they do, even if they don't think it's worth anything, and then we will go through it occasionally and pick out the things that were worth carrying on to revision or publishing or whatever, and that's usually the kind of stuff that goes then in the finished portfolio, that kind of stuff.

**Showcase Portfolios**

While the writing and reading folders are contained within a working portfolio, some items eventually are chosen by the students to be included in their showcase portfolios. The purpose of the showcase portfolios is for the kids to reflect on their work. In the next quote, Barb explains the purpose of the showcase portfolios and she also reveals that her transition towards using alternative assessment is not complete; it is a developmental process. She goes on to explain that the showcase portfolio is a broad representation of students' work over the course of the year and ideally is shared with parents in a student-led conference:

Barb: They are for the kids, most of all; to reflect on through periods throughout the year. We haven't done much with them this nine weeks really. We need to pick some pieces to go in them. Last year was the first year I really did this in a more comprehensive on-going way and so I'm experimenting with them and I'm working really hard this year to try, and I don't think I've achieved my goal

[...]

Barb: We have lists of what kinds of things should be in your portfolio so that you can have a broad representation of types of work and content area and all kinds of things and then optimally in the end of the year we have a night where the kids are just totally, it's not going to be a teacher run thing, it's a kid run thing and where they...

Jerome: Where parents come in?

Barb: Yeah, and they just share work that they've been doing all year and explain about their growth and do a more oral reflection with those people for what they've done.
District Initiatives with Portfolios

Earlier in this case study there was a brief discussion about a district wide writing assessment which is also called a portfolio. Barb makes clear distinctions between the district portfolio and the portfolios that she has her students keep, even though as she admits, there are some overlaps. At issue are elements of valuing, choice, and meaningfulness - both on the part of students and teacher. In the following discussion, those elements are addressed and one also gets the sense that the district’s goal perhaps has not been articulated to the teachers:

Barb: We have a district writing portfolio, which it could be a good thing but for me that’s one of those overlap places where I’m just doing it because I’m required but this [her own portfolio system] I’m doing it because I value it. But the things in these [looks for one]

Jerome: I think that’s what I saw a couple kids working on last week; the yellow packet?

Barb: I don’t have this kid anymore either (laughs) It just shows all the reading and writing things and they keep changing the rules on it, so they’re not very clear with what they want this to be in the end.

Jerome: Yeah, I think they are experimenting too aren’t they?

Barb: Yeah. And it hasn’t become a meaningful thing where kids interact with whereas what I have, the kids are making the decisions about the sorts of things with guidelines about what’s good and what’s you know ...

Jerome: Well as you understand it, what’s the district’s goal?

Barb: I don’t really understand what the district’s goal is because, this isn’t a good example but there’ll be things from like, you know, way back. So

As Barb continues, she expresses a concern about what is supposed to be in the district wide writing portfolio, how long items should remain, and what purpose it should serve. A lack of consistency seems to pervade the practical implementation of the initiative:

Jerome: Oh I see, that [the writing portfolio] is supposed to follow them.

Barb: If it followed them, but then see here’s what I don’t understand, as fifth grade teachers, we are supposed to go through these and give them back everything, you know, so what goes on with them, I don’t, you know, what’s the point if, because I don’t even [looks for an example] It seems like there should be things from first grade but this is like, they’re all things from last year.

Jerome: So this is happening here at least at this school?

Barb: What, these?

Jerome: This process.
Barb: This is the whole district.
Jerome: As far as I understand it, but I see in her folder, she's a fourth grader now and that's just third grade stuff in there. So I don't know what happens to the first K, 1, 2 stuff that was in here.
Barb: Well it says on here somewhere.
Jerome: This, well yeah, they change color midstream, but there should be work from, you know, I don't know what the purpose is if you're going to track kids with this information, it needs to follow clear through their elementary career. And if you're going to give it back to them, give it to them at the end of fifth grade or something. I mean that's my understanding of what portfolio is, that you are seeing that development of growth.
Jerome: And actually it seems that the sixth grade teacher ought to get some of that.
Barb: Sure, and I think that's what they are thinking about but it became unmanageable I think and I think they're just doing it in name only now, whereas as what I am trying to do, or Tammy down in room 14 or some of the other classrooms, they're really doing portfolios in the way that portfolios are meaningful.

Additional Assessment Techniques

The journals, folders, and portfolios described above are for the most part managed by the students; they keep them organized and make some of the decisions about what to put in them. At the same time, Barb maintains a folder at her desk that allows her to keep track of several types of data. The anecdotal records and simple checklist contained therein are simple and utilitarian:

Barb: Yeah, and I have a folder that I keep at my desk and I do several things in it. I keep track of when I do oral reading assessments with the kids, I keep track of the written assessments that they do and I also keep like anecdotal records.
Jerome: OK, and you keep that somewhere else?
Barb: Yeah, it's over at my desk.
Jerome: Well can you tell me a little bit about those things that you do? The oral reading and ...
Barb: Yeah, I keep checklists about who's done what during reading time. We also do other things like computer, like word kind of games, sorts of grammar kind of things on the computer during silent reading some days; some kids do those. I do read alouds with them and ...
Jerome: So this is pretty much a checklist here.
Barb: Yeah
Jerome: OK
Barb: That's just for me to keep track of who's done what.
Jerome: That's exactly the same thing that I used pretty extensively.
Barb: Yeah, it just works for me because then I can just scan those.
Jerome: Yeah, it's simple.
Barb: And the other thing I do is I just keep a record of what days kids have read with me and what they read and just kind of anecdotal notes about how their reading is going mechanically and just some feedback about comprehension and questions and prediction and ... 

Jerome: So that's a running narrative of what's going on each day.

Barb: Yeah, and there are other pages somewhere else. That's what I do with reading.

The assessments described thus far have mostly dealt with language arts. By Barb's own account, assessment in math is an area where she recognizes a need to improve. She has set a goal for herself to identify and utilize more meaningful assessments in math. That goal is addressed in the following quote, which again illustrates a developmental process where a teacher's transition towards using alternative assessment can be placed somewhere on a continuum:

Barb: My goal for next year is to really integrate the math into the portfolio, because there are some really good alternative assessments [interruption]. I want to get some meaningful math assessments because that's one area that I feel like we're still not informal and because of district requirements, so I'm experimenting with that. I've been reading a lot about you know, math assessments and things, and I know Mark Carter has done a lot of things and all of Barrington in fact has been working towards that and that's really, I really want to follow up on that a little bit so I can start doing some of that in my classroom.

Presently, Barb administers the district wide CBE assessments in math eight times a year. She views those assessments as a constraint or burden and reports, somewhat to her dissatisfaction, that the CBE tests are driving her instruction:

Barb: We do eight now, it used to be fifteen per grade level and that was just totally unmanageable and that's all we did, we did no instruction, we just, and I've gotten to the point where even with these eight, they kind of gear the instruction. I have the kids take the test and when they've reached a point where there's something they don't know we work with small groups and then they correct their tests later, so we're not doing two of everything but it's kind of driving the instruction which is not totally bad but I'd like to get into some other more meaningful ways of assessing kids and grouping them. [...] I don't see the point of it at all. I mean for some people it makes sense but for this classroom and looking for a better way to assess math and teach math, math is like my thing this year that I'm struggling with. Some years it's something else but this year it seems to be the one thing that's not connecting(?)
Jerome: Well it's interesting because it seems that from everyone I've talked to so far, math is the one area that they incorporate the least with alternative assessments. They kind of stick to a more traditional strategy.

Barb: Well that's why I keep experimenting with ways to kind of bring it in to that more holistic, to be a more holistic part of our classroom I guess.

In an attempt to conciliate the differences between the district’s math assessment and Barb’s philosophy of teaching and learning, she made a few adaptations which initially caused some friction with her administration. Rather than administer the tests to the entire class at predetermined times, Barb gave the CBE tests to individual students when they had progressed to a point that they were ready for them. In this way, she was bringing an individualized flavor to the district level assessment:

Barb: When she [the principal] first came here she confronted me because we have those CBE math tests, I refused to do them in the way that other people do. Rebel! (laughs)

Jerome: 

Barb: I wouldn't give them all to the whole group at the same time. I said "That's not what we're about! We're about individuals working at their own pace and if I want to give each of these tests," you know, maybe Joe goes through all fourteen the first or second week of school and maybe Suzie does three for the year; you can't tell me that I can cram anymore tests into Suzie if she can't do them, you know, and I also would turn them in as I got them. Oh man, this woman that was doing these on the computer, and she's not even like a teacher, she's just a support person that sends them into the computer to be processed ...

Jerome: Wants things conveniently done?

Barb: For God or whoever to look at downtown you know, and so she, I got into this big trouble about this whole thing, but you know, once I said to Cindy, "This is what I'm doing, here's my records," I had a big chart that had all their names and it was all about mastery or what they needed to do and it was really comprehensive. I knew way more about where my kids were and what they were doing and it was more meaningful to the kids and she supported me ...

Jerome: Well you were trying to make sense with the system.

Barb: Yeah! Exactly! I was trying to adapt it in a way that worked for this school, what I believe to be working for this school, and she was supportive of me. All I had to do, you know, she made me explain it to her several times but she was real supportive.

Jerome: So is that where it stands?

Barb: Pretty much, yeah. If I can justify things then I'm free to do them you know.
Summary

The preceding discussion illuminates a teacher who is committed to her philosophy of teaching and learning. It is a philosophy that is student-centered and values meeting the needs of individual children. Two factors, which have been documented in this case study and that play a crucial role in Barb’s teaching towards her philosophy, are a high level of confidence and, perhaps ironically, a view of herself as a learner who continually progresses in her professional development. These attributes, commitment to her philosophy, confidence, and view of self as learner, play a substantial role in Barb’s transition towards using alternative assessment:

Barb: Exactly! And I think I’m finding that more and more, every year, that I don’t need to worry about that other pressure thing as much, if I’m really doing what I believe is right because the other stuff kind of happens or can happen more easily in a less artificial way.

Jerome: And you’ve seen that it works out.

Barb: Yeah

Joan

Introduction

While the first three participants in this study all taught for Henderson City Schools in urban settings, Joan taught in a suburban school for Carrollton City Schools. I contacted Joan to participate in this study after several assessment specialists, who were familiar with Joan’s use of in portfolios, recommended that I speak to her. Another veteran teacher, Joan has been teaching for twenty-three years – all of them in Carrollton and all in second grade classrooms.

Just as I had wondered before I visited Barb for the first time, I speculated about what I would find in Joan’s room. With greater confidence, I anticipated a room where
children were grouped together, textbooks were not utilized by students, quality children's literature were abundant, manipulatives of all sorts were plentiful and accessible, and teacher dominated instruction was minimized. These assumptions proved correct.

Our first interview took place in Joan's spacious classroom after the children had gone home for the day. We sat at a round table and spoke together for a couple hours for what would be the longest interview of the study. Joan seemed to relish the opportunity to participate in the dialogue about teaching, learning, and the role of assessment, and to reflect upon her professional development in that regard.

The School

The school where Joan now teaches is an integrated language arts - computer magnet school. The school is in a hundred year old building that is on the National Registry of historic building and is located near the center of town. She has been at Jacobs for seven years and it is at Jacobs where she has made the greatest progress towards using alternative assessments. The year that Joan transferred to Jacobs was its first year of being a magnet school; before that it had been a regular elementary school.

As a magnet school, Jacobs receives some of its students through a lottery system. Families that want their children to attend the integrated language arts - computer magnet at Jacobs enter a lottery and those that are drawn are then able to attend. Five of the classrooms at Jacobs are recognized as integrated language arts - computer magnet classrooms. There are also four classes of Able and Talented which serve students who are chosen based on standardized test scores. Of the five magnet teachers, four of them previously taught at the same school.
The Classroom

Arrangement

The 26 student desks in Joan's classroom were arranged in clusters. Most of the groupings consisted of four desks pushed together to make rectangular shapes. There was one African American student, one Japanese American, with the rest being Caucasian. The room was very spacious and as would be revealed later, that spaciousness was one of the reasons that Joan was attracted to the school.

Children's Literature

Of the most prominent elements of the classroom was the collection of children's literature. In any direction that one could look in the room, one could see quality children's literature displayed. The collection could be more accurately described as a library and a visitor to the class would likely wonder how the impressive collection could be amassed by one teacher.

Manipulatives

In the few places around the room where literature was not displayed, manipulatives of all sorts were available for students to use. Mostly displayed on tables, the manipulatives were plentiful and mostly related to areas of math, science, and social studies. The social studies manipulatives consisted mainly of numerous individual maps. Math manipulatives included such items as dominos, pattern blocks, pentominoes, flash cards, tangrams, counting discs, rulers, unifix cubes, play money, dice and cuisenaire rods. For science, the students could access hand lenses, balances, microscopes, videoscopes, density liquids, kaleidoscopes and a slinky among other things. Two aquariums held an assortment of fish and frogs. Also on display were birds nests, snake
skins, hermit crabs, various rocks, pinecones, milkweeds, cross sections of trees, and a
deer's skull with antlers. Underneath the tables were boxes of additional science
materials. Some of the boxes were science kits prepared by the school district. An equal
number of boxes contained science materials collected by Joan.

Visuals

A familiar saying was displayed on one wall: *I hear and I forget, I see and I
remember, I do and I understand.* Another saying displayed on the wall which revealed
an important philosophy for Joan read: *Learn as much by writing as reading.* The walls
of the room were decorated with a variety of children's work, inspirational sayings, art
work, and reminders of various processes such as problem solving, writing, and the
scientific method.

Each student had a fabric satchel fitted over the backs of their chairs. In the
satchels were various journals, notebooks, and any books that the students had borrowed
from Joan. Inside their desks, students kept a math workbook, paper, and "tools" like
crayons, glue, and scissors. There were no science, social studies, language, reading,
spelling, or health books in the students' desks.

**A Day in Joan's Classroom**

Morning

The students start out the school day working either individually or in small
groups on problem solving activities. When they finish the day's problem they begin
reading individually from children's literature. Sometime in the midst of the beginning
activities, they listen to the morning announcements and say the Pledge of Allegiance.
During these initial 45 minutes of the school day, which is referred to as "warm-up time,"
the students enjoy the freedom to move about to various places in the room. Joan spends
the time constantly moving around the room working either with individuals or small
groups. In a subsequent interview with Joan, she stated that “The teaching that I do is
right with the kid who’s doing the activity.”

After a comfortable start of the school day, Joan calls the students to a corner of
the room where there is a rocking chair and an easel. Joan refers to this time of the day as
the class meeting. On this particular day a student reads a poem to the class. It is a poem
that she had written and submitted for a national competition. The students respond to the
poem by telling the young girl that they like the poem. Joan facilitates the discussion by
asking the students to be specific. One boy mentions that he likes the words, and Joan
replies: “Be specific, what do you like about the words?” With this type of questioning,
Joan encourages the students to engage in assessment and be explicit with their language.

While still seated on the floor, Joan leads the class in an activity where the
students go over several items on a teacher made worksheet. The worksheet contains the
problem solving activity that the students had worked on during the warm-up time. It
also has some math work that focuses on fact families, as well as a section that requires
the students to correct sentences that have grammatical errors. On the floor, the students
each have their copy of the worksheet and as such, they get immediate feedback on their
performance. During this short teacher-led activity, several math concepts are covered
and many grammatical rules are reinforced. After working through the sheet, the students
trade papers and check the corrected sheets for accuracy.

The time together on the floor lasts a little over twenty minutes. It turns out to be
the longest amount of time spent in a teacher-led activity. Although referred to as teacher-
led, the time on the floor is far from being teacher-dominated. The amount of student talk
at least equals that of teacher talk.

200
During the next 45 minutes, the students reflect back on the goals that the students had generated with their parents at the beginning of the school year. The goals were long range - year long objectives and were part of the students' portfolios. After a brief discussion about the goals, the students respond to a writing prompt that asks the students to identify what their parents wanted them to work on during the year (their goals) and to describe what they have done thus far to meet those goals. During the extended writing time, Joan spends some time interacting individually with the students and modeling by working at a desk engaged in her own writing. During this time soft music plays in the room and the students remain on task and engaged the entire time. Occasionally students refer to their "quick-word" books, which are personalized dictionaries containing high frequency words and words often misspelled.

In a smooth transition, Joan invites some of the students over to the floor in the corner to share their writing. The other students move into "workshop" time. During workshop, the students remain engaged in the writing process by working on stories. These stories however offer a greater degree of student choice and freedom. Some students work together, others work individually, and some are engaged in activities that appear far removed from writing. Those students however are generating ideas about what they might write about next, while others are gathering additional information for their writing. The students appear at ease and comfortable with the workshop time. Again, Joan spends much of the time on the move working with the students individually or in small groups.

Afternoon

After recess and lunch, Joan brings the class together for only the second time in the day. This brief meeting on the floor serves to explain the science inquiry lesson that the students will be engaged in during the afternoon. The lesson, which allows students
to work cooperatively, involves magnets and making predictions about the number of paper clips that various numbers of magnets will attract. The lesson further illustrates to a visitor that the school has a language arts focus. After spending an adequate amount of time in inquiry, the students respond in writing about what they learned from the lesson. Joan tells the students: “I want to know what you’ve learned.” She also asks to see the students’ writing when they have finished. As the lesson draws to a close, Joan brings the students together for the last time and probes the group to find out what they learned from the inquiry lesson. Joan later revealed that based on what she found out through the various forms of assessment during the magnet activity, that she will spend more time with the concept of prediction during the next school day.

Joan’s Background

Preservice

Joan currently has a Master of Art degree from Ashland University and has completed an excess of thirty hours beyond the Master Degree. She did her undergraduate work at Miami University of Ohio. The undergraduate program that she went through had no particular theme and Joan described it as “just elementary education, K-8.” When asked if she remembered any course work during her preservice training that dealt with assessment, Joan replied “Not that I can remember.” The same was said for her graduate course work. When Joan was describing her student teaching experience she spoke of how her preservice training did little to prepare her for teaching:

Joan: I don’t remember a thing I learned in college. My kindergarten methods course was excellent. I do remember doing things with kids (said with emphasis) in my kindergarten methods (laughs), but as far as language methods, I mean we were making bulletin boards. That doesn’t teach language. I didn’t learn how to teach writing; I didn’t learn how to teach reading; I didn’t learn to teach science or social studies.
Student teaching. Her first teaching experience was with Head Start, where she worked individually with students in reading during summer employment. Joan's field experiences at Miami in Oxford were mostly in traditional settings. Her student teaching, however, was completed at a nontraditional, multi-grade, multi-age, non-graded, open architecture school. She recalled as a student teacher, having felt that she was truly on a team of teachers and not cast in the role of student. Functioning on a team of three other teachers, Joan worked with about 85 kids in a large open area. One of her greatest learnings from that experience involved assessment; the learning was that assessment cannot be ignored:

Joan: It was a really valuable experience. The thing I learned most from that was when we were all sitting around evaluating the children for their report cards. Somebody asked me about a child's behavior in my particular group that I was working with and I said "I don't even have a clue." And she said "You didn't keep track?" And I said "There's so many of them, I can't remember." And she said "I'm counting on you." (laughs) So I kind of had to make it up, and that's when I figured out that you've got to have some kind of a recording system or something to keep track of what kids are doing and not doing. And that dawned on me at the end of that three month period. (laughter) I mean I learned about my kids, but I just didn't collect data or document the things that I should have.

Joan's own learning, described above, has been reconstructed as a lesson on the need to constantly assess. As Joan points out below, at that time it appeared to be a lesson on the importance of evaluation. It was not until later in her career that she began to consider the importance of assessment, or even that evaluation and assessment serve two different purposes:

Joan: When I was student teaching I just never took any anecdotal notes. And so the information I gave to the teachers was all coming from my head. But I never looked at it as assessment then. That was your grading procedures, or whatever you want to call them. Evaluation was what you gave the kid on the grade card, as opposed to assessment which looks at what they are doing and then helps you as the teacher to take the next step -- to move them on.
Focused on own learning. As the other cases in this study portray teachers who have progressed in a developmental nature, so too has Joan’s progress been developmental. Her focus during student teaching was not surprisingly fairly narrow and centered on specific tasks. For example, the following quote illustrates that Joan was mainly concerned with her learning, rather than the learning of her students. Having already had some experience with teaching reading, she focused on learning to teach reading. She also reported spending significant time and energy trying to make the environment of the room more desirable:

Joan: And I was really very concerned, not necessarily with assessment but learning how to teach reading. I kind of knew what I was doing since I had done some Head Start stuff, and that’s one on one reading. But I was more concerned with the environment that we had created in this area and they [the other teachers on her team] weren’t, and that was a real concern with me. It didn’t look very inviting. There wasn’t a lot up, whether it was teacher generated or student generated, and so I think I wasted a whole lot of time making it look presentable to me, you know, my kind of...

Jerome: Right
Joan: And I think back and I think all that time wasted when I was putting up all that junk that I really didn’t need, but I remember that part of it. I don’t remember doing any special things in science or special things in any subject area. [talks about the long hours she put in during student teaching] So I think I worked hard but I’m not sure of what I got out of it, other than I learned to work with a team of teachers.

There was similarity between Joan’s first teaching experience with Head Start and her student teaching experience. The school that she student taught in had a school mission of individual guided instruction. Her experience with Head Start was also individual instruction in practice. As Joan points out below, the individual instruction during student teaching was natural to her because she had experience with it:

Joan: [talking about student teaching] See, IGE means individually guided instruction, so to me, looking at how you can make a child’s program independent for him, you know, kind of tailor the program, didn’t seem unnatural for me. I already had experience doing that.
Induction

Following her student teaching experience in Centerville, Ohio, Joan was employed by Carrollton City Schools to teach at Drysdale Elementary. The open architecture school where she began teaching was only half built. The entire staff was new to the school, yet the teachers were expected to team teach. Her description of the first year illustrates several frustrations. Absent from the description is any mention of student learning, again suggesting a developmental process whereby early in her career a teacher focuses on self and the task of teaching before focusing on student learning:

Jerome: I assume that’s the first year that staff came together, right?
Joan: Yes, there was no team building and we were expected to team with two other teachers in a space with no walls. What I found was I learned how my personality was intimidating. I learned how other people were intimidating. (laughs) I learned how some people have definite ways that things need to be done and I remember having a teacher who was with us who wanted all the low kids in her room because she didn’t think anybody could teach the low kids but her. Well! (laughs) So we grouped for reading. Oh, that was terrible! I should have never gone along with that. I mean looking back, that really was awful. I remember the noise problem was really terrifically bad. So there were a lot of things we had to work out the first year. Everybody tried to be patient but there were a lot of blow-ups, a lot of crying, that kind of thing. I remember being allowed to come in on Sundays and work on the weekends.

Jerome: A lot of late nights like in student teaching?
Joan: A lot of late nights, but we also came in on Sundays and worked, and the principal came in and opened the doors for us; he had to be there if we were going to be there. We weren’t allowed to use the ditto machine a lot; he didn’t believe in that. So we almost were forced to do some writing before writing started. We were teaching Sullivan reading which is programmed reading. And not knowing much of any thing else other than language experience, which I did because that’s what I knew, we did Sullivan reading, language experience, and as many activities as we could do in science and social studies where the kids were doing something. Whether it was fluff or not fluff, we were doing something.

Restraints on Autonomy

The discussion about reading programs is interesting because Joan eventually decided to leave Drysdale based on the opportunity to teach reading with trade books. As addressed in the quote above, at Drysdale she was initially required to utilize Sullivan
Reading - a programmed reading series. Joan recalls below that seven to nine years later the school adopted a basal reading series. Her reaction to the basal series was so severe that, as she reports, it caused her anxiety attacks. Although perhaps extreme, her reaction illustrates the profound effect possible when a teacher is confined to teaching in a manner not consistent with one's own philosophy.

Jerome: Was the entire staff doing the reading program?
Joan: Yes. Well I take that back, because first, second, and third were programmed reading. Fourth, fifth, and sixth were criterion referenced reading.

Jerome: Was that under the direction of the principal or...
Joan: That was what was going to happen in that school, so that's what that school got, and I think we were doing that for seven to nine years, until we got a basal. Then we got a basal and I did that for two years and I got sick. I really got anxiety, I had anxiety attacks and I was sure it was the basal reader that brought those anxiety attacks on. (laughs) Because I said I cannot read one more of those stories one more year.

Jerome: Was that under the same principal?
Joan: Yes. That principal stayed there with me for sixteen years. And then from that basal reader we moved into another basal system and then from that basal system I moved here to use trade books and that was one of the neat things about coming here; we didn't have to do workbooks or basals.

Transition Towards Using Alternative Assessments

A Move to Another School

Although as will be described later, Joan began a transition towards using alternative assessment during her last couple of years at Drysdale. The transition, however greatly accelerated once she began to teach at her present school. When it was announced that Carrollton City Schools would open up a language arts magnet school, Joan applied for a position there. She along with three other teachers from Drysdale were hired for the positions, making up four fifths of the magnet school faculty. According to Joan, there were two major motivations for her desire to move to Jacobs. First, she relished the opportunity to be rid of basal readers and be able to teach reading with trade
books. The second reason was the attraction of the large spacious rooms, described earlier.

Joan: When I was at Drysdale we felt like change was resisted, but we had been there long enough that we were the old folks, so it was like if the old folks are changing and the young ones don’t like it, too bad. But we moved here for the freedom that we didn’t have there and we moved here probably for the size of the rooms too.

**Administrative, collegial, and parental support.** Besides the freedom to teach in ways more consistent with her philosophy and the size of the room, Joan has found administrative, collegial, and parental support to be very favorable. The freedom and the support have played major roles in Joan’s professional development and in her transition towards using alternative assessments. Her impressions of those three levels of support are presented below:

Joan: [speaking about her principal] She’s the perfect administrator! And I wouldn’t say that if I didn’t think so. She allows me to go places and learn. She sits down and talks to me about my ideas. She gives me feedback both ways. She’s one of these people who says if it isn’t broke, break it. And there’s something to be said about that. If it’s too comfortable then it’s not working. She’s very honest about what good instruction is and isn’t. She’s open too, she’s extremely flexible and open to ideas. She is like another staff member. She doesn’t make decisions here unless we all come together and we decide. Sometimes we’d like her to make a decision but she sticks pretty much to “This is a building decision, let’s decide.” I would have a hard time working for someone else after her. She’s really supportive.

Joan described the collegial support as being positive and stated that she can approach any member of the faculty to have meaningful dialogue about teaching. The teachers do not take on an adversarial stance towards Joan’s transition and she does not feel like she is the only teacher implementing change. There are times however that she wishes the faculty would be a little more aggressive about pursuing change. Although collegial support is not described as ideal, of significant importance is that her colleagues do not in any way hold Joan back in her transition:
Jerome: What about collegial support?
Joan: Well sometimes I have it and sometimes I don't. I often feel like I'm out on a limb here. [...] Now, as far as support here, I can go to any teacher in this building and talk pretty much like I'm talking with you. But a lot of what I'd like them to do doesn't happen. I don't know how to say that nicely. I mean I have some things that I really wish were happening here and I'm not real patient about waiting years for it to happen.

Jerome: What types of things would that be?
Joan: Well like student-led conferences, use of portfolios, use of reflection, kids should be writing more.

Jerome: A lot of those things deal with assessment.
Joan: Yes. It should be, and everybody here is growing at their own rate and I know that, but we're a magnet school and so we need to be doing more than a regular school. We feel like we should be on the cutting edge and I'm not so sure that we don't get too comfortable feeling like "Oh we're already ahead so why don't we just relax." Whereas I kinda like to always be trying something or at least improving in some area.

Jerome: It sounds like you would like to see a little more continuity.
Joan: I think we all need to be on the same page once in a while. We need to have the same vision.

The level of parental support is similar to the collegial support. Overall the parents support Joan's assessment strategies although there are normally one or two parents each year who offer some resistance to Joan's initiatives. That resistance comes from such an overwhelming small number of the parents that it is of little significance and therefore does not impede Joan's transition. To Joan's advantage, the parents had a choice to enroll their children at Jacobs and thus they tend to support the teachers more:

Jerome: What about parental support?
Joan: I would say every year about one to two parents are ticked.
Jerome: They want to see "A"s, "B"s, and "C"s?
Joan: Well you see they've chosen to come here; they didn't have to come here. So sometimes when they've chosen to come here they don't like the fact that uhm, it's not that they want the "A"s, "B"s, and "C"s or the basics, they are upset about something I'm doing, or the way that I'm doing it, or the expectations I have. What I sometimes have to say is "That's the choice you made. If you'd rather have your child do this then you have this choice."

Jerome: It's nice to be able to say that.
Joan: Well and it doesn't always work. And then there are some parents that want their kids pushed to a degree that it's unsafe for the kid, and I'm a pusher, but giving them more computation isn't making them better at math you know.

Jerome: Yeah, father doesn't always know best.
Joan: And so sometimes I have to make some decisions that are not comfortable for parents.

Jerome: But do you find resistance to portfolios?
Joan: Yes, sometimes. I have a couple of parents who want to see the work every Friday and I don't always have it ready every Friday but when I get it ready they see it and they bring it back on Monday. Because we don't have things every week and sometimes it's not corrected and sometimes it's not perfect and that's OK with me and it's not OK with them. It takes somewhat of a trust on the parents' part to know what we're doing.

The level of administrative, collegial, and parental support, described above, was considered by Joan as being sufficient for her to progress in her transition towards using alternative assessment. As mentioned earlier, that transition actually began during Joan's final years at Drysdale. It is interesting to consider whether or not the transition would have flourished if Joan had stayed at Drysdale.

A Critical Encounter

Like Shirley, Joan identifies one critical incident which led to the transition. That critical incident was a case of eavesdropping at a workshop she attended in neighboring Upper Arlington. She was one of twenty teachers selected by a drawing to attend a Donald Graves workshop and watch him work with children. During the workshop she overheard Graves and Dr. Tierney talking about portfolios; she listened carefully:

Jerome: You mentioned at one point about attending a Graves workshop, I think that's where you overhear Tierney talking.
Joan: Yeah, it was in Upper Arlington and luckily I got to go.
Jerome: Why were you at the workshop?
Joan: Well we went to hear Graves talk about writing and there were twenty teachers who got to watch him work with kids.
Jerome: And you were one of those twenty?
Joan: Yes, it was a real kind of intimate group and I was lucky enough to have been drawn to attend. Part of that workshop was also held on Saturday, and on Saturday Dr. Tierney came in and eventually there was a discussion between the two and that's where I first heard Dr. Tierney talk; I had never seen him until then.

In an earlier interview Joan had told about overhearing the discussion between Graves and Tierney. Listening to her account of that discussion, one can practically pinpoint the precise moment of Joan's genesis into using alternative assessments:
Joan: Well for me, you know I'm sitting here eavesdropping on two guys that are talking at this workshop in Upper Arlington and one of the guys was Donald Graves and one of them was Dr. Tierney and I didn't know who they were. I knew I was at a Graves workshop and I knew that was Graves, but I didn't know who the other guy was. So I was just sitting there waiting for the meeting to start and they were sitting up there chit-chatting about "Wouldn't it be nice if portfolios were used in schools so people would have a chance to see their work." And I was sitting there going "Oh God, that's a novel idea! I wonder if anybody is doing that." And then Tierney started talking about how he had done portfolios with kids in fifth, sixth, seventh, and eighth grade, and what he was doing, and it was kind of like a light bulb went off and I said "Wow, that's a pretty neat idea!" And I looked at Shirley, who's the administrator, and she looked at me and I said "I'm doing that, that's a hot idea!" I said "I'm going to try it at least." But then I had no clue about how to start. (laughs)

This brief exposure to the idea of using portfolios would turn out to be the seed that would germinate into a major change for Joan. The brief encounter, albeit a quite removed encounter, with Graves and Tierney perhaps would not have been as critical had the timing been different. Joan already had some dissatisfaction and disharmony between her developing philosophy of teaching and learning and her reality. Within the confines of the school culture at Drysdale, Joan had begun to make connections back to her earlier experiences with Head Start and her student teaching with a focus on the learner. With her developing philosophy, she began to make changes in her teaching styles to align her philosophy with her practice. Below, she speaks of the frustrations met as her changes in practice did not keep pace with her changes in philosophy:

Joan: The other thing is that testing was becoming harder to do if you were trying to change your teaching style. And to be able to put a grade on a kid's piece of writing or a grade on a book a kid made, or on a grade on a project, I mean I wasn't smart enough back then to think you could have a scale, OK, so it was becoming harder to put a value on those things.

Jerome: Was it getting harder because you were changing your teaching?

Joan: Well, at one point, and I can't remember how many years ahead of the Dr. Tierney project it was, I had this like mental breakdown, like overkill, whatever you want to call it, anxiety attacks.

Jerome: Yeah, you talked about anxiety [cross talk]

Joan: OK, and when I came back [she took time off because of the anxiety attacks] things changed. They had to, because I blamed my anxiety on a basal reading program. OK, so if I was going to come back I was certainly not going to do that anymore; things had to change. That's where I started looking at new ways to do things. And just like anybody who tries
something new, you jump in and you overkill it. You just overkill it. I did
that for a couple of years and then I started thinking “OK, now we need to
refine this a little bit more” and all of the sudden Tierney pops on the scene
with this idea, and you know how some times you are just ripe for hearing
something?

Jerome: Yeah, so it was serendipity.
Joan: Yeah, I was kind of ripe for hearing it. “Oh, I kind of like that idea. Let’s
see what we can do with it.”

Concurrently, Joan had befriended a colleague who was then the district
supervisor for language arts. The relationship with Shirley was important because of the
opportunities for professional discourse. Joan and Shirley traveled to various
conferences together which supported, if not ignited, the transition that Joan was making.

It was with Shirley that Joan later attended the conference where she overheard Graves
and Tierney talking. Again, she talks about being “ready” for what she was to hear:

Joan: At that point I was coming back and getting into something different. We
had a new language arts supervisor in the district who’s really into literature
and she and I became very good friends and we started ...

Jerome: That was Shirley?
Joan: Yeah, and then we started traveling together, like to Australia, New Zealand
and pretty soon things snowballed. And then you hear a lot and then I was
just ready for that. I mean I was just ready for that. But over the time period
between the time I came back and the time I left, I was still using a basal text,
I just was using it in my own way. Then when I came here [Jacobs], I came
here specifically because I didn’t want a basal text and I could use my own
books.

Jerome: That’s interesting because almost every person I’ve talked to, this may just be
strange coincidence, but they all moved to a school. They were somewhere
and they moved and it was sort of like a pilgrimage. (laughs)

Joan: Well you know when you move, it’s like when I came here, I liked the idea
not only because I have space (she has a large classroom), I mean that was a
major thing, but we all were thinking along the same lines and I wasn’t
butting my head up against somebody down here who doesn’t like what I’m
doing

Engaging in Action Research

Being “ripe to hear something,” Joan latched onto the idea which she heard
Tierney talk to Graves about. With encouragement from Shirley, who according to Joan
was interested in engaging in research, Joan followed up that eavesdropping by
approaching Tierney later that year. She and two other teachers met with Dr. Tierney to solicit his advice and ideas for beginning portfolios with their students:

Joan: Lisa Dapoz, myself, and a kindergarten teacher decided we wanted to do portfolios with our kids. This was during our last year at Drysdale and so we went down and we talked to Dr. Tierney and he kind of gave us an umbrella look, a very skimpy umbrella look about what it was all about. He said that “I'll watch you, you do,” it’s almost like I'll watch you and I'll see what you do to figure it out, which is OK if you are a jumper.

Jerome: Yeah

Joan: OK, and I tend to be a jumper. So I jumped in and I kind of did it the way I thought it should be done and we talked a lot and we met a lot and we kept track of kids’ work and we followed kids along.

Jerome: When you say we you’re talking about...

Joan: The three of us.

Jerome: With Dr. Tierney?

Joan: With Dr. Tierney watching and his staff and the supervisor of language arts [Shirley].

The “umbrella look” that Joan referred to in the quote above, she later referred to as the big picture. The advice from Tierney was that the teachers should look at quality of work, growth over time, that they should showcase it at some point, and that the process should be strongly tied to reflection. He didn’t tell the teachers how to do it; he helped them identify the critical components of meaningful portfolios.

The collaboration was extremely important to Joan. Her involvement with Tierney evolved into an action research project which in turn provided data for a portfolio book written by Tierney and others. Being part of a research team energized Joan and helped insure that she followed though with the initiative:

Joan: I’ll tell you, when you are part of a research project, you have an invested interest in keeping it going, you know, keeping it up. Where as opposed to if you don’t have anybody constantly following up on what you are doing you may tend to back off and not do it.

The collaborative effort was not necessarily always pleasant. At times there were differences of opinion and apparently different levels of commitment. Yet the collaboration was critical to the social construction that would eventually lead to
development of meaningful portfolio assessment. At that time there were not books available that could guide one in the development of portfolios:

Joan: And we weren't always happy with one another. And that's another thing, I mean in all the research projects I've been in, there's been some animosity between what one of us thinks and what another believes. I'm probably the worst offender, I mean I would get kind of real upset if somebody was fluffing off on reflection or "Oh we don't have time for it today." "Well wait a minute, this is our project. We need to make time."

Jerome: Yeah, if it's important enough.

Joan: So it wasn't a real collaborative happy group. But we did talk and we did listen to one another and we did carry it through.

Jerome: And yet it sounds like it was very important, (pause) that coming together like that.

Joan: Yeah, it was, because I don't think we would have done it alone. We wouldn't have known how to. If we wouldn't have sat down with Tierney we wouldn't have had anything to go by, other than "We want this collection of work and what are we going to do with it?" And we had to learn how to talk to our kids differently and how to ask different kinds of questions so that they would start asking different kinds of questions. I had never done that. And I had to listen to them more. So, I think it was a hard year. (laughter) I don't know if I've had any harder ones, but that was a hard one.

Being willing to take the risk, Joan moved ahead with the initiative to use portfolios with her students:

Joan: So I just kind of jumped right in and said "Hey, I don't know if this is going to work but let's try it." Sometimes I would fall flat on my face and I would sit there and cry and they'd go "It's all right Mrs. Smith, you'll be all right." And I'd say "Well yeah, but it just doesn't work right!" "Well don't be frustrated! We'll try again tomorrow!" (laughter)

Joan spoke of her initial experience with using portfolios and with the research project as being a lot of hard work. She remembers that her lower students embraced the changes, while the higher students struggled. She also revealed that the long term benefits to her and her teaching were well worth the hard work and the pain:

Joan: We had a lot of discussions and a lot of meetings about what was happening and where we were going and what kinds of questions we were asking kids for reflection and all that kind of stuff. What we found was, what I found was that it was pulling the low kids up. My low kids were the ones, the strugglers were the ones that were really getting hooked into this, and my top ones were having trouble because they didn't think they had to work on anything you see, so (laughs) when you had to work on something you have to think of a goal and that was harder and it was real painful the first year. I remember I cried a lot, I was frustrated and I tend to be real passionate about
something so I got real consumed with it and couldn't sleep. But at the end of the year when I looked at what happened from here to here, it's kind of like you forget the pain. It's like childbirth, I always tell people you forget the pain because there's so much growth that you can't let the baby go. And that's really the way I visualize it.

A Developmental Process

The first year using portfolios was a beginning of a developmental process that continues to evolve. Joan described the transition as being somewhat of a trial and error process. Her transition towards using alternative assessment has been accompanied by a change in control. Joan reveals below that using portfolios has meant giving up some control so that the students had a greater voice in the management of their portfolios:

Joan: And then from that year on I just kept revising it a little bit more and looking at the process. What I've noticed about the process that I've had using portfolios with kids is that I was in control and then I was out of control, as opposed to being able to give up control. When you give up control you are here, and then I would take a little bit back and then I would give a little bit more away and then I would design it management-wise so that I had all my bases covered. So it was almost too complicated and when I thought I had it, when actually it was really still too complicated, somebody would show me another idea and I would say "Oh my God that would make it so simple!" And then I would try a simpler idea. Now I'm at the point where it is the most manageable for me.

Jerome: Right now?
Joan: Yes.

The far reaching impact of Joan's experience with Dr. Tierney and his advice about portfolios is powerfully portrayed in the following quote:

Joan: I still haven't changed some of my feelings that he's given me. I still feel quality work is important. I still feel kids need to look at growth over time. I still feel that kids need to look at their effort. I mean I still think that they need to celebrate their work in some kind of showcase event. So, some of the very basic things that we talked about, the very roots of what he was trying to do have stayed with me.

Impact of Professional Reading and Conferences

When asked about other professional development opportunities that have had an impact on her transition towards using alternative assessment, Joan talked about reading
books and journals, attending workshops and inservice, and graduate level courses.

Beyond her discussion about the Graves' workshop discussed above, she did not dwell on her experience with workshops, inservice, and classes. Actually, Joan stated that one of her objectives in attending workshops on alternative assessment is to see how others present their topic. She looks for ways to improve the workshops that, as will be illustrated later, she offers on the same or related topics:

Joan: But then I'd go to a conference to listen to what other people are doing and also to look at how they're doing the workshops so that I can present better. (laughs) That's terrible but I would watch like Linda Fenner, I watched her several times to see what she does that makes people listen to her. Sometimes I feel like I'm not clear enough. I make sense but I don't know if I make sense to other people. So I go to the conferences for that reason and also to see if people are doing things that I'd like to try and incorporate into my assessment practices.

Joan does some professional reading but admits that the amount and the impact are minimal. Below, she describes how she has not done much professional reading although she has bought numerous books on assessment. Usually, if she does read from any of the books, it is a matter of scanning for specific tips on strategies. In that sense, the books serve mostly as resource.

Jerome: Were there other things that helped you make that transition besides your work with Tierney and these other teachers? Workshops, conferences, readings?

Joan: You know, it's surprising. I haven't read a whole lot. I didn't even read Tierney's book. I figure it's too painful to relive it. I have about eight or nine portfolio subject matter textbooks. What I do is I read them backwards, which is really unusual for me, but I take the book and I read it backwards. If the last chapter or parts of the last chapter are pretty good then I take the next chapter. It's just weird. And there's one from Canada called Literacy, and the last part is on student-led conferences. I read that first and I thought this guy writes pretty good, I'll just keep moving back. I read that book from cover to cover, but most of the books I have I buy because somebody's told me they're good and eventually I should get to read them, like Portfolio Portraits. I know that's probably a really good book but I haven't read it yet, and I've listened to people talk to me about it. I will read an article sometimes in a magazine, depending on the magazine but I tend not to read too many of them.
One such example of when she has read from various books for specific ideas, centered around anecdotal observations. Joan read a particular book that dealt with anecdotal observation but upon reflection indicates that reading the book was no substitute for actually doing it in the classroom. In the discussion about reading that book, Joan makes known what she values in anecdotal records. For her, such records capture specific, usually minor details which she would otherwise have difficulty committing to memory:

Joan: Now, once in a while I've felt that I've needed to know a little more about anecdotal records. So I bought some material about what it means to do anecdotal records; how can I do them better? I tend to wipe out the negative things kids do and I don't remember who isn't listening and who isn't following directions and who isn't turning their work in on time. Unless I keep track of it, it's out of my mind, it's not important to me.

Jerome: Were the books that you bought the types of books you would find in a teacher's store?

Joan: No, they're professional books, but I only read sections of them. If it's got a chapter on something I'll read that. There was an English portfolio book I heard someone talk about that deals about how you can learn to be a better anecdotal observer, and I bought that and I read that thing from cover to cover. I'm not sure it helped me be a better anecdotal observer, because I think you have to sit here and watch. And I'm sorry, I'm on the move. I don't have time to sit here and make notes and watch. The notes that I make are the things that I think I'm going to forget. But I'm never going to forget Stephanie when she actually read a second grade passage and her whole being lit up. I'm just not going to forget that, as opposed to the fact that Stephanie doesn't always sound out words or use context clues; I've got to write those kinds of things down. So I'm not saying I'm the best anecdotal record keeper but I'm not depending on a book to tell me how to do it. I have to be in here with the kids and have to try the things.

Presenting Workshops on Alternative Assessments

Over the course of her transition towards using alternative assessment, Joan has progressed from the receiving end of inservice trainings to the providing end. At the time of these interviews, Joan had presented thirty workshops on portfolio assessment. Some of the workshops have been for local schools and local school districts, while others have been conferences in other states.
Joan: Now I've done over thirty portfolio workshops for people. Sometimes I say I can't talk about this subject one more time (said in exasperation) (laughter). But then I think to myself there are some things that I've done that I've changed along the way that maybe would help somebody who's just starting.

Jerome: Sure. It's great for teachers to hear from other teachers and to say "Here's how I did it."

Joan: And I haven't given it up. This will be my seventh or eight year or somewhere around there and it's really important to me. I have my own portfolio that I just couldn't live without; it kind of represents who I am, and that's important to me. So I think if it's important to me to have mine and I keep using it, it must be important to them.

An Informal Network of Colleagues

Joan's experiences both attending and presenting workshops on alternative assessment have helped to develop a network of professionals who share an interest and expertise in alternative assessment. Joan is able to rely on that informal network whenever she is "stuck" and needs new ideas or confirmation:

Joan: The supervisor, Dr. Tierney, the people that I work with, and I know a lot of people from working with portfolios, I have a network of people that I contact when I'm stuck who know a lot about portfolio assessment.

Jerome: Other teachers?

Joan: And administrators

Jerome: OK

Joan: And we don't all do it, we don't all believe in the same things and we don't all do it the same but we all have a healthy respect. Like Sharon Dorsey in Henderson, we have a healthy respect for each other's opinions. There's not really a lot of elementary teachers that I know of. Maybe there are and I just don't know who they are that do a lot of portfolio assessments.

Teaching Honors and Awards

A discussion about Joan's background would be incomplete without mention of three prestigious teaching awards that she has recently received. In 1994, Joan was honored with the Outstanding Elementary Teacher of the Year Award by the Ohio Council of Teachers of English and Language Arts (OCTELA). The following year she was honored again with a national award by the International Reading Association (IRA) as the Outstanding Elementary Language Arts Teacher. These two awards had been preceded by Joan's recognition as the Teacher of the Year in Carrollton in 1990.

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was very modest about the awards and only talked about them when asked directly about
the awards.

Joan's Assessment Strategies

At the center of Joan's alternative assessment strategies are the portfolios that she
has students maintain. However, as has been eluded to throughout this case, Joan
employs several assessment strategies on a daily basis. One technique, which was not
employed by the other participants in this study, is to utilize tutors and volunteers in the
assessment process. Joan has ten of her students being tutored by ten fourth graders:

Joan: I really have ten kids that have tutors that come down and read in the
afternoon, and they keep track of what they are doing and what they are not
doing for me.

Jerome: Are the tutors students?

Joan: Yeah, they're student tutors from fourth grade. So when they are ready to
move up a level, one of the tutors will come and say "I really believe that so
and so is ready to move up a level. The last one she did, she was making
very few mistakes, she was self-correcting, bla bla bla." Which is my own
little verbal running record for them. And then I will say "Fine, move her up
to the next level, tell me how she's doing" and then eventually I'll check her
at that level.

Role of Volunteers

Joan also has parent volunteers come in on a regular basis and they play a role in
assessment. Three different parents come in and work individually with specific students
on reading. As part of their work with the students the parent volunteers prepare
conference notes and keep track of the reading strategies that the children use and whether
or not they are comprehending. Joan had to spend some time at the beginning of the year,
both with the student tutors and with the parent volunteers, to train them in the assessment
process. The form that she has the parent volunteers use reflect the grade card used by
the school and so the data collected help support the completion of the grade cards.
The extra help that Joan receives from the tutors and volunteers allows her to work intensively with reading assessment with a smaller number of students. She keeps the same types of reading conference notes that her volunteers use. On a daily basis, Joan takes anecdotal notes which she keeps in a little book that is always nearby. In the book she jots down things that she thinks she needs to remember. She described it as "just free writing, it's really notes, just jotted notes."

Assessments Through Writing

Congruent with the mission of the school that Joan teaches in, much of the assessment data that Joan collects involves the students' writing. Even in content areas like math and science Joan uses the students' writing to assess what they understand. Presented earlier was a description of a science activity that Joan had the students do using magnets. Her assessments came from the students writing about what they learned as a result of the activity. She also collected less formal data by talking to the kids, asking them questions about their learning, and through constant observation. As often as possible, Joan has her students writing about what they have done; what they have learned; or in the case of math, what strategies they used to solve the problem. In many ways Joan forces her students into being metacognitive, whereby they have to think about what they learned and how they learned it.

Student Self-Assessment

Joan's focus on the students' being engaged in their own assessment is extremely important to her. One example of how she achieves this is requiring the students to choose which work from their working portfolios to include in their showcase portfolios. Attached to each element in the showcase portfolio is a written description of why the student chose that particular piece. Several times she commented on the importance of
self-reflection on the part of students. That importance is most evident in the way she incorporates the portfolios into her assessment. This following quote powerfully illustrates her conviction of the need for student reflection:

Joan: I mean I'm a stickler. If you’re doing portfolios and you're not doing reflection, then you're not doing portfolios. It’s as simple as that. Whereas somebody goes “Yes I am.” “Well, no you’re not.”

As she continued with her discussion about the importance of the students participating in self-reflection, it becomes clear that Joan values that aspect above everything else:

Joan: And the fact that the goal is that you are teaching the child self-assessment is more important than having all this concrete data to prove that you are accountable. I really do not do it for anybody other than to teach that kid how to look at his work and say something to me about what he’s doing and not doing instead of me telling him, he’s telling me. So he’s discovering what I’m discovering and maybe he’s going to discover it before me, and that’s the bottom line and that’s why I stay with it.

Portfolios

The process of using portfolios for assessment has undergone constant change and revision since the first year that Joan used them. Much of the change has occurred after field testing various ideas, sharing ideas with other professionals, and matching up strategies with each new group of students.

Each student has a showcase portfolio which is housed in a 12” x 18” brown expandable folder with her/his picture laminated on the outside. There are some standard features of each portfolio and yet there is a great deal of variety among all of them. Each portfolio contains various types of reflection forms.

One of the reflection forms found in each portfolio is referred to as Post Conference Parent Reflections. This form is completed by the parent after they have participated in a teacher conference and had an opportunity to peruse their child’s portfolio. The completed form becomes a permanent document in the showcase portfolio.
In similar fashion, each student completes a Student Pre-Conference Reflection form before the conference and a Post Conference Reflections form. These items, just like the parental forms, become permanent documents in each student's portfolio. Each item in any given portfolio has a large post-it note® attached to the document explaining why that item was selected to be included in the portfolio.

Joan reported that the selection process is taken seriously by the students and they put forth great effort to make meaningful choices. As the following quote illustrates, the management of the portfolios has changed over time. For example, rather than waiting until the end of a grading period to choose pieces for the showcase portfolio, the students now select work on an on-going basis:

Joan: I used to wait until the eighth week and we would get out all our stuff, lay it on the floor and pick. And we would do all our reflection the next day. Oh, my God! No wonder they hated it. (laughter) They hated it! But now we do a little bit along the way. So when we get to the last, which was today, where we have to finish the selection for the grading period, they don't have x-amount of pieces to write on, and I don't feel so bad.

An important component which supports the showcase portfolios is the working portfolios that Joan has the students keep. In essence the working portfolios, referred to Joan as gathering folders, are mere collections of most of the work that the students produce on a daily basis. A sub-component of the working portfolios is the writing folder that each student maintains. Earlier in this case there was a description of cloth satchels which fit over the backs of the students' chairs. Within the satchels (which Joan refers to as back pockets) are, among other items, four-pocket folders. Within the folders, students keep their writing. The pockets represent various steps in the writing process and therefore reinforce those discrete steps. The four pockets are labeled:

- Pre-writing
- Drafts
- Word play - Editing
- Deadline drafts - Reflect
Assessment Informing Instruction

Although portfolios are at the center of Joan’s assessment techniques, Joan differentiates between the portfolios and the little day to day types of assessments which mainly involve observations and anecdotal records. The portfolios serve to help kids self-reflect and become involved in the assessment process, and they also inform parents about student performance. Recognizing that the ultimate goal of assessment is to inform instruction, Joan acknowledges that the daily observations and discussions with students, as well as viewing the papers or document which may eventually end up in the portfolios, play the major role in assessment. This issue is brought to light in the next quote in which Joan addresses planning. Joan indicated that she would not be able to turn in weekly plans if requested by administration because her plans change on a daily basis depending on what she finds out about her students' understanding through her assessments:

Joan: I see all the work before it even gets chosen for that portfolio; so that’s where I’m doing my assessing, from what I see from day to day. It’s real hard for me to plan a week. If she (referring to the principal) made us have plans for a week in advance I couldn’t do it; I think that’s cruel.

Jerome: That’s an interesting point.

Joan: Because you cannot plan a week ahead thinking about what the kids are going to be doing. I can have a ball park idea of I’d like to be here, but what a waste of paper! At best, I do two days at a time. Then I find out what we’ve done in those two days and I take the next step. Now somewhere along the line I have a plan about what the next step is, but it isn’t in my book. And I get that before it even gets in a portfolio.

One of the things that Joan learns about her students as a result of their having portfolios is what they value. By observing what the students chose to include in their portfolios and through being privy to their reasons for selecting those items, Joan gains valuable insight to what her students value:

Joan: What I like about the portfolio for kids is that they are making some choices about what they are doing in class that means something to them. And that means something to me. I told them the other day, I said “When you make
Joan recalled the words of a leader in alternative assessment which appear to represent her philosophy of teaching and learning. The individual suggested that there are four key elements in education which are interdependent upon one another. The four elements are goals, instructional strategies, assessment, and reflection. He further suggested that instructional strategies and assessment should be seamless and that a visitor in a classroom should not be able to detect whether a teacher is teaching or assessing. Joan agrees, and places great emphasis on the two other elements as well:

Joan: I heard him talk once and he made this statement, and you know how you can listen to someone and all the sudden you go “Oh my God!” (laughs) Well he made a statement that there’s four things you need to remember in the classroom: goals, instructional strategies, assessment, and reflection, and it’s a cycle. If your instructional strategies don’t look exactly like your assessment, then something’s wrong. You shouldn’t be able to tell, I should come into your room and not be able to tell if you are testing or you are instructing. So I really keep that in mind. In other words if you are doing this and it doesn’t have anything to do with your goal, don’t do it. I don’t care how much fun it is. Which really talks about the fluff that everybody likes to do because it’s fun and the kids get excited. But where is it taking you? That’s what I learned from him. What goal did you reach? What did you do it for? Well OK, now if you did it for this goal, then did you accomplish that goal? “I don’t know, but the kids had fun” Then it doesn’t make any difference! That’s what I learned from him and I think that took a lot of the stress of having to do so much, because we all feel like we’re being asked to do more and more and more. Well yeah, we’re asking to do more important things and let’s look at what we’re doing that isn’t working. But teachers are having trouble with that even in our district.

**Teachers’ Need for Alternative Assessment**

One of the last questions asked of Joan during the interview process for this study was what type of advice she would offer another teacher interested in using alternative assessments. Her insightful response clarifies her belief that there is a connectedness between what one values in teaching, what one’s goals are, and whether or not students have a role in the assessment process. A decision to use alternative assessment therefore
should not be made in isolation. Rather, that decision should be based on the answers to the questions that Joan raises:

Jerome: OK, if you were to meet some people right now who wanted to start alternative assessment and they came to you, what advice would you give them?

Joan: I'd probably ask them what their goals were. I'd ask what kinds of things they do in their classroom and whether they teach kids how to do reflection and what they do now for testing, or assessment. Those are the four things I keep in my mind. If you start alternative assessment, if these haven't changed, they will change, one will change the other. One will drive the other.

Jerome: So you'd be interested in knowing why they want to change and what their goals of doing that are.

Joan: Yeah.

Continuing the discussion about teacher change, Joan concluded that most of the teachers that she has provided in-service for or that have approached her for ideas about alternative assessment have reasons for seeking alternative assessment training that are not grounded in a philosophy of teaching and learning that would support such a change. In this powerful quote, Joan eloquently articulates that alternative assessment is not something that a person just does. It is a way of thinking and should be tied into one's philosophy of teaching and learning. The implications inherent in her thinking have far-reaching ramifications for district or statewide initiatives that attempt to mandate the use of alternative assessment:

Joan: Well, most people that I've in-serviced on assessment, come because their districts are imposing it upon them so they have to make the move. But in the beginning...

Jerome: Imposing the alternative assessment?

Joan: Yeah, they want them to try different forms of assessment. But most teachers want to know what exactly it is and how do you do it. They want the steps, “what do you actually do, can I come look at it.” And then they want to come and see it, and I say “It’s not something you just do.” So once they come and they see how a room works and how the day works and what the kids do, then it kind of dawns on them that maybe their teaching doesn’t match. OK, or they will tell me that “Well I’m already keeping a file.” “Well that’s fine, it’s your file, now let’s look at how you can get kids to do that, you know, and that’s different than you keeping the file.” Most teachers want to do it just because somebody’s telling them that they have to keep “X” amount of pieces to pass on to the next teacher. I don’t care if anything goes on to the next teacher, that’s not why we are doing it. So until they get that
idea that it's a way of thinking and a way of operating in your classroom, and that it has some value that you need to spend some time on it, and you need to spend some time teaching kids how to look at their work, it's not going to work.

Linda

Introduction

Two additional participants were selected for this study who do not use alternative assessments. They were chosen after consultation with several colleagues who have spent time in classrooms supervising field placement students. The colleagues had been asked to recommend veteran teachers whom they felt were effective teachers, and to their knowledge did not use alternative assessments. Two particular teachers were recommended by multiple informants. They were both contacted and agreed to participate in the study.

One of their cases is presented here. It is a comparative case study of Linda, a veteran teacher who has taught for Henderson Public Schools for twenty seven years. During her years teaching, Linda has taught third, fourth, fifth, and sixth grades. Her case study is presented to provide a benchmark comparison case of a veteran teacher who for whatever reasons has not chosen to use alternative assessment strategies.

It is anticipated that the reader will recognize this comparative case study as a traditional elementary school teacher. It is not the goal nor intention of this writer to portray teachers who do not use alternative assessment in a negative light. Rather, this case is presented to create a greater understanding or awareness of which factors impact teachers' abilities and motives to use alternative assessment.
The data for this case were collected in the same fashion as with the other cases. Multiple in-depth interviews were conducted and classroom observations made with the participant. The presentation of this case study mirrors the other case studies although there are some minor differences with regard to emphasis.

The Classroom

Arrangement

The self-contained fourth grade classroom that Linda taught in was spacious and had large windows running the length of one wall. Cream colored blinds were pulled three fourths closed, and on the blinds several posters were displayed. A long chalkboard ran most of the length of the opposite wall, save space for a door and a sink. The chalkboard appeared to hold a place of prominence in the room, as student desks were lined up facing it. Four straight rows of four student desks were lined up behind one another in an orderly fashion. On both ends of the rows, additional rows faced one another so that the formation of desks created a compact rectangle. A few additional desks sat in isolation, pulled back from the main bank of desks, yet facing the focal point of the room - the chalkboard. A lone desk was pushed right up to the chalkboard, facing it, and located at its furthest end.

The teacher's desk was located in a back corner of the room flanked by a steel file cabinet. Her desk also faced the front of the room, although the backs of the students. Within easy reach behind Linda's desk, the bookcase was loaded with teacher's resource kits for all of the content areas. Teacher's editions of textbooks, reproducible workbooks, test packets and other assorted workbooks were neatly organized by subject. In the farthest point of that corner, an old overhead machine gathered dust.
An empty aquarium sat on top of a bookcase in front of the window. It had been home to a class pet - a tarantula, given to Linda by a colleague. An Apple IIe computer, covered by plastic, sat idle at the front of the room. The lone table in the room was located between the computer and the teacher's desk. Large enough for perhaps five students, the table was accompanied by one chair.

**Visuals**

Around the room, on all four walls, various posters and assorted visuals were displayed. The majority of them were typical of the resources available at teacher supply stores. A world map and United States map were displayed above the chalk boards in the front of the room. A few of the other visuals had titles that included: Basic Geometry, Cursive Alphabet, The Writing Process, Lungs - Smoker / Non-Smoker, and Parts of a Letter. The collection of posters that were displayed on the window blinds represented the various content areas. One bulletin board near the front corner of the room had some student art and poetry about spring displayed.

**Storage**

The room was graced with ample storage space. Low book shelves lined both long walls, either under the windows or under the chalkboard. A dividing wall separated an eight foot deep storage area that ran the length of an adjacent wall. In that space, students kept their coats, book bags, and other personal items. Floor to ceiling cabinets added to the storage available to the teacher. On the other side of the dividing wall, an additional chalkboard with bulletin boards on either side faced towards the students' desks.

The multitude of shelving space contained mostly books. The books were not collections of children's literature but rather an accumulation of old textbooks.
dictionaries, and references. Some of the textbooks included previously adopted reading series and books on handwriting, music, social studies, and health. There were two complete reference collections of books; one featured each state, the other featured countries around the world. Despite the ample space, many of the shelves were scantily utilized. The only manipulatives on the shelves included two small buckets of pattern blocks and one box of geo-boards. These comprised the only manipulatives readily accessible to the students, and they were rarely used.

**Textbooks**

Items that were frequently used, the students' textbooks, were kept in their desks. The books kept therein included: math, science, language, spelling, reading, social studies, and health -- leaving little room for anything else. Perhaps it was due to the students always having at least one book out of the desks, that they had room to also store paper, folders, and pencils. Overflow items were stored by individual students under their chairs or stacked up under their desks.

**A Day in Linda's Classroom**

**Schedule**

A quick summation of a typical day in Linda's classroom can be achieved with the following extract copied from the chalk board located on the dividing wall perpendicular to the front of the room:

- **Spelling** - Lesson 28 p. 125
- **Reading** - Selection Responses pp 55-56
- **Language** - p 138 (1-15)
- **Math** - p 209 (1-24)
- **Social Studies** - Weekly Reader

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The order of the activities listed mirrors the order in which they were completed by the students during the day. Although the schedule was from the previous day's work, it transformed into that day's schedule, line by line, as they reached each content area. Linda would send a student to erase the page numbers and enter the new pages for that day whenever the assignment for each subject was announced. Typically the morning hours are devoted to a language block during which time the students do their daily assignments in spelling, reading, and language. Missing from the schedule above is handwriting, an activity that the students normally render on a daily basis.

**Morning**

As the school day began, the students were only in the room for a few minutes before going out for art. When they returned, forty-five minutes into the school day, Linda announced that they would all go to the rest room and then come back to take their practice spelling test. Linda's was the only classroom where group controlled rest room breaks were witnessed, although it appeared that was the norm at her school. The students lined up in two lines, a boys and a girls, and proceeded to the rest rooms. Upon their return, the students went to their seats and got ready for the practice spelling tests.

Linda administered the spelling test in a traditional manner, walking around the room with the teacher's edition of the spelling book on her arm. Each word was stated clearly and then used in a sentence; the sentences were read from the teacher's edition. At the end of the list, Linda presented five additional "challenge words" for the students who do not receive Title 1 support in reading. Concluding the practice test, Linda reminded the students to dot their "i"s and cross their "t"s and to pass their papers to the end of the row to be collected and graded.
According to schedule, Linda announced: “We’re going to have reading next and we’re going to start out with a poem, just like they told me to.” They refers to the authors of the reading series, who provide the hints to teachers about how they might present the material from the reading series. In similar fashion to the administration of the practice spelling test, Linda walks around the room with the teacher’s edition of the basal reader on her arm. After Linda read the poem, she again referred to the teacher’s manual to ask a couple questions. One particular question was interpretive, yet Linda continued to ask around the room until she found the “right answer.” She then quickly read the poem again, apparently so the students could see why the “right answer” was correct, and then she asked the class the same interpretive question and appeared pleased that they all knew it.

Her comment about “just like they told me to,” and the manner in which she conducted the spelling and reading lessons suggested a level of faith in the teacher’s manuals and the textbook curriculum. The reading lesson progressed in a linear fashion as prescribed in the teacher’s manual. Linda told the students that reading the poem was supposed to get them ready for next story. She drew the students’ attention to the front chalkboard, upon which was written eight words that the students would see in the story. One by one Linda led the class through the words asking for definitions. When they got to “vast” and no one knew its meaning, she asked the students to look in the glossary:

Linda: Take out your books and look in the special place called a glossary to find the word “vast.”

The first student to find the word read the definition out loud straight out of the book. During the remainder of the vocabulary building segment, Linda often called on a particular boy at the front of the room to supply the right answer. When it came time to read, Linda read half of the story while the students followed along. At that point, the students completed the reading in a round-robin fashion. It was stressed to the students
that they follow along as their peers orally read. At the conclusion of the reading time, the
students took out their “selection response” worksheets from the previous day, swapped
papers, and graded their peers' work. The grading progressed in a predictable manner:

Linda: In your best reading voice, read the sentence and the answer. Brian, would you
read the first one?

Similar teacher-led strategies, based on prescriptive teacher's manuals, were
played out during the remainder of the school day in the other content areas. Even the
Weekly Reader, which comes with a cover page for teachers that resembles a teacher's
manual, was presented as a teacher-led activity. Linda read from the parts of the Weekly
Reader and then asked the students to finish reading it on their own and answer the
questions contained therein.

The language assignment happened to be the “Unit Checkup.” The students were
assigned two pages out of the language book that contained over fifty review questions
from the chapter they were completing. With the teacher's advice to use their study time
to good advantage, the students were given close to an hour to complete the assignment.
Many of the items required that the students copy sentences out of the book and either
underline specific parts of speech or change verb tenses. During this work time, students
that approached Linda seeking permission to go to the rest room were granted that
permission, but at the cost of five minutes of their recess time. The morning language
block ended with the school bell signaling time for recess and lunch.

**Afternoon**

The afternoon transpired with apparent similarity. Assignments in math, social
studies, science, and health were made. In math, Linda went through some of the guided
practice problems with the students before assigning the problems on the page to which
they had progressed. Social studies, science, and health were all presented by either
Linda reading or directing the round-robin reading from the students' textbooks. In each subject, students were then expected to complete questions as they were presented in the books.

Throughout the afternoon, and indeed throughout the morning, the students remained seated at their desks either listening to Linda's directions, their peer's responses and oral reading, or completing assigned book work. The student behavior during the entire day was excellent and in spite of their controlled schedule, they appeared content and seemed to enjoy their interactions with Linda.

**Linda's Professional Background**

*Preservice*

Like most of the participants in this study, Linda has taught at more than one school. She completed her Bachelor Degree in elementary education at The Ohio State University in a program that she described as not having any particular theme or focus. When asked directly about whether or not she had any course work that dealt directly with assessment during her preservice training in the general elementary education program, Linda responded that she had not. She did, however, explain in that same response that because teachers are not trained in assessment they tend to assess in the same fashion that they had been assessed:

Jerome: Do you remember any course work during you preservice training that dealt with assessment?
Linda: No. You usually, what happens since they don't give you anything, you rely upon the way you were graded, and that's what you usually do. Because they don't really talk about that much. And now they want you to individualize everything. Well it's just not feasible to do that in a classroom with 30 kids.
Student teaching. Her student teaching experience was at an urban school in Henderson, where she was eventually hired for her first teaching job and stayed for the next four years. Linda's brief description of her student teaching leaves the impression that it was just part of the process of becoming certified. She did not elaborate beyond what is presented below:

Jerome: What was your student teaching experience like?
Linda: It was a good experience. She (the cooperating teacher) had been teaching for quite a while. She was real easy going but I thought she had some good ideas, (pause) and that's all.
Jerome: Was she a big influence on your own teaching?
Linda: Not a big influence, but some.

The reader may recognize that throughout this case, Linda's responses to questions and her discussions are less articulate than the responses offered by the other participants. It appeared that Linda was less confident talking about issues of teaching, learning, and assessment. Perhaps the difference was magnified by her interest in the discussion as compared to the four participants who use alternative assessments. While they appeared energized and excited to talk about their assessment strategies and their professional development, Linda was less expressive. Her responses, however, which may be open to greater interpretation, are telling.

Induction Year

Like all the participants in this study, Linda's first year of teaching was a difficult experience. She reported feeling lost and not as prepared as she would have liked to have been. Her descriptive account of some of the difficulties centered around assessment. Her greatest concern was not knowing what to expect from her students and not being able to compare their performances to a familiar standard.

Linda: I just felt like I was groping. I didn't know what I was doing and I didn't, you know, you've got all these kids and you're supposed to grade em and if you have nothing to compare them to it's really tough, and you want to give them an accurate grade. I think you have a tendency to grade higher when
you don't know. When you didn't know what to expect from fourth graders. I mean I didn't know what to expect. So I probably graded them higher.

Just as the other respondents recalled being more concerned with their own learning and the task of teaching during their induction periods, Linda told of working very hard to become familiar with all she had to teach. Whereas the other respondents spoke of becoming familiar with the curriculum, Linda talked about becoming familiar with the books, revealing a belief that the two are synonymous:

Linda: Plus you weren't familiar with the books and you had to read up on that and prepare, it was interesting. I probably did as much work then as I did when I was in college. Well, a lot more memorizing in college.

The last sentence in the above quote, concerning the memorization that she did in college, causes speculation about the type of learning that Linda values. Although she was not alone in referring to her undergraduate work as being inadequate, she was the only one to talk about her task in college as being a matter of memorization -- as a collection of facts to be memorized.

First Five Years Teaching

Linda's first four years of teaching were completed at the same school where she student taught. During her fifth year of teaching, Linda taught for the Department of Defense in a Dependents' School in Germany. Her recollection of that experience was that the students paid close attention and worked hard. After spending a year in Germany, Linda returned to the United States, got married, and moved to Indianapolis where she taught in the public schools for two additional years. She made her last long distance move when she returned to Henderson and started a teaching job at South Creighton, an urban elementary school.
The Next Eleven Years

Linda's description of South Creighton is one of a difficult place to teach. She recalled rowdy, disrespectful students who came from families where fathers were in prison, parents were on drugs, and they did not value education. She told stories of particular kids who stuck out in her mind over the years. They were stories of students out of control, without regard for rules and behavior expectations. According to Linda, the parents were not cooperative and she mentioned several times that many of them did not have phones in the homes -- making communication all the more difficult. She often saw her role there as one of baby-sitting and policing. The only bright spot of the experience there involved her relationship with her colleagues:

Linda: The staff was really nice and I think in a situation like that the staff has to be, because the kids are so challenging. So the staff was great really. That's really what kept me there for so long. The staff was really neat.

Linda's Transfer to Etowah Elementary

After eleven years at South Creighton, Linda decided she needed a change. She reported not wanting to "turn sour" on teaching before at least trying something else. Linda entered a "pool" to transfer to Etowah Elementary and due to her seniority was able to transfer; she has been at Etowah Elementary ever since. She has been happy with the transition and pleased with the increased parental cooperation and support. She spoke favorably about the level of collegial support at Etowah Elementary and indicated that despite differences in the ways some teachers approach teaching, they accept one another. She describes herself and the majority of the staff as being traditional and offered an interesting portrayal of some of the newer teachers. In the portrayal, Linda exposes that she values structure and that the role of students is to be quiet and listen:

Jerome: In this school do you feel that all the teachers are pretty similar in the ways they approach things?
Linda: No, you got some of the traditional ones and then some of the more, the younger ones who are more loose, not loose, I gotta think of the right word,
more (pause), I don’t know, they don’t expect the kids to be quiet and listen while you’re giving directions and stuff like that. They’re just more, what’s it called? (pause)

Jerome: I was going to say alternative, but ... 
Linda: Less structured.
Jerome: Someone might call it informal
Linda: Yeah, right. Well you have some of those, and, but the majority of us are more structured, more traditional.
Jerome: Does that cause a rift?
Linda: No, no, they just accept that’s the way, that’s their way of doing it and they accept the way you do it.

Administrative support. Linda used very few words to characterize the level of administrative support at Etowah Elementary. Those few words, however, are very striking; they portray several important concepts. Foremost, Linda reveals that she believes that the administration values student performance on standardized test scores. Her words also indicate a belief that test scores “prove” that students have learned. Additionally, her brief answer indicates that test scores are the measure of school effectiveness. They are beliefs and values that seem to permeate much of what happens in Linda’s classroom on a daily basis:

Jerome: What does the administration here value in teaching?
Linda: Well she likes to see the children learning but she also likes the test scores to prove it, because that makes our school look good.

Professional Development

Discussions about Linda’s professional development during her tenure did not turn up any major events, strategies, nor themes, except to say that it has transpired at a minimalist level. Her disinterest in conferences, in-services, professional reading, and furthering her education suggests an educator who feels that her initial training in preservice is sufficient to fulfill her role.

Currently, Linda holds an undergraduate degree, a degree that she referred to as “the regular.” She earned a few graduate level credit hours early in her career but since then has not pursued any further graduate course work. She further reported that she has
attended as much inservice as was necessary. Necessary, meaning that she attended as many inservice trainings as she needed to earn the CEU credits required to have her teaching certificate renewed on a regular basis:

Jerome: What’s your highest degree at this point?
Linda: The regular, the Bachelor.

Jerome: Have you attended or participated in much inservice?
Linda: Yeah, as many as were necessary. But I never started working on my Master Degree. Well that’s not true, I started but then I got waylaid.

Jerome: But you have a few hours that apply towards it?
Linda: Yeah, but it was back in the 70’s so it wouldn’t count.

When asked how she decided what types of inservice trainings to attend, Linda replied that generally she tried to keep up with the newest ideas. After attending the various trainings, she would decide which parts of the trainings to use based on what she thought was worthwhile. One can assume that the parts that she considered worthwhile were those that meshed with her philosophy of teaching and learning:

Jerome: Besides keeping up the CEU credits, was there any other value in the inservice training?
Linda: I think just keeping up with the things was important. You know, take some each year and keep up with the newest ideas so that you can decide what parts you want to use of it, what part you think is worthwhile.

Jerome: Were you selective in deciding which inservice trainings to attend?
Linda: Not really. I have avoided all computer type things because I don’t have a computer at home and I don’t know anything about it. Well this year another girl and I took the science because they were going to have that on the proficiency test for the first time and I was interested in that and so I think it was more or less just what I was interested in at the time and what met my needs, or what I thought met my needs.

Continuing the discussion on the types of professional development activities that Linda engaged in, she disclosed that she has not attended professional conferences. Her stated reason for not attending workshops stemmed from her belief that doing so would have required an overnight stay, or that conferences are held only on weekends, although she was not too sure about the accuracy of that belief. She also mentioned that having young children may have kept her from pursuing such professional development activities:
Jerome: What types of professional conferences have you attended?
Linda: I have not done that. Because that's usually overnight or over a weekend, right? Probably if I hadn't had younger children I probably would have done more of that sort of thing.

Rounding out the focus on professional development activities, Linda spoke briefly about her professional reading. Her response indicates very limited exposure to journals and books, and one might even question whether or not the reading could be classified as professional, as it was practitioner-oriented and served more as a resource for ideas:

Jerome: Are there particular books or journals you read that deal with teaching and learning?
Linda: Yeah, there's one down in the library, and when I read it, it's to get bulletin board ideas.

Linda's Assessment Strategies

A Reliance on Textbooks

The assessment strategies employed by Linda are closely tied to her teaching strategies. Just as Linda relies on the textbooks to guide her instruction, she relies on them for her assessments. Her descriptions of her assessment strategies reveal the same faith in the textbook publishers. They also expose a traditional philosophy towards education that suggests that students' learning can be measured by measuring discreet skills using multiple choice tests. Her assessments sort student performances into percentage ranks and follow what she believes is the norm throughout the district:

Jerome: Can you describe your assessment strategies?
Linda: I grade on a percentage. Everything in the 90's is an "A" and everything in the 80's is a "B," 70's a "C," 60's a "D." And I think that's pretty uniform throughout the system. And that's how I base it. Now somethings, conversation wise, if you're just having a discussion, then I will give them a grade on that - like satisfactory or outstanding or S+ or S-, just for my own record. In other words if you don't give that many tests in health or science then you'll have this to go by.
Purpose of Assessment

At first glance, her mention of keeping records on oral discussions appears to be similar to some of the assessment strategies used by the other participants in this study, resembling running records or anecdotal notes. However, as she goes on to explain the use of those assessments, it becomes clear that the data collected serve far different purposes. Rather than revealing what students understand or informing instruction, the data serve as checklists to document who is paying attention, or at least following along:

Jerome: I see. [looking at an example of the checklist] And this one says oral reading.
Linda: Yeah but that was oral reading of uh ...
Jerome: Oral reading in a round-robin sort of fashion?
Linda: No, I called on them whenever. They didn’t know when I was going to call on them and they had to know the place. If they didn’t know the place then they got a check mark. And they pay pretty close attention.
Jerome: Is that out of a reader?
Linda: That was out of a health book.

Throughout our conversations, the notion that Linda uses assessment strategies to keep the students alert was repeatedly reinforced. In the quote above, Linda described how she uses check marks to document whether or not a student knew which word on a page the class was on. The students are made aware that she keeps track of that type of information and that it is used for grade purposes. Linda mentioned, two quotes above, that this data helps to fill a gap in subjects like health and science where she does not have as many test grades to rely on. In essence then, a significant portion of students' grades in those subjects is not based on what they have learned, but rather on whether or not they are able to follow along with the class during oral reading.
Assessment Strategies in the Content Areas

**Spelling.** That same strategy of keeping the students “on their toes” is illustrated in the following quote. When asked specifically how she deals with assessment in spelling, Linda described a weekly process that involves students’ completing a spelling page every day of the week except Friday. Additionally, the students take a practice test on Thursday and then the real test on Friday. The tests are always graded by Linda but the daily work is graded by swapping papers and checking one another’s work. As Linda points out, the students never know which grades will end up in the grade book and therefore they do the work:

Jerome: What about spelling? How do you assess in spelling?
Linda: Well straight from the book. I mean I give a trial test on Thursday and if they get a 100 they don’t have to take it on Friday. Then on Friday is the final test. And here’s the sentences, where they use the words. [show example] And here’s the reach out words, the challenge words we call them. If they go to the CBE reading, or the Chapter 1 reading it’s called now, then they don’t have to take these because the others have more time to study.

Jerome: Each day you assign another page from the book?
Linda: Yeah.
Jerome: Do you grade those pages?
Linda: We exchange papers. I always grade the tests.
Jerome: Do the papers impact their grades?
Linda: Sometimes, not every time. That would be too many grades. But they don’t know when I’m going to, so therefore they do them.
Jerome: If a student does poorly on a spelling test do you do something different?
Linda: You know what? They get suckers if they get a 100. They’ll work for that.

My final question in the quote above was an attempt to find out if the data collected through her assessments in spelling impact any further instruction. Her response indicates that she either did not understand the question, or the thought of using data to make instructional decisions is so foreign to her that she could not begin to address the question.
Reading. Linda’s assessment strategies in reading also closely follow the suggested techniques offered by the adopted reading series. The series includes reproducible worksheets which Linda faithfully utilizes. Among the types of worksheets provided, some of them deviate from practice with discrete skills and focus rather on interpretive skills. For example, after reading Stone Fox, the literary sheet asks students to tell how they felt about the character stone fox before the race, during the race, and at the end of the race. They are also prompted to tell why they felt that way. Interestingly, Linda takes grades from the skill sheets, which easily convert to percentages, but she does not take grades from the “literary sheets” which are more open ended and therefore subjective. She also makes use of the same technique described earlier to keep the students “on their toes.” As was illustrated with the checklists used during health to document who was paying attention, Linda keeps checklists that show who completed the literary sheets. The assessment does not reveal or document what their writing reflects, it only shows who completed the work:

Jerome: What are your assessment strategies like in reading?
Linda: This came with the series. [shows reproducible worksheets] These are worksheets that go along with the stories and then this I call a literary sheet. I don’t normally grade those but I do get grades on the skill sheets.

Jerome: Do you enter all those grades in you grade book?
Linda: No, but I don’t let the kids know which ones I’m using, you know, keep them on their toes. And I collect those selection responses just to make sure they are doing it. And I’ll check off, you know, whether they have or haven’t done them. I make my list, my bad list of those that don’t.

In addition to the reliance on the adopted reading series for assessment, Linda is compelled to administer district-implemented assessments. Linked to Competency Based Education (CBE), the assessments are administered to all the students at certain points in the school year. The tests go along with the adopted reading series and consist of multiple choice and open ended items. The teachers grade the tests, including the open ended items and forward the results to administration. When asked if it was difficult to
grade the open ended questions, Linda expressed a concern for fairness. Most likely, her concern was one of reliability:

Linda: It’s not hard, you try to be fair, but you don’t have the criteria to go by.
Jerome: Did this come with some sort of training for you?
Linda: When they adopted the series they gave us workshops.
Jerome: And taught you how to grade the papers?
Linda: Pretty much, they tried, well, they tried. You really pretty much had to teach yourself, you know, and just from talking to other teachers you picked up your own.

The results are compiled, entered into a computer, and transmitted to the district office. Linda’s response to a question about the value of the CBE tests indicate that the data are used to determine reading groups (in other words to sort students). She also uses the additional data to bolster her rationale for the grades that she assigns to her students on their report cards:

Jerome: What does the information from those tests do for you?
Linda: I can see when the computer comes out with the printout, I can see what percentage they had and they’re suppose to have a certain percentage and it equals a certain grade if they don’t, but they’re getting away from all this. And then from this you are supposed to have your ability groups, do the grouping. Everyone’s in the same book right now and then to make up for the different levels you are supposed to have these different groups, ability groups. But that’s not real easy done.
Jerome: Does the computer printout also help you determine grades?
Linda: Yes, because if a parent objects to a grade I give, I can pull those out and say “Well he did so and so percentage on this test” and that’s more documentation.

Math. The assessment process in math closely resembles the reading assessments. Linda closely adheres to the math textbook and utilizes the supplied worksheets and chapter tests. Linda lets the students grade much of the daily work by swapping papers and as has been illustrated in the other areas, the students never know which scores may be used to calculate grades. As with reading, Linda is required to administer CBE tests in math. Actually she was not sure if she was still required to give the tests. Linda explained that the CBE tests are not stressed as much as they were, but as she explains below, she continues to do so because that’s what she has done in the past:
Linda: I'm not really sure if you have to give them. I don't know what would happen if you didn't. I do it because I started out that way and you had to do it, so you just do things because you have to do them and that's the way to do it.

Linda also uses the student performances on the math CBE tests to collect additional grades for their report cards. She feels that if a parent comes in to argue about a grade, the CBE test results help to justify the grade given.

Science, health, and social studies. Linda's response to questions of how she assesses in the other subject areas resulted in similar findings. In science and health, Linda teaches out of the adopted texts, all of which come with their own testing programs. The social studies series is in its first year of use and does not include a testing program. It is the one subject area that Linda has to rely on her own quizzes and tests. In science, where according to Linda, she relies almost exclusively on chapter tests to determine grades, the only way that she can come up with daily grades is to throw in a few pop quizzes:

Linda: The tests from the science books are basically the knowledge from the book, of what they've read and memorized.
Jerome: And this is also an adopted series.
Linda: Right. At the end of the chapters they have the exercises to do and then there's the printed test that comes with it which you can run off. And I use those but I think they're difficult so I let them use their books. That's the only subject that I let them use their books. And you know what, they usually don't take the time to do it. They just want to get it over with so they just put down any answer.
Jerome: So for science it's mainly the tests at the end of each chapter.
Linda: Yeah. The only way I get a daily grade in science was if I were to give a pop quiz. Assign some pages and then ask them some questions to see if they really read it. That will keep them reading it because they don't know when I'm going to do it. Some don't care.
Jerome: What about in social studies and health?
Linda: See, once again, I pretty much use the textbook and what they've prepared for us. Social studies was Ohio history and I pretty much made up quizzes for that. But the health has its prepared things to do for each unit.
Data Collection Methods

In all the assessment strategies discussed in this section, Linda collects data from daily work and chapter tests. Almost exclusively the grades come from either worksheets or tests produced by the publishers of adopted textbooks. With all the subject areas, Linda weights the daily work as fifty percent of the final grade and the tests as the other fifty percent:

Jerome: Do you treat the daily grades differently from test scores?
Linda: The test grades count more than the daily grades. Daily counts half and test scores count half. If they are on the line and have improved then I give them the benefit of the doubt.

While the accounts of Linda's adherence to the textbook curriculum alone indicates unwavering faith in the textbooks, it may also indicate a lack of confidence or a feeling of disempowerment whereby Linda feels she cannot deviate from the textbooks. Regardless of how Linda collects data on student achievement, of utmost importance is what she does with the data once collected. Rather than the data informing her instruction, Linda repeatedly verified that the purpose of the data was to assign grades -- a summative process known as evaluation.

Linda's Philosophy of Teaching and Learning

Linda had some difficulty articulating her philosophy of teaching and learning when asked directly about it. Assuming that veteran teachers teach to their philosophy, that their philosophy is reflected in their methods, then one can make some assumptions about her philosophy based on the descriptions of her teaching and assessing. In an effort to have Linda articulate her philosophy a bit more directly, she was asked what good teaching looks like. Her reply illustrates a rather simplistic role for the teacher and a passive role for the student:

Jerome: If you walk in the classroom door and there is really good teaching going on in the room, what does it look like? What are the teacher and students doing?
Linda: She is up front and she's explaining it and then she walks around and makes sure that they are doing what they're supposed to do. Or if it's committees, she makes sure the committees are doing what they are supposed to do.

Jerome: Is there anything else you'd like to say about that?

Linda: Well then I think good teaching has things up on the bulletin boards too with things that are being, that they are working on. And just someone who's real expressive and stuff like that. I think if someone just sits back and doesn't do anything, if the kids aren't interested they aren't going to be interested anyhow.

Jerome: And on the flip side of that question, what would bad teaching look like?

Linda: Someone that sat in their chair right here and just had the written work handed out to them. Put the assignments on the board and that's it.

Linda's description of good teaching does indeed mirror her methods. When Linda mentioned "committees" she meant groups. Further illustrating her reliance on textbooks, she disclosed that she does cooperative type groupings when the math and reading teacher's manuals suggest doing so:

Jerome: By committee, do you mean group?
Linda: Yes
Jerome: Do you do committee or group work here?
Linda: I do group work.
Jerome: For any particular subjects?
Linda: Well the math has the cooperative learning sections in it and so that's when I do the groups. That and the reading. The reading is reading in pairs and so that's group too.

Jerome: Is that strategy in the book?
Linda: Yes, the reading in pairs, orally to each other. So I try to group a good reader with a weaker reader. Because if you put two weak ones together they're completely frustrated because no one knows what the word is.

Influence of Standardized Tests

Linda brought to light the role that standardized tests play in her teaching. Being a fourth grade teacher, she has to administer the State of Ohio Fourth Grade Proficiency Test. She contends that the test is forcing her set a pace of instruction that does not allow to help the students who are slower to understand the lessons. Instead of meeting individual needs, Linda aims for the middle and tries to keep her instruction at grade level:

Linda: I guess I aim for the middle. I do what I can do and then I go on. I don't just wait, with this proficiency test, that's on grade level so I figure it they are going to pass it they have to do things on grade level so we go on. We don't stay that long on one thing. They either grasp it or they don't. And I know
that's a very negative approach but I don't think there's any choice since the state is having us do this proficiency test.

In contrast to her negative view of the proficiency test, Linda places some value on the standardized test that the school had administered before the initiation of the proficiency tests. The California Achievement Test (CAT) that the school used to administer is exclusively multiple choice and tends to measure discreet skills in the various subject areas. The proficiency test on the other hand is geared to more higher level thinking skills. In math for example there is a greater focus on problem solving rather than the focus on computation found on the CAT. As evidence that Linda and her fourth grade colleagues at Etowah Elementary value the CAT, they voted to administer the math segment of CAT this year. Their vote, which led to the decision to administer it was totally optional; they did not have to administer it since the state proficiency test measures math achievement. Linda explained their rationale:

Linda: This year we had a choice whether we wanted the students to take the computation part of the CAT.

Jerome: You had a choice?

Linda: Yes, because on the proficiency test it’s more (pause) (laughs) they have to have good math sense to figure it out.

Jerome: OK, well what did the staff decide on the computation?

Linda: We decided to give it to them. I think that helps the child, when they, if they learn their facts and they can do the basic functions it helps them to be able to get some answers right. This one, [the proficiency test] this is going to be tough. But I just keep telling them how wonderful they are going to do and maybe I’ll convince them and maybe they will. Maybe

Jerome: So was that a school wide decision to give the computational part of the test?

Linda: Of the math, yes, we were asked. The other fourth grade teachers and I were asked.

Jerome: I wonder if all the teachers in the district had that choice

Linda: I don't know. Without that, see this is all. I don't have a copy of the proficiency test, they had to be locked up but they're really going to have to have good mathematical sense to do well on the tests.

And so it appears that Linda and the other teachers were anxious about their students' performances on the state proficiency tests. Perhaps to bolster their own morale, they decided to also administer the CAT portion of the math test, a test that would
measure the students’ abilities to perform basic computation and hopefully reflect the
types of learning brought about by the teachers’ styles of instruction.

The last interview with Linda happened to be the same day that she had
administered the science portion of the state proficiency test; as such, it was at the
forefront of her thinking. Linda told about how she had attended a workshop at the
beginning of the year to get training to use the new science kit that she had received. Over
the course of the year she did not use the kit at all but after seeing the content of the
science proficiency test, she admitted that next year she would have to dust it off and use
it. Her rationale for not using the science materials was that there were too many other,
more important things to do:

Linda: They adopted this series [science kits], not in books, and they sent us to
workshops, gave us opportunities to go to workshops. I went to
Brookhaven and then we did some of the experiments and then we were
supposed to go back to the classroom and do it. Well I confess, I have not
spent any time with it. In fact it’s covered with dust. There are so many
other skills that needed more attention, like being able to read. I mean, I
don’t know, it just didn’t seem as important. Next year since it’s going to
count I’m going to have to.

Jerome: And that’s a case where the test is going to change something you do next
year.

Linda: Yes that’s true, it will.

Jerome: Was the workshop for using the new science kits mandatory?

Linda: No, I just attended because I knew I needed help how to teach it but evidently
it didn’t work because I didn’t do it. There’s just too many other things to
do. Each one of these fields thinks theirs is the most important and if I could
teach science the whole semester or something then I could probably get it
done but to work it in, it’s not always easy. There’s lots of interruptions;
there’s a lot of stuff going on.

A Lowering of Standards

Finally, Linda explained that with all the changes in education, society, and
particularly testing, she has been forced to lower her standards. She told that she treats
her kids as though they were younger, and once again mentioned that she aims for the
middle. The end of the following quote powerfully illustrates Linda as a teacher who
goes along with the system and doesn’t take a stand on the issues:
Jerome: How have all the new tests changed you?
Linda: I think I am more accepting of different levels now.
Jerome: Different levels of ability?
Linda: Yes
Jerome: Does it make you teach in a different way?
Linda: It has made me teach more like they do in the younger grades. I just treat them like they are younger, even meeting the vocabulary you know, just treat them like they are younger. I guess I just aim for the middle.
Jerome: Are the ways that you grade now different than before?
Linda: It’s different because I had to change because of the type of child I had. In other words, if you have a cut off of 94-100 and your class just isn’t doing that well, you have to lower your standards. So that’s what I’ve done.
Jerome: For who’s sake?
Linda: The system has the 90-100. So I just go along with the system. I don’t want to fight city hall.
CHAPTER V

CROSS CASE ANALYSIS

Introduction

In chapter four, five case studies were presented. Four of those case studies represented elementary teachers who use alternative assessments in their classrooms. For the sake of comparison, the fifth case study illustrated an elementary teacher who does not use alternative assessments. In this chapter, several themes and issues will be revisited that are worthy of further contemplation and analysis. They were selected for further reflection because they emerged as common phenomena across multiple case studies.

This cross case analysis considers the various themes and issues separately by comparing their relevance in the cases where they occur. In some instances, their occurrences are contrasted to the analysis from the comparison case study of Linda. It is probable that the reader has already discerned commonality among and across the multiple case studies. Those phenomena are bared in the following, as a function of confederation, in order to more clearly consider the implications from the data.

Additionally, I will refer to two other teachers whom I interviewed and observed during data collection for this study. Although I did not develop the data from those teachers into case studies, the data are equally revealing and strengthen the trustworthiness of the implications. Segments of transcripts from their discussions appear in this cross case analysis and will be referred to in Chapter VI. The two additional participants are John, an elementary teacher who uses alternative assessment and was the participant for the pilot study; and Jan, an elementary teacher who uses alternative assessment.
Importance of Collegial Interactions

The impact that teachers can have upon one another is powerfully evidenced in several of the case studies. That impact can be both wonderfully positive or distressingly negative. Several of the participants described critical incidents with other teachers that played a significant role in their professional development. Others talked about a culture of collegiality at their schools that greatly impacted the ways that they progressed as teachers. Not all participants stressed the importance of the interactions with their peers, but those that did left little doubt that the role of collegial support is consequential.

Shirley’s articulate reconstructions of the tremendous impact that Curtis had on her major shift in philosophy and style of teaching illustrate the potentially far-reaching positive effects from collegial discourse and revelation. Her interactions with Curtis were the genesis of her transition in her teaching philosophy, and according to Shirley, her reflections of those interactions were the defining element in being hired at Stevens, where her further transition was fostered.

Jerome: At what point did you realize that alternative assessment was necessary?
Shirley: I taught ten years and never really thought much about it. I just did it the way everybody did it because that’s the way you taught. So until I saw what Curtis was doing in his classroom, I never even thought about it. I mean that’s pitiful isn’t it? I mean I was just doing what everybody else did, or that I thought everybody else did.

Shirley went to Stevens because she saw it as an opportunity to learn and to develop towards the type of teaching and learning that she saw in Curtis’ room. Shirley’s transition was fostered by the culture of the school at Stevens which placed great emphasis on collegiality. Shirley provided numerous accounts of how the staff socially constructed their knowledge and pursued professional development in concert.

Shirley: I thought going to this new school, where they said they were going to have a lot of workshops and do a lot of in-service would be my way to learn, and so that’s why I went to Stevens.
Jerome: And was it the workshops?
Shirley: Well it was in-house workshops, us helping each other, teachers. We very rarely had any experts come in and talk because at that time there weren't very many people that were doing what we were doing and so we just, you know, you'd read about some of these radical things and radical people doing this stuff and we'd say "All right, let's do that." So we'd hash it out and change it around the way we wanted and do it. And if it worked for the kids and we saw improvement in the kids then we'd say "Hey, keep it going."

Jerome: Action research
Shirley: That's exactly what we were doing!

Like Shirley, Barb teaches at a school where there is substantial collegial support. The teachers at Barb's school share an informal philosophy. Being at a school where the faculty share a mission allows Barb to develop within her philosophy. The teachers there do not pursue their professional development together as zestfully as the teachers at Stevens, but Barb did talk about certain support groups at Balfour that have had positive impacts on her professional development. Barb has found support from other teachers, predominately from other informal schools, that she reported has been invaluable in her professional development. She was trying to organize a network of informal teachers and a few professors at The Ohio State University to meet together on a regular basis just for the purpose of sharing thoughts on teaching.

The importance of collegial interactions was also apparent in Joan's transition towards using alternative assessment, as it was initially closely tied to a collaborative effort with three of her colleagues. The action research project that she became involved with after approaching Dr. Tierney was the impetus that drove her to develop her alternative assessment strategies. The collegiality involved with the research project was a strong enough force to help insure that she followed through in the transition process.

Jan, one of the participants whose case study was not developed, also identified interactions with other teachers as being the impetus for her transition towards using alternative assessment. Her situation was unique in that she substitute taught for two years upon returning to teaching after a maternity leave. During the extended substitute experience, Jan had the opportunity to interact with teachers throughout the district. It
was during those interactions that she first saw a teacher using portfolio assessment and thereafter she made concerted efforts while subbing to gather all the information about alternative assessment that she could manage:

Jan: What helped me was those two years of subbing, '87 and '88. I hit every grade level, practically hit every classroom in Carrollton. Hit every grade level. Did some long terms, but a lot of that day to day stuff which was really neat because I got to get back in touch with all the teachers and see what was going on. [...] That is how I was first exposed to alternative assessment, but it's a long story to where I got where I am now, so, but that's when I first got interested and started educating myself.

Once Jan began the transition towards using alternative assessments, the importance of dialogue and interactions with colleagues intensified. She found, as she sought out people to talk with about alternative assessment, that she became connected to an informal network of teachers who shared her enthusiastic interest. On one particularly important day in Jan's professional development she took a professional day for herself and visited the classrooms of two colleagues whom she recognized as leaders in alternative assessment. They were both in two different school districts. Within the course of one day, facilitated though professional discourse, Jan conceptualized how to bring many of her ideas about alternative assessment into a cohesive workable strategy:

Jan: And once you get into this you get connected you know, with people. Then I got connected with Linda Fenner, a fifth grade teacher at Wright Elementary in Dublin. I went on a visit over there and her kids were doing the portfolio process that day. They were going from their working folders, deciding what needed to go in and I interviewed and taped them and asked them all kinds of questions and she and I snuck into a little broom closet literally and had about fifteen minutes, and I had a zillion questions. From that, I can still remember this, it's fun to have someone to tell this to, that cares, when, I mean, you know, you know what I mean by that?

Jerome: Definitely!
Jan: OK, I had to drive from there to Old Orchard and be at Old Orchard at 1:00 and I left her probably about noon.
Jerome: Was this like an inservice day you had taken for yourself?
Jan: Yeah.
Jan: From there to there (Linda Fenner's school to Marlene Beierlee's school) is when I formulated what kind of portfolio I wanted to do.
Jerome: On that drive?
Jan: Yeah. So by the time I reached Marlene, I was so excited. Well Marlene was wonderful. She put me in this first grade classroom with this lady who
did writing workshop differently than I had ever seen it done. I mean I had writing workshop going in my classroom but I was like in there, I was going “Oh my gosh, she’s doing this with inner-city kids.” I’m going “Oh wow!” I was in there and then she put me in another class with somebody that did portfolios and then she gave me an hour of her time (said graciously) and I was so ready at that point because now all the questions were there. And we just sat in this little cubbie place and we just talked and I said this is what I want to do. And she, like asked me questions and formulated and then I got to go visit another classroom and when I drove home that day, I mean I was so excited to get started!

Within this discussion, about the role of collegial support on these teacher’s professional development, one must not overlook the negative impact of a collegial climate that does not support teacher change. Beth unfortunately found herself during her third and fourth years of teaching at a school where she was isolated and as she reported, the other teachers hated her. The result, understandably, was that she left there to find a school culture that would support her change.

In an interesting twist, John initially taught at a school where like Beth, he did not enjoy collegial support because his methods varied from the norm. John, however, turned to assessment to justify his method to his peers and skeptics. At his first school, John was the only informal teacher and because he found that he was constantly having to justify his style of teaching, he began to develop alternative assessments to prove to his critics that his students were learning from his instruction:

John: So I was the only teacher in that building at the time, that taught in an informal way, and it made it very difficult because there was always a need to justify what I was doing. Maybe that was another thing that certainly propelled me to find out ways of finding data about my kids, is that I felt like I always had to be ready to argue my points. I used a lot of anecdotal records. I used a lot of data, real kids’ work to show what they could do. I mean so those are the early things that I did.

Linda, on the other hand, was fairly neutral on the issue of collegial support. There was a sense of irreverence in her description of the younger teachers who she initially described as “loose” but then changed that description to “unstructured.” Regardless, she reported that the teachers at her school just accept one another in the ways
that they approach teaching. Lacking from her description of collegiality was any mention of support. She also did not mention any names of teachers who along the way have had a significant impact on her own professional development.

A related finding from the data show that with the exception of Barb, all the teachers in this study had taught in more than one school. Within the three positive case studies (Barb being the fourth), each of the teachers had made deliberate choices to leave their previous schools to find a school where they felt they could change and be supported in their quest to teach in a manner consistent with their philosophy of teaching and learning. Barb, who ironically found herself teaching at a school well suited to her philosophy, has not felt the need to look elsewhere. Beth left one of her schools to escape negative collegiality; Shirley left her school in pursuit of a level of collegial support that would foster her professional support; and Joan left her school to seek the freedom to teach in a manner that she felt was appropriate. Linda also left her school for her current position. Her stated reason did not deal with increased collegial support or teaching freedom, but rather to teach at a school where the children came from better home environments.

Shirley, Barb, Joan, and John all currently teach at alternative schools. Defined loosely, alternative schools implies deviation in some manner from traditional schools. For these participants, it either meant informal, open architecture, or multi-age / student-centered schools. With the exception of Shirley, in the list above, they also student taught in alternative schools. Beth, who at the time of this study taught in a traditional school, did student teach at an alternative school. Of the participants who use alternative assessment, Jan was the only one who neither student taught nor taught at an alternative school. She did however spend two years subbing and some of that time was in alternative schools.
Impact of EPIC

Three of the participants in this study were students in the EPIC preservice program at The Ohio State University. The case studies of Beth and Barb documented the far reaching impact that the EPIC program had on them. The third participant, John, (the pilot study participant) also had been an EPIC student. All three of these teachers indicated that the EPIC program helped to develop a strong philosophical foundation that valued student-centered instruction.

The EPIC program focused on informal education and particularly encouraged the preservice teachers to look at the individual child. All three participants indicated, as John points out below, that alternative assessment was not directly dealt with during EPIC. They do however insist that the strong teacher development program provided them with a solid child-centered philosophy, from which their transition into alternative assessment was inevitable:

John: I came out of the EPIC strand at Ohio State and it was a strong teacher development program for informal teachers. So part of my development has always been geared to alternatives. I don’t think that I was truly prepared to go into a classroom and assess the way that I needed to assess, but the things that happened in EPIC that were so good was that they really started us looking at the individual.

The paths that led Beth and Barb to EPIC were quite similar, whereas John reported that it was only after hearing about the informal focus of EPIC that he decided to go into elementary education. Barb and Beth both had serendipitous preludes to EPIC. They were initially drawn to EPIC because it was a three quarter (The Ohio State University is on a four quarter system) program and they wanted to take the quickest route to graduation. When Barb sat down with an advisor and considered her options, the EPIC program “clicked” with her immediately. Beth, who was referred to EPIC by a
friend was a bit more reserved in her initial judgment. However, by the time she went to Stevens to do her student teaching, she was “sold on it.”

In all three cases, these EPIC teachers reported that the focus in EPIC was on the individual child. They were taught that children learn by doing, that children need a purpose and an audience for their work, and that they need to meet the individual needs of children. While it may be easy to see how those views of teaching and learning would lead one to use alternative assessments, these teachers found that they did not start off their careers by using alternative assessments. Rather, they began teaching, and at different rates developed into student-centered teachers. As they became more student-centered, as their teaching methods began to mirror the philosophies that they developed in EPIC, they found a void in assessment. Their dilemma became: How do we meet the needs of the individual child when we don’t know where the individual child is at; when we do not know what that individual child understands.

Although the EPIC teachers in this study became involved with alternative assessment through their own choice, one could argue that it was a forced choice. Since they all report eventually buying into the EPIC philosophy, and they all developed into student-centered teachers, they had little choice but to develop alternative assessment strategies. These teachers did not require, nor did they report any critical incident that led them to using alternative assessment. The force that led them there was instilled early on, in their preservice training, in the form of a strong philosophical foundation that valued the individual child.

Critical Encounters

The other participants in this study went through preservice programs that held no particular theme or focus; they were in general elementary education preservice programs. Their routes (excluding Linda’s) to using alternative assessments were considerably
longer than the EPIC teachers*. Without the philosophical foundations that the EPIC teachers had, the other participants seemed to require a critical incident, such as Shirley’s encounter with Curtis, or Joan’s attendance at the Grave’s workshop to set their transitions of using alternative assessments into motion.

Jan also identified a critical incident, involving a kindergarten student, that lead to her transition towards using alternative assessments. The incident occurred during the two year period when she was subbing after coming back from maternity leave. The child was in the same classroom where Jan reported first seeing portfolios. The incident however centered around a child who had entered a Proud Experience competition, a competition for which Jan, as a “PTA mom,” was the chairperson. The child, Kayla, wrote that she was proudest when she got to share her portfolio. When Jan read that, she knew there was something more powerful about portfolios than she had originally given credit:

Jan: I was the PTA mom at this building in charge of a program called the reflections program that kids entered. That one year it was called My Proud Experiences. So, not only was I subbing and I was in her room and I saw these big brown things you know, called portfolios. Then I get this student, Kayla, who enters this reflections project and My Proud Experience. And oh, it was, it was all spelled upside down and backwards but, “I am the proudest when I get to share my portfolio.” And she had this portfolio made out of Styrofoam, not Styrofoam, uhm, like it’s orange-ish colored, it’s flexible,

Jerome: Sort of a foam type of material?
Jan: Yeah, foam. And she had like paper sticking out it you know. I just, that was just, that was it right there. I wanted to know what on earth is it that made a kindergartner pick that. I mean my daughter, who entered the same contest, wrote “The day I dived off the diving board and my mom and dad weren’t there.” You know, those are the kinds of experiences kids wrote about, but Kayla’s was this thing, and so that was it. I started asking everything. I’d get into people’s classrooms and I’d ask and I’d be in the lunch room and I’d ask and I’d see a magazine laying someplace and I’d read, and that’s when, I wanted to know what this was and then I started seeing it in some of the classrooms, some [emphasis] of the classrooms.

Jerome: As you were subbing?
Jan: As I’m subbing. So it was my re-entering education, that’s when it was.
Jerome: How about that.
Jan: I know it’s when it was.
Lack of Assessment Training in Preservice

Regardless if the teachers were in the EPIC program or one of the general elementary education programs that they described, all the participants were quick to point out that their preservice programs did little to prepare them for the difficult task of assessment. In fact they all said that they did not have any course work that dealt directly with assessment. Jan's and John's responses below were typical of all respondents:

Jerome: Do you remember if any of your course work dealt with assessment?
Jan: No. I had to take a statistics course for my Master's, but I, which of course talks about test scores and everything, which isn't this type of assessment, but I can't remember ever talking about grade cards, report cards, assessment techniques. I can't remember it at all!
Jerome: Well you're not alone there. Everyone I've interviewed with has had that answer.
Jan: I can't remember it at all! You know, that was that thing you always brought home in a little yellow envelope when you were a kid. And would they ever look different? Probably not, your grade book always looked the same, you know, so.

[...]

John: I don't think that I was truly prepared to go into a classroom and assess the way that I needed to assess, but the things that happened in EPIC that were so good was that they really started us looking at the individual.

Barb was the only one who gave any credit to her pre-service training for dealing with assessment, although it is clear in her descriptions that it was dealt with indirectly and she made the connections by inference. Even at the graduate level, the participants reported that they did not have course work that dealt with assessment. Jan however was forward looking enough to decide early in her Graduate program, grounded in her budding interest in alternative assessment, that she would base her practicum on assessment. She was therefore able to individually focus on assessment throughout her Graduate program though research projects and papers that she had to complete. She described the Graduate program at Ashland University as one where she could "gear it" the way she wanted:
Jan: Ashland was a really good program for me because you could kind of gear it the way you wanted it to be. And somebody said “You know you really ought to decide way up front what you want to do your practicum on.” Because, they said, then when you do the different things in the different classes you can be doing your research on that, so that by the time that you get to end, you’ve kind of like narrowed it. And I wanted to know about portfolios. I mean at that point it was like driving me nuts! It was driving me crazy to have all this stuff around my room. And I thought like ooooh, I just, I kept thinking I need to get this organized you know, you got the grade book, you got this, you got that, you got this. Well ...

Jerome: And that interest or wondering was rooted back to this kindergarten student?

Jan: Way back, and in my subbing.

Transition Towards Using Alternative Assessments: A Developmental Process

All the teachers who use alternative assessments that were interviewed, talked about their transitions towards using alternative assessment as being a developmental process. In all cases, they struggled through their student teaching and induction year being focused on their own learning and the tasks of teaching. The major task during their induction year appeared to be learning the curriculum. They also talked about the induction year as a time to learn the basic survival skills that teachers must develop, such as classroom management. As the teachers reflected on their induction year, it is interesting that when they talked about learning, they were referring to their own learning.

For the three EPIC teachers, they began to focus on the individual child, which led them to developing alternative assessment strategies, during their early years of teaching, although only after surviving the induction year. John’s following quote eloquently details the dilemma of his induction year; he had a need for assessment, but not the skills:

John: Now I think I came out, as I said, sort of woefully lacking in knowing where my kids are and I remember that going into my first classroom and very truthfully being very concerned about gosh, I just don’t know where these kids are, and I struggled thinking about pretests and posttests and informal reading inventories and how do I make sense of this spelling and their writing and their project work, and for a new teacher, it was very overwhelming. I think a big key for me was I remember having kids that I had questions about and the, quote, professional was brought in, the
psychologist, to assess the kids, and that quite literally upset me. As a young professional I felt insulted, but at the same time I also realized I'm glad that somebody was coming in because I really didn't have those skills, and I think so right there at the very beginning is when I really decided if I'm going to teach this way, I really have to have ways of gathering data about kids and so I made a conscious effort then to start looking at the individual. But any how, to make a long story short, I think it was something that I set out to find out on purpose, I mean I needed to know how to assess the kids.

The other teachers told of teaching and assessing in a fairly traditional manner through their first ten years at least. Although the data does not clearly show, one can postulate that during the initial decade that each of them spent teaching, they began to internalize shifting views of what teaching and learning should look like. Without the freedom, support, or impetus to align their philosophies with their methods, inertia was difficult to overcome. When one considers the anxiety breakdown that Joan experienced while teaching in a school where she had to use a basal reading program, or the ah-ha experience that Shirley had when she walked into Curtis' room, one could surmise that there already existed an imbalance between the way they were teaching and what they felt they should be teaching.

All the same, whenever the teachers in this study began their transitions towards using alternative assessment, it was a process that evolved over time and in all cases, continues to evolve. They all confess that it has been a trial and error process. Professional development activities such as conferences, inservice trainings, and professional reading have had varying impacts on the teachers. Shirley's growth has heavily relied on socially constructed knowledge which stemmed from shared experiences of professional reading and attendance at conferences.

The participants all mentioned that reading about assessment has impacted their transitions towards using alternative assessments; the impacts, however, varied widely. At one end of the continuum, professional reading had significant impacts for Shirley (through her own reading and the socially constructed knowledge at her school) and Beth.
who reported that most of her assessment strategies were gleaned from professional journals. Further along the continuum, Barb reported that reading about portfolio assessment has been instrumental in her transition. Less significant levels of impact were reported by Jan and Joan; yet professional reading was influential for their transitions. The EPIC teachers noted that there were significant readings during their preservice training which eventually impacted their transitions. Those readings, however, did not deal directly with assessment but rather with the student-centered philosophy. All the teachers, however, expressed that while reading was a method to teach themselves, there was no substitute for the actual doing of assessment.

The importance of attendance at professional conferences was noted by Joan, Shirley, and Jan. The significance of networking and professional discourse with informal colleagues was cited by Barb and John. District mandated inservice trainings on the other hand were denounced by all the participants as playing an insignificant role in their professional development.

Teacher as Leader

Ironically, each of the participants who use alternative assessments, have progressed to a point of providing inservice trainings to other teachers. Some of them have also presented at district, state, and national conferences. Although the teachers did not dwell on this point, one can speculate that taking such a leadership role has positively impacted their own use of alternative assessments. The process of internalizing their strategies, so they could in turn explicitly describe them to other teachers, would certainly have forced the teachers to deeply reflect on their assessments strategies and their reasons or needs to gather data on student understanding. Jan address these issues and also points out that she learns from the questions and from interacting with the inservice participants:
Jerome: Did presenting inservice trainings on alternative assessment further your own professional development?

Jan: Definitely, because I had to get organized. I had to think it through. I had to think where my beginnings were. That's why when you called and asked about interviewing me I knew it wouldn't be difficult because I've had to think through all of that. And then I've learned a lot from people asking questions, and you learn from them too.

Impact of Report Card

Another common topic of discussion with the participants revolved around report cards. The teachers who are at alternative schools have the luxury of using report cards that they designed with their colleagues. While none of them report that the alternative grade cards pushed them into using alternative assessment strategies, they certainly felt that the alternate reporting forms provided greater freedom to use alternative assessments. They felt that the types of data collected during their assessments were more easily incorporated into the alternative report cards and therefore there was less tension between assessment and evaluation.

With the exception of Beth, the other teachers described district mandated report cards that have metamorphosed into reporting systems which appear more developmentally driven and do not force the teachers into assigning percentage based grades. Again, this has the impact of making it easier for the teachers to continue to rely on their alternative assessment strategies and use the data collected to inform the evaluation process. Joan's quote, presented below, provides insight to the negative force that report cards can have on teachers who want to use alternative assessments:

Joan: Because if the grade card said you had to give "A"s, "B"s, "C"s, and "D"s, then I felt compelled to give a percent and therefore I felt compelled to put on their papers a percent, which meant that I had to put a value judgment on each thing I gave them. Then it went to "S" and all those kind of things. And then I started making, that changed my record keeping to pluses and minuses and checks and all that kind of garbage but when I really had to sit down and talk with a parent, if I hadn't kept a student file, I would have had nothing to base that check or plus on. [interruption] OK, and then we went to a grade card which said "Is the child independent at this skill, Need occasional support, Need frequent support." That's kind of where we are now. Well
when it says "Uses picture clues," if I don't have a running record then I don't know whether he needs occasional support or frequent support or whether he can do it. It's as simple as that, so the portfolio helps me. Before then the portfolio was an additional thing I did; I did it because it was good for kids but I also did the grade card OK, and I kept dubious little things and made averages and all that kind of stuff. Now ...

Jerome: So the grade card is ... 
Joan: The grade card is helping me move away from, it freed me up in the way I look at assessment and how much I have to keep a record of.

The new grade card freed her up because she was not having to collect types of data to support an evaluation process that was counter to her own assessment strategies. The new system was designed in such a way that she can easily use the data she collects to report on student performance.

Beth was the only participant using alternative assessment strategies who had to use a grade card that was designed in the traditional manner with the percentage based grades. While the grade card did not keep her from using alternative assessments, the following quote illustrates the complexities created by living in both worlds. Although the process of "separating" her assessment data into discreet categories for the purpose of assigning grades was not clearly articulated, the quote does create a complex and confusing image of a process which Beth sees as an unnecessary extra burden:

Beth: And then when I separate it to do their grades for the grade cards, because I have to go back to traditional, then I separate the process of science from the actual data collecting of math or the collecting of that data, so I do, but I pull it together. It's together when you look at my grade book, I mean you can look at my grade book, math and science are, everything's together. Then when you have to go, you separate back out.

Role of Standardized Tests

The conversation about the role of report cards often led to discussions about standardized tests. I had expected to hear the teachers talk in depth about the negative role that standardized tests play in their use of alternative assessments. Surprisingly, they talked very little about standardized tests. Actually, the only participant who dwelled on the role of standardized tests was Linda. She talked negatively at length about the
proficiency exams required by the state of Ohio. In fact during one interview she recognized the amount of time she spent talking about them and commented that “The tape will say a lot about proficiency tests, but it frustrates me.” It was clear that the motive behind her instructional decisions hinged upon her students’ performances on standardized tests. This following excerpt, trivial as it may be, illustrates that motive:

Linda: (pulls out note from desk) Entrepreneur -- I remember that from the proficiency test last year. So when I saw this in the paper, September the 3rd, 1995, I brought it in to share with the kids so they could remember it for the test. And I think it did help them.

The other participants either dismissed the various standardized tests as necessary evil, or they saw some value in the accountability function of the tests. Recall Beth’s quote:

Beth: I have no problems going to a standard benchmark because I really think that I can be alternative every day, and I do not fear fourth grade proficiency, because my kids are going to pass that ...

She went on to indicate that she felt all teachers need to be held accountable to the same standard, a task she felt could be accomplished through standardized tests. Overall, the participants demonstrated a level of confidence that they could teach and assess in the manner that they do, and the standardized tests would take care of themselves. In fact some of them, like Shirley, boasted that their students’ scores were among the best in the district. It is worth noting that the type and number of standardized tests that the participants administer varies. In Shirley’s quote below she first addresses the impact of the state proficiency test, which as was discussed in Linda’s case study tends to be more open ended and measure higher order thinking skills. The second test that she refers to is the city wide test which resembles a more traditional measure of achievement. Her view of the city wide test was similar to the views of the others on standardized testing:

Jerome: Do you have to give standardized test here?
Shirley: Yes.
Jerome: How does that ...
Shirley: Well we had to give them the fourth grade proficiency last year. We came out number one in the city.

Jerome: Oh really!

Shirley: So now the old pressure’s on, and you know, I mean they sent out all the practice things to me and I just threw them in the trash. Didn’t bother with it?

Shirley: No, because I looked at the test and what did they need on the test. They needed to be able to solve problems. They didn’t need to know a bunch of facts. They gave them all the facts. They just needed to be able to read graphs and solve problems. [...] And when we have to give the city wide test, that’s a couple days out of the week. We just, we teach our regular way, here’s the day for the test, all right, stop, everybody go to the different rooms, take the test, test is over, now we’re back to our regular, we don’t ...

Jerome: Don’t change?

Shirley: No.

Jerome: Do people worry about it?

Shirley: I don’t. I think some teachers do, but you know ...

Teacher Confidence

Beth’s and Shirley’s responses concerning standardized testing convey a high level of confidence in their teaching. It was a level of confidence that permeated the discussions with all the participants who use alternative assessment. That confidence was in some cases linked to a group of teachers, for example with Shirley and Barb. They and the staffs they teach with were confident in their approaches to teaching and they used that collective confidence to push though various initiatives, even if it meant taking on central administration which they both referred to as “downtown.” For Shirley and the teachers at her school it meant refusing to give traditional letter grades:

Shirley: ... this school said right away “We’re not going to give grades, we’re just not going to do it,” and downtown said “You have to,” and we said “We’re not,” and so we wrote letters for every child during time of assessment. [...] And so downtown said “You MUST have some sort of a grade card and give letter grades,” and so we made bizarre letters like “P” for progressing as expected, “N” for no progress seen, “I” for inconsistent, “X” for not expected at this time, and that was just to satisfy downtown, which right now we’re in the process of changing our progress reports because we’re doing all these portfolios. We want to eventually use the portfolio and actually go back to this written and get away from letter grades, but we don’t know, we’re fighting it, it’s been twenty-one years, we’re still working.

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For Barb, a high level of confidence was evident in her discussion about giving the district mandated CBE math tests on an individual basis, when she thought it made more sense, rather than when the district stipulated that they be given:

Barb: I wouldn't give them all to the whole group at the same time. I said "That's not what we're about! We're about individuals working at their own pace and if I want to give each of these tests, ..." I got into this big trouble about this whole thing, but you know, once I said to Cindy (her administrator), "This is what I'm doing, here's my records," I had a big chart that had all their names and it was all about mastery or what they needed to do and it was really comprehensive. I knew way more about where my kids were and what they were doing and it was more meaningful to the kids and she supported me ...

Teacher Empowerment

The sense of confidence that the teachers exhibited seemed closely tied to a feeling of empowerment. All the teachers stated that they felt empowered to make important instructional decisions in their classroom. In some cases, however, those decisions have led to initial conflicts with their administrators, as was illustrated in Barb's quote above and Beth's below:

Beth: And I'm the kind of person that I make the professional decisions and I go with it. I mean Janet will tell you this for sure: I get an idea and I do it. I don't ask, and afterwards if there are repercussions, I take them (laughs). I'm like "Oh, sorry" you know, but that's kind of the way I work, so, and she'll tell you that I definitely work that way, I just go ahead and do it.

Jerome: So do you feel empowered to make those professional decisions?
Beth: I do.
Jerome: OK
Beth: And I usually have a lot of support.
Jerome: From where?
Beth: From administration, I mean I've had good feedback, that's probably important, I mean if I had negative feedback from administrators which are evaluating me, I probably wouldn't be so sure of myself and my guess is I would probably be performing more in the tradition that I was taught, and I don't do that because after I've done something where I've put it on the table, I've gotten a lot of good feedback.

Jerome: And again you are speaking of feedback from administration?
Beth: From administration. Sometimes Janet will say "You know, you're a pain in the ass." Because like I'll argue any point. I'll argue my stand with any professional that wants to come in, sit down, you know, and they know it, I'm not afraid. Probably one of the keys is with alternative assessment you can't be afraid to say "Come on in, sit down, I'll show you what we're
doing, I've got nothing to hide.” I guess if you’re afraid to do that then it’s a
different issue but that’s probably one of the things that I’ve had to do is you
have to have that open door, and for parents too.

Jan reflected on her sense of empowerment in a more positive light, stating that
she has always felt empowered to make instructional decisions. Whether or not her level
of confidence comes from within, she was not sure. The feeling of empowerment does,
however have its limits, as is evident in her last sentence:

Jan: I have never been in a teaching situation where I didn’t feel empowered. Whether that comes from within, which if you ask my husband he would say
that definitely comes from within with me. I don’t know, I have never felt
that I was in a situation where the principal was, where I had to run
everything by the principal first. [...] Yeah, now see I’ve never gone as far
as develop my own progress report. I just go ahead and use the one that the
system has, but then I write a book that goes home with that.

In stark contrast to the high level of confidence that the alternative assessing
teachers display, Linda constantly made reference to doing what “they” wanted. They,
refers to administration, either at the building, district, or state level. Doing things the
way that they had always been done, was her rationale for many of her instructional
decisions. Most of her explanations for why she does various things were based on a
sense that those things were expected by “them” -- the administration.

Classroom Environment

There were striking similarities in the ways that the teachers’ using alternative
assessments had their rooms set up and the ways that they taught. Without exception,
every room was arranged so that students sat and worked in groups. At the maximum,
students had one textbook at their desk or in their cubbies and it was usually a math book.
Math was the one subject that several of the teachers taught in a more traditional manner.
At Shirley’s school the teachers in her pod grouped for math. The students in Beth’s
classroom had math books in their desks. Barb occasionally used the math textbook. But
the other textbooks that one might expect to find in students’ desks, i.e. language.
science, social studies, reading, spelling, and health, were either stacked up in the corner, under tables, or were missing altogether from the rooms of these teachers.

Without exception, each classroom had a significant selection of quality children's literature on display and available to the students. Manipulatives for science, math, social studies, and art were abundant, readily accessible, and utilized by the students. Children's art work, writing, and other endeavors were prominently displayed in all the rooms and often spilled out into the hallways.

Linda's classroom stood in contrast. Each student in her classroom had their own desk, placed in straight rows, either facing the chalkboard or in towards the groups. In those desks were textbooks in all the subject areas mentioned above. With the exception of a handful of books, children's literature was not displayed in the room. Manipulatives consisted of two small containers of pattern blocks and one dusty box of geo-boards. The bulk of visuals displayed around the room were materials one would buy at teacher's stores.

Role of Teacher

The role of the teacher took on striking similarities in the classrooms where the teachers use alternative assessments. In all cases, the amount of teacher-led didactic instruction time during the day was minimal. A stopwatch would have likely clocked less than thirty minutes of teacher-led instruction per-day in each of their classrooms. The only time any of the teachers were observed at their desks, without a student, was when they modeled silent reading time. The rest of the day these teachers worked with individual students or in small groups, usually wherever the student was sitting. On a few occasions some of the teachers worked with individuals or groups at the teachers' desks, typically engaged in a conference of some sort, be it reading, writing, or portfolio.
Linda on the other hand spent considerably more time in a didactic role, although at least half of the time was spent with the students sitting at their desks working on assignments. The striking contrast between Linda and the other teachers was the amount of time spent with either individuals or small groups. While the other teachers spent the overwhelming majority of their time working with individuals and small groups, Linda spent close to none. In fact, during a full day observation, Linda never sat down with a student to engage in individual instruction or clarification. Individual questions were normally dealt with by the students raising their hand, and after being recognized, having their questions answered across the room.

Role of Student

There was an element of student choice that permeated those classrooms where the teachers use alternative assessments. In each of the classes, a minimum of an hour was set aside daily for student choice work. In many cases that time was spent actively engaged in project work that extended for days, weeks, or even months. In most of the classrooms, student choice was an integral part of the majority of the day. Shirley's students' work was guided by webs that included perhaps forty different activities from which to choose. Students could add their own ideas for activities on the webs. Barb's students spent a significantly longer amount of time working on projects of their choice. The student choices process in those rooms, however, was normally a negotiated process.

In each class, students practiced choice during their silent reading time. Daily, students read for uninterrupted periods ranging from thirty to sixty minutes from literature of their choice. Students engaged freely in conversations throughout most of the day, apparently without fear of reprisal. The conversations rarely if ever became such that the teachers had to either ask the students to quiet down or demand that they get back on task. Student movement was accepted and they practiced that freedom occasionally.
The student behavior in Linda’s class was just as impressive. Their behavior, however seemed to a product of control. Student movement and talking were not accepted. Linda’s case study illustrated students losing five minutes of recess if they had to go to the rest-room. A couple times during the day, apparently on schedule, the entire class made the short trip to the rest-room and drinking fountain together. The books that the students used for reading were not literature of their choice, but rather the basal books adopted by the district. Any element of choice was difficult to detect. The students’ days were planned out in advance and progressed in a structured linear fashion on a daily basis. One only needed to look at the chalkboard to see the detailed events, complete with page numbers, for the day. A visitor could, with some degree of certainty, predict what would be happening at any given time on any given day. That is to say, each subject was taught at about the same time on each day.

Assessment Practices

While the students engaged in their seat work, Linda worked at her desk grading papers. The grades normally were converted to percentages to enter into the grade book and then passed back to the students. The student who scored a hundred percent received the same feedback as the student who earned a fifty percent. The feedback was the percentage grade. Linda reported taking some work home to grade but it was minimal because she managed to grade the bulk of the students’ work during the school day. In that sense, there was a clear dichotomy between instruction and assessment.

The assessment practices in the other classrooms were more seamless and it was difficult to determine whether the teachers were instructing or assessing. Typically each of the teachers had either clipboards, index cards, or simple folders readily available to jot down assessment data. Occasionally the teachers would compile the data or expand upon their brief notes in a more formal instrument. When they assessed students’ work, it was
usually in the presence of the student, facilitating timely feedback and necessary guidance.

Beth's quote below provides a clear picture of a philosophy that seemed to undergird the assessment of the teachers:

Beth: And that's my key because all of my data that I pull, and I hear teachers say they grade papers every night. Well traditional teachers do. I don't grade crap. I don't spend a lot of time grading that a traditional teacher would. However, when I pull data, I'm pulling it for the purpose of helping the individual and I mean I use that data to guide their instruction. So when I'm sitting with a kid one-on-one and I'm looking at their writing, and certainly they are getting graded if I think they can do more or less, but it's real individualized and it's really to make that child a better writer, not to say you're an "F." Because I really don't care, that doesn't do me any good to get them any further.

Jan recalled words of advice from an instructor at a summer institute that she attended a few years ago which seems to represent the mentality guiding the teachers' decisions not to grade a stack of papers removed from the children:

Jan: ... and she got going on how you have to learn to assess on your feet. She said "Don't ever take a pile of papers home and sit down. How can you grade a pile of papers, you don't have all your kids there with you! You can't grade a pile of papers!"

The assessment techniques that the teachers employed varied but there were some common features. All of them conducted individual conferences to more formally assess reading and writing. Data from the conferences were normally recorded on forms created by the teachers. All the teachers reported that they keep anecdotal records on the students which they collect in a central location, for example a folder on the teacher's desk.

Portfolios have been implemented by all the teachers as a way to showcase the students' work over time. Apparently, the goal of the showcase portfolio was not as much a tool for the teacher to assess the student, as it was a tool for the student to showcase work and progress over time. The type of assessments that inform the teachers' instruction occurs through the daily and weekly activities such as observations, anecdotal records, and reading and writing conferences. The portfolios are a place to collect student work and in all cases the teachers emphasize the importance of student
reflection and self-assessment in the decision process to determine what becomes part of the showcase portfolio.

Working portfolios, which are the staging ground for the showcase portfolios, tend to be large collections of the majority of work produced. Normally, the working portfolios are cleaned out on a monthly or quarterly basis. Before being cleaned out, or emptied, the students engage in a decision making process whereby they choose which items to select to showcase. All the teachers require that the students indicate, normally in writing, why they have chosen the work to showcase. The self-assessment aspect of the selection process was regarded by the teachers as crucial in the entire scheme of assessment.

Student Self-Reflection

Several of the teachers have developed their own process that encourages student self-assessment on a more regular basis. As was presented in her case study, Shirley described the SELF process, which she uses daily to get the students to engage in self-assessment. Barb described a process she refers to as SOS, which was also a daily process to encourage self-assessment. Joan stresses the importance of self-assessment through the portfolio process in the following two quotes:

Joan: And the fact that the goal is that you are teaching the child self-assessment is more important than having all this concrete data to prove that you are accountable.

[...]  

Joan: When you’re using portfolios, sometimes the kids discover things about themselves before you even discover it. So instead of me telling them what they’re good at, they can start telling me what they feel like they’re good at.

Jerome: So you’re really talking about self-assessment.

Joan: Uh hum. Now primary kids tend to want the teacher to tell them this is good, OK, and that’s, I try to wean them off that, you know, “Do you think it’s good? What do you think about it?” So they start assessing and then I’ll say “Hmm, I agree with this part, I might not agree with this part.” And then
we have a discussion about it. But ultimately I want their opinion first, and that's pretty neat when you see that, it's worth staying at.

Finally, all the teachers' using alternative assessments in this study started doing so without a mandate from above. The began their teaching careers using more traditional assessment techniques and over time developed or adapted assessments. They see themselves as lifelong learners and appear willing to take risks. In all cases, the teachers' decisions to use alternative assessments followed other important phenomena which cast them in a position where they had to have other ways to collect data about student performance.
CHAPTER VI
SUMMARY AND DISCUSSION

Introduction

The present study yielded insights into the complex nature of potentially interconnected phenomena which impacted six elementary teachers' transitions towards using alternative assessment strategies. Multiple in-depth interviews and classroom observations were conducted with six elementary teachers who use alternative assessments in their classrooms. Data from four of the participants were developed into individual case studies which were presented in Chapter IV. A comparative case study of an elementary teacher who does not use alternative assessments was also included in Chapter IV. A cross case analysis was developed in Chapter V to provide an opportunity to further reflection and analysis of recurrent themes and issues that occurred across multiple case studies.

In this chapter, a summary of the research findings is forwarded with a discussion of their implications. The chapter is organized to separately discuss each conclusion followed by consideration of their implications. The purpose of this study was to provide insights regarding the following three questions:

1. What impacts do teachers' formal and informal professional development experiences have on their transition towards using alternative assessment strategies?
2. What are the impacts of the school context on teachers' transition towards using alternative assessment strategies?
3. What impacts do teachers' philosophies of teaching and learning play in their decisions to use alternative assessment strategies; how do their philosophies of teaching and learning correlate with their need to gather data?

To answer these questions, I asked participants to focus on the following types of phenomena and provide their insights of the impacts that each had upon their transition towards using alternative assessments:

- description of their preservice training/student teaching
- description of their induction year
- types of inservice training
- teaching experience
- teaching strategies
- conferences attended
- continuing education
- professional readings
- time frame (at what point in their careers they began to use alternative assessments)
- collegial support
- administrative support
- parental support

In addition to the data collected through interviews to document the phenomena listed above, classroom observations provided data on the classroom environments which afforded greater insights of the participants' teaching and assessing strategies. Member checks with participants were completed throughout the process to triangulate interpretations of the findings.

This chapter builds on the cross case analysis in Chapter V and the individual case studies of Chapter IV, to propose implications from the data and issues for further study. The narrative description of the teachers in this study unveiled a complex chronicle of interconnected events and people. The purpose of this chapter is to untangle parts of the web to more clearly consider the implications of the findings. The forthcoming implications are based on my interpretations of the data collected through the interviews.
and classroom observations weighed together with the scholarship summarized within
Chapter II -- Review of Literature.

Findings

Professional Development

The most significant findings from this study deal with professional development. Recall from Chapter I that my working definition of professional development included pre-service training, induction, inservice training, and staff development (Howey, 1985; Willie & Howey, 1988; Witherell & Erickson, 1978). It also includes factors such as: inquiry, support groups, professional reading, travel, parenthood, community involvement and service.

Although not completely independent, some of the findings reported in Chapter V deal with professional development at two levels which are often considered as discreet phases: preservice training and post Bachelor Degree teacher development. Perhaps understandably, since preservice training is a precursor to other forms of professional development, it is traditionally viewed as a separate activity. While I believe that such a view causes other problems, the findings in this study provide guidance that mesh with the traditional split. They are, however, also interconnected in a more complex web that requires one to view professional development as I have defined earlier.

Preservice / EPIC

EPIC was a really good experience for me because it laid a real strong foundation for what I do now. (Beth)

Discussion. The first of the findings deal with the impact of the EPIC (It has since been aligned with an M.Ed. program that combined the tenants of EPIC and Urban
education into a program referred to as Literature Education and Diverse Settings (LEADS) preschool program that was offered at The Ohio State University from the mid 1970's until 1995. Three of the participants in this study were in the EPIC program during their preservice training. My analysis of the data clearly indicate that all three teachers credit the EPIC program for providing them with a strong philosophical foundation that valued the individual child and stressed student-centered instruction. The three teachers claim that there were no courses during EPIC that dealt directly with assessment. This was verified by a document analysis which indicated that there was not a required course on assessment in the program. This finding is congruent with the empirical studies (Airasian, 1991; O'Sullivan & Chalnick, 1991; Gullickson & Hopkins, 1987; Gullickson, 1986) reported in Chapter II that show that preservice programs normally do not train preservice teachers for the difficult task of assessment.

Furthermore, analysis of curricula from the EPIC program verified that the required courses in the EPIC program closely resembled the required courses in the other three or four concurrent programs at The Ohio State University. In fact, there were no courses required that were not also required in at least one of the other programs. A course entitled Literature Across the Curriculum was the only class in EPIC that was offered in just one other program. In the unlikely event that the Literature Across the Curriculum course was the critical feature to account for EPIC's far reaching impact in these teachers' professional development, one would have to hypothesize that other important factors existed. Apparently, the difference was multi-faceted and, according the EPIC participants, involved effective university professors who were highly committed to the EPIC philosophy, embedded philosophical discussions integrated across their courses, appropriate readings, and extended field experiences under the mentorship of cooperating teachers who shared an enthusiastic commitment towards the EPIC philosophy.
It is not my intention to suggest that teacher educators can simply reconstruct the tenants of the EPIC program, provide such training to preservice teachers, and expect that their graduates will develop into student-centered teachers who use alternative assessments to inform their instruction. Surely the variables are far too complex for such a prescriptive approach. Indeed, during encounters with other teachers in the Henderson area who had also been in the EPIC program, I did not sense that they approached teaching and assessment in the same fashion as Beth, Barb, or John. Some of them practiced education on the other end of the continuum, while others appeared to be somewhere in the middle. To what degree their development has been shaped by the schools they teach in, support from their colleagues, years of experience, educational experience, their own philosophies, or even which particular group of teachers they had in EPIC is uncertain. What seems apparent, however, is that the EPIC program has not had the same powerful impact regarding assessment on all its teachers as it had on the three in this study.

I would suggest, however, that dependent on certain variables being in place, a preservice program such as EPIC can have powerful impacts on teachers' using alternative assessments. The web of variables is too complex to sort out into a recipe for producing teachers who will eventually effectively use alternative assessments. Barb and John seemed naturally inclined to the tenets of EPIC, although Beth reports that she was not so inclined initially. We therefore cannot say that for starters, recruitment should screen for individuals that have a student-centered philosophy. Apparently that philosophy can be fostered in preservice training.

From the data presented in this study, I submit that the right mix of variables came together in the cases of the three EPIC teachers. Those variables deal with the levels of the individual, the preservice program, and the context, and are laid out below in Table 1.
Table 1.
Interconnected Elements for the EPIC Teachers

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The Individual</th>
<th>Preservice Program</th>
<th>The Context</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>commitment to lifelong learning</td>
<td>cohesiveness</td>
<td>field placements at sites that share the program's vision</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>high level of confidence</td>
<td>philosophical discussions woven into course work</td>
<td>involvement of cooperating teachers in professional development activities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>dissatisfaction with traditional education</td>
<td>focus on student-centeredness</td>
<td>peer/administrative support for student-centered instruction</td>
</tr>
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Implications. Three teachers in this study who went through the EPIC preservice training at The Ohio State University developed over time into teachers who use alternative assessment strategies. They indicated that EPIC provided a strong philosophical foundation that supports their use of alternative assessment strategies, yet they also indicated that EPIC did not directly address alternative assessment. Whether or not the absence of assessment training in their programs was a flaw in the design will not be addressed here, although it does raise the question of whether their transitions towards using alternative assessments could have been made easier with such training.

The crucial point is that as the EPIC teachers aligned their practice with their budding student-centered philosophies, they had a real need for alternative ways to collect data on their students. Their informal, student-centered, individualized philosophies did not find support from the established norm of teacher-centered/textbook driven instruction, with all its imbedded assessment techniques. As the teachers deviated from that well established tradition, they could not rely on textbooks and “teacher-ready” curriculum materials which provide teachers with ready-made tests.

These EPIC teachers bought into the student-centered philosophy, developed their teaching styles to reflect that philosophy, but found that in so doing, they did not have
assessment techniques to support their teaching; they still needed to know what their students understood. Yet they could not turn to the resources that other teachers use. For how could one give an end of the chapter test in science, social studies, health, or math, if one wasn't using the textbooks! These teachers quickly realized that to keep teaching in the student-centered approach, they would have to develop their own assessment techniques. For these three teachers, that trial and error process has been a highly successful one, if not painful at times. How their transitions would have been supported if their preservice trainings dealt directly with assessment is unknown.

To say that the three EPIC teachers chose to use alternative assessment strategies is misleading. Obviously they made the choice, but for them it was an inevitable choice. They did not set out to use alternative assessments because it was a fashionable trend in education, nor did they use them as a result of a district or state mandates. The decision to use alternative assessments was not a decision made in isolation. The decision to use alternative assessments followed the teachers’ development into student-centered instruction. As such, it was an out-growth of their aligning method with philosophy.

As if their transition was a linear progression, several other elements occurred first. The teachers who went through EPIC developed a student-centered philosophy. They were then employed as teachers and persevered through the induction period. Once their focus could be diverted from their own learning, they were able to focus on student learning and eventually align their teaching practices with their philosophy. That alignment likely was contingent upon being in a school context that allowed such alignment. When these interdependent elements were in place, the teachers had to come full circle and develop alternative assessment strategies that would support their teaching. Had they not made the transition into using alternative assessments, they would have been poorly equipped to meet the needs of the individual children.
If their progression towards using alternative assessment strategies was truly a linear process, then the first element, the development of a strong student-centered philosophy in EPIC was a crucial element. So while the EPIC program did not deal directly with assessment, it built a foundation for these teachers that inevitably led to their use of alternative assessments.

While this argument is based on if/then logic, if the establishment of a strong philosophical foundation was the crucial element (together with the phenomena presented in Table 1) then focusing on student-centered philosophy in preservice programs may foster teachers' eventual development and use of alternative assessments. To avoid oversimplification, I must point out that these teachers' transitions towards using alternative assessment strategies were contingent on various preceding elements.

My own experience working with preservice teachers is that they prefer a pragmatic approach in their preservice courses. They seem to prefer that professors deliver insights on the practice, and withhold the theoretical understanding; philosophy is left out of the mix. As an instructor who tried to balance theory and practice I take the findings from the three EPIC teachers to suggest that philosophy be given a greater emphasis and be integrated into the methods courses.

Collegial Interactions

So until I saw what Curtis was doing in his classroom, I never even thought about it. I mean that's pitiful isn't it? I mean I was just doing what everybody else did, or that I thought everybody else did. (Shirley)

Discussion. The second significant finding also deals with professional development. The focus of this finding, however, is on post Bachelor Degree teacher development. For the three teachers in this study who were not in the EPIC preservice
program, the single most important element in their transitions toward using alternative assessment strategies was contact with other teachers.

All three teachers indicated that assessment was not dealt with directly in preservice training. They also reported that they spent at least their first ten years of teaching without using alternative assessment strategies. Without the strong student-centered philosophical foundation that the EPIC teachers had, these teachers’ transitions were significantly delayed.

The data provide some explanations for why these three teachers did not make the transitions earlier. The clearest explanation can be found in Joan’s reconstructions. She taught her first sixteen years at a school where the principal “ran a tight ship.” According to Joan, that meant teaching from the textbooks, following mandated instructional strategies, and using basal readers. During that time, she became dissatisfied with the teacher centered / textbook driven curriculum, but she endured. Although she managed to make some transitions towards student-centered instruction she found that the assessment strategies that she had to use made it extremely difficult to further that transition.

As she further developed a student-centered philosophy of teaching, she had an anxiety attack from the imbalance between her practice and her philosophy, forcing her to take a leave of absence. With all this as staging ground, Joan was more than ready for her serendipitous encounter with Dr. Tierney when she overheard him talk about alternative assessment. That critical incident presented the notion that she could even possibly do alternative assessment with kids and set off a transition that quickly led to her engaging in action research with other teachers, which led to her developing alternative assessments.

That transition culminated in the move to her current school where she enjoys the teaching freedom and support to teach in a student-centered approach. In a short period of time she has amassed an amazing classroom collection of children’s literature, adapted
student-centered instruction that was evident throughout the day, and developed alternative assessment strategies to support that teaching. Her teaching awards and numerous alternative assessment presentations are evidence of the effectiveness of that tremendous transition.

The support for her transition had little to do with those things that one might consider as professional development activities, such as: inservice, graduate school, journals or books. It was strongly supported by interactions and discourse with her colleagues. She spoke meritoriously of the staff at Emerson and how nice it was to "have everybody on the same page." Part of her support included interactions with a university professor but it was in the role of research mentor, not as class instructor. Actually, the transitions for all three of the non EPIC teachers had little to do with the those typical professional development activities.

Shirley's case study illustrated a critical incident similar to Joan's. Similar in the far reaching ramifications of the encounter. One look in Curtis' room and she was changed forever; after ten years of teacher-centered / textbook driven instruction, Shirley saw in Curtis' room an alternative. Whether she shifted her philosophy overnight or maintained an implicit student-centered philosophy during her first ten years is unknown. However, it is clear that the encounter with Curtis set off a major transition that among other things resulted in her move to Stevens Alternative Elementary School where she has enjoyed a unique richness of collegial support.

Shirley's account of the manner with which she and her colleagues have supported one another in their transitions such as multi-age groupings, team teaching, thematic units, multiple intelligences, and alternative assessments is impressive. There is no doubt that their combined energies and enthusiasm account for the diversity and quality of changes which have been implemented at Stevens. Within the social context of
Stevens, Shirley made the transition towards using alternative assessment strategies. Indeed the transition continues as the school moves towards electronic portfolios.

The impact of colleagues was evident in some of the various excerpts from Jan's interviews, which were presented in the cross case analysis. Foremost in importance for her transition was the two-year extended subbing that she did in Carrollton. As she told, she had opportunities to visit practically every elementary classroom in the district. Using a tactic of recording good ideas, she developed a repertoire of instructional strategies that she currently utilizes. She was certainly greatly influenced by her colleagues. She recalled that it was during subbing that she first saw portfolios being used. From that day on, she sought out information on alternative assessment from whatever source she could manage.

Her description of traveling from Carrollton to Wright Elementary to Old Orchard and back to Carrollton in the course of one professional day that she had taken for herself illustrated the impact that visiting and talking to fellow teachers had on her. Selecting two of the more prominent assessment leaders in the area to seek advice from, she visited their classrooms, and in the process visualized how she could put together all the assessment pieces that she had been grappling with. Like Joan, Jan has since spent considerable time presenting alternative assessment strategies to other teachers in workshops, conferences, and inservice trainings.

Implications. It would not be difficult to argue that our educational system is not set up in such a was as to encourage or support teachers learning from other teachers. Traditionally teachers start their first teaching job with a pat on the back and are left to their own devices. If they are fortunate they are assigned a first-year mentor to help guide them through some of the technicalities of teaching. They go into their classrooms, close the door, and perform their duties from 8:00 to 3:00. Generally, within the American
culture, their job is conceptualized as being in front of the kids during those seven hours, five days a week, with a little time left over for grading papers and planning. There seems to exist a mentality that all that is needed is to provide a couple of inservice days at the beginning and end of the school year (when the teachers' foremost concerns are either opening up a new school year or closing it down) and pepper in a few teacher workdays throughout the year for preparing grade cards.

As such, the idea of teachers entering into professional discourse with one another, engaging in action research, sharing ideas, and pushing one another is not valued. When those things do occur, they typically happen on the teachers' own time. While maybe the expectation is that such matters of collegiality can occur over discussions in the lounge, during the couple of inservice days, or at the lone conference that the teacher gets to attend, it is a faulty expectation.

Required is a shift in the way that the teachers' role is conceptualized. In order to facilitate teachers' professional development, they need time to enter into meaningful interactions with other teachers and learn from one another. This requires a vision that includes providing quality sustained opportunities to collaborate, visit, exchange ideas, research, and reflect. These things are not easily accomplished within the roles that teachers are cast into.

The teachers in this study are perhaps exceptional in their confidence, motivation, and effectiveness. They were able to carve out the time, or to reconceptualize that role themselves. Part of the teachers' success in their transitions was possible due to good fortune. Shirley happened to end up at a school where the teacher's role has been somewhat reconceptualized, and socially constructed knowledge is the norm. While it may have appeared at the time as a misfortune, Jan had the opportunity to learn from practically every elementary teacher in Carrollton during her two years of subbing. Joan found a school where teachers collaborated and she forced the issue to make time to
engage in research and push ahead with her transitions. From what I now know of Joan, I am sure that meant successive twelve hour days over extended periods of time. Joan was able to make the transitions within the teacher role cast for her. Joan however is the exception; for how many teachers have the drive, motivation, and energy to prevail in the culturally constructed role of teacher, and yet spend the time and energy to provide for their own learning?

The impact of collegial interactions is powerfully illustrated in these teachers’ descriptions of their professional development. The danger in presenting the cases of these exceptional teachers is that one might argue that it is possible to exist within the culturally constructed role of teacher and yet engage in meaningful collegial interactions. True, it is possible, given the levels of motivation, confidence, conviction and energy that these teachers exhibit. But how many more teachers could reap the benefits of those interactions if part of the role that we construct for teachers included frequent, sustained, meaningful interactions with their peers? I suggest that based on the results of the collegial interactions that these teachers enjoyed, every effort should be made to increase the opportunities for teachers to learn from one another. Jan’s words echo that sentiment:

Jan: Let your teachers get out and see what else is going on. Let them get out, go visit, whatever or wherever they want to visit. Let them visit other elementary schools. Have the teachers come together. If you have to, shut the entire system down for a day and bring teachers together. And don’t forget your own backyard, there are bound to be good things happening there too. I happened to have the opportunity to see some of those things because I was a substitute. Learning has to be a lifelong, it has to be lifelong learning. And with teaching, of all things, it should be. So, see I’ve never had to formulate this. All right, so give your teachers release time to go out and visit one another. Have something like a literature conference within your system at least twice a year, or some type of a conference. And I don’t mean one of those days at the beginning of the year or at the end of the year where they bring you together and they make you sit down in the auditorium and one person stands up and talks. I don’t mean that. I mean something where teachers are presenting ideas from their classroom, just like you would find at professional organization conferences. Because it doesn’t just happen with sitting down with a book and reading about it. You can sit down with the book and read it and get excited but then you need to talk to somebody else. The discourse is really important.

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Developmental Transitions

If I look back at the beginning, those first two years, I wasn't really servicing the individual child. I was trying to deal with the group dynamics, trying to get lessons out, and that was the foundation. I was not concerned at all with assessment and the individual. I was more concerned with how to get my classroom together. (Beth)

Discussion. As was pointed out in the cross case analysis, all the teachers in this study have had transitions towards using alternative assessment strategies that have been developmental. In each case the teachers reported being consumed with their own learning and survival during the induction period. They spent that time becoming familiar with the curriculum and establishing classroom management techniques. It was not until after that process that they began to develop instructional techniques that were student-centered. The teachers who were in the EPIC program and had strong student-centered philosophies began those transitions quicker, but all the teachers' transitions evolved over time. They described their transitions as being a trial and error process and recognize that their transitions continue to evolve.

Since all the respondents reported that assessment training did not occur in their preservice programs, it was necessary that they made all their progress towards using alternative assessment strategies during their post Bachelor Degree period. As has been documented, most of that progress was afforded through contact with other teachers, while some of their progress transpired through professional readings, attendance at conferences, and graduate work. Inservice trainings were described as woefully inadequate to the degree that they were offered in a top-down model. Some of the teachers reported gaining valuable insights from the types of inservice training that were conceptualized, organized, and presented by their colleagues. Several respondents actively provide inservice trainings to their colleagues and report furthering their own professional development through so doing.
Implications. The completion of one's preservice training does not conclude their professional development. Teachers who view themselves as life long learners continue to develop throughout their careers. Much of the discussion in this chapter has focused on the importance of collegial interactions to foster that growth. The important concept is that although some of the techniques utilized to foster teachers' professional development are viewed as ineffective, efforts to assist teachers in their professional development need to be made. If the completion of preservice training is just the beginning of their professional development, as the teachers in this study feel, then efforts to support the potential furtherance of their development are paramount.

Those efforts however do not have to translate into a top-down model whereby the “expert” comes in and tells how to make the desired transitions. It can mean assisting teachers by restructuring their roles to include greater opportunities to interact with their colleagues, engage in research, and attend conferences where they can present and attend sessions that pertain to areas of interest of their choice. The efforts could also include developing team-building skills that encourage increased interactions and dialogue among teachers. Collectively, the efforts should recognize that teachers can change throughout their careers and therefore the support can be utilized throughout.

Recent initiatives, such as the Praxis Assessment of inductive year teachers, extends the focus on teacher development for an additional year but possibly sends a message that the end of the induction period signifies the point where teachers have fully developed. This research indicates that the end of the induction period is the genesis of teacher development; it is the point where teachers can begin to focus on student learning. The transition that begins there can be the opportunity for the greatest advances in teachers’ development.
As a side note, for those teachers who were not privy to the focus on philosophy throughout their preservice trainings, perhaps such a focus in the professional development activities could reap great rewards. There could be greatly increased attention to philosophy in graduate programs. Another alternative is for individuals in professional development to facilitate the attention on philosophy with the intention of causing teachers to recognize, articulate, and possibly further develop their philosophies. For example, if inroads can be made to increase the interactions between teachers, and as part of those interactions the teachers include university professors or professional development people, those people would have opportunities to focus the groups on philosophical discussions.

**Student-centered Instruction**

"Oh my God, we couldn't use the textbooks. We had to change. We had to get different books and we have to look at different ways to grade the kids now. We have to do the assessment a different way. You can't just grade their papers, because now they are doing projects and so we have to assess a different way." (Shirley quoting teachers at a school that recently implemented student-centered instruction)

**Discussion.** All of the teachers in this study that now use alternative assessment strategies also use student-centered instructional strategies. This translates into following the standard course of study to determine the parameters of what to teach rather than following the textbook curriculum. It also means not relying on the textbook and teacher-ready curriculum materials to guide their instruction. Most obvious is that it has meant that the teachers spend far less time in teacher-led didactic instruction and far more time facilitating student learning with individuals or small groups. In this role, it is difficult to distinguish between teacher as instructor and teacher as assessor; the two approach a seamless existence.
The teachers' focus is on student understanding rather than coverage. Assessment becomes the necessary component in determining what the students understand so that subsequent instruction can build on the children's understanding. The task of planning for these teachers is not the traditional prescriptive outline of determining the order of pages to cover out of a book. Their planning was more fluid and responsive, and changes on a daily basis, grounded in what the teachers uncover from their daily assessments.

For these teachers, student-centered instruction has meant giving up some of the control to allow for student choice. Children's literature was used instead of basal readers. The students use manipulatives in the various subject areas as they construct knowledge. Students engage in project work that extends over various periods of time and allows for pursuing individual interests. Methods are employed to provide students with an audience for their work. In a similar vein, students are provided the means and the opportunity to showcase their work through portfolios.

**Implications.** Foremost among the implications of the teachers in this study being student-centered is that in each case they had abandoned the textbooks and their embedded assessments. When they filled the instructional gap with student-centered instructional materials and strategies they were left with a void for assessment. When a teacher decides against using basal readers, for example, it is practicable to supplement with children's literature. Teachers can rely on the vast resources of public libraries; some of them can rely on sufficient holdings of children's libraries in their schools; and others supply their classrooms with children's books with money from their own resources. How to assess with those books is another story altogether. As the introductory quote to this section by Shirley illustrated, one decision leads to another.
While it appears that there are growing numbers of teachers who heed the call of theorists to implement initiatives such as whole language, literature-based reading, science process skills, problem solving, constructivism, and multiple intelligence, once the teachers make those transitions, they are left with a void in assessment. The void demands that the teachers develop alternative assessment strategies. If they do not, the transitions are likely to be only surface level and not result in the greater levels of student understanding that serve as the greater purpose for the various initiatives.

The fact that the teachers in this study developed alternative assessment strategies after, or in a sense, as a reaction to developing student-centered instructional strategies is important to consider. It holds significant implications for initiatives such as those in Kentucky, Vermont, and California where alternative assessments have been implemented as statewide initiatives. These teachers did not develop alternative assessments because someone told them to. They had a real need for alternative ways to collect data on their students' understanding. Imagine if the State of Ohio, or Henderson City Schools mandated that all its teachers use alternative assessments. Does Linda have a need for alternative assessments?!

**Constraints on Teacher Autonomy**

The grade card kind of drove that for me. Because if the grade card said you had to give "A"s, "B"s, "C"s, and "D"s, then I felt compelled to give a percent and therefore I felt compelled to put on their papers a percent, which meant that I had to put a value judgment on each thing I gave them. (Joan)

**Discussion.** I entered this study expecting to hear teachers complain about the role of standardized tests and how they place constraints on their autonomy. In reality the teachers in this study (except for Linda) did not dwell on standardized tests. As was pointed out in the cross case analysis, some of the teachers indicated that they held some value in those tests. The teachers did however talk frequently about the role of the report
cards that they use and how they potentially impact autonomy. Interestingly, with the exception of Beth, the teachers in this study who use alternative assessments relate that the report cards they currently use have evolved into reporting systems that mesh with the types of data they collect through their assessments. As such, they report that the grade cards provide a certain degree of freedom to continue their assessment strategies.

The teachers at Shirley's school took a stance on report cards from the day they opened Stevens. That stance resulted in friction with central administration and required strong leadership. Their stance has been compromised somewhat over the years but they continue to use alternative grade cards which have undergone at least four significant changes over the past twenty years and according to Shirley was undergoing another change. The teachers at Barb's school have had similar experiences with grade cards and because of their alternative status, they have been able to develop an alternative grade card. Joan and Jan, who both teach for Carrollton City Schools, report that the district grade cards have evolved to the point that the data they collect on student performance was easily incorporated into them.

Implications. All of the teachers seem to recognize the potential constraints inherent in traditional report cards. Those who have alternative report cards spoke appreciatively of them and suggested that it made their transitions easier. Beth, on the other hand, currently struggles with converting the data she collects into evaluative data for the district report card — a struggle that reminds me of a description provided by Livingston, Castle, and Nations (1989, p. 24), “teaching with schizophrenia.” They were referring to teachers who move ahead with tenets of constructivism but are still bound to district or statewide standardized testing. In Beth's case, however it was based on teaching in a student-centered manner and assessing students with alternative assessments but yet having to satisfy the constraints of the district grade card.
At the same time, that district grade card soundly reinforces the instructional and subsequent assessment strategies of Linda. Just as the grade card requires the assigning of traditional “A”s, “B”s, “C”s, and “D”s, Linda easily transfers the percentage grades that she assigns to student work into the same “A”s, “B”s, “C”s, and “D”s.

The review of literature revealed abundant discussion about the role of standardized tests on assessment; there was little mention of the role of report cards. This study suggests that teachers are more concerned with the role of the grade cards than they are with standardized tests. That is not true with Linda however. She was more concerned with the standardized tests than with the grade cards.

If a goal of professional development is to facilitate teachers’ transitions towards student-centered instruction and alternative assessment strategies, then greater focus on the role of report cards should be stressed. Teachers deserve a greater voice in the design and adoption of grade cards. Rather than align the data that teachers collect with the grade card, the teachers should have the autonomy to align the grade cards with the data.

Recommendations for Further Research

This study has provided several insights into the impact of various phenomena upon teachers’ transitions towards using alternative assessments. At the same time, however, it has also revealed many questions that are worthy of further study. A discussion of some areas for further inquiry follows.

The impact of the EPIC preservice program at The Ohio State University was a major theme that ran throughout this study. Three of the teachers in this study credit EPIC for, in essence, setting the stage for their ultimate transition towards alternative assessments. Further study on the nature of the EPIC program would potentially reveal important insights on the critical elements that had such impacts. While the teachers in this study unanimously reported that it was the philosophical focus on student-centered
instruction, it is not clear how such a focus was attained or translated to the preservice students. Many of the original professors who conceptualized the EPIC program have since retired. Interviews with those individuals might lead to reconstructions that provide information to teacher educators which could be implemented in other programs.

Whether or not it was just the mix of people involved, the reading that was required, the central mission, an integrated approach reinforced throughout the course work, or a combination of these and other elements could only be determined through an in-depth historical study of the EPIC program.

Relatedly, studies with individuals who went through EPIC and have not made transitions towards student-centered instruction or alternative assessments would provide additional valuable insights. Did EPIC have the far-ranging effects on only certain types of people? Were there other key elements, such as the schools where the teachers were employed or the type of student teaching experiences they had that could explain why they did not make the same types of transitions? There is much to investigate about EPIC so that those elements that did have such an impact on some teachers could be cultivated and utilized in teacher preparation.

Beth student taught under Curtis' supervision; the same teacher who had such an impact on Shirley. Although Beth did not give the same type of credit of her transition to her experience with Curtis that Shirley did, the coincidental finding does raise wonderings. The teachers in this study have all had student teachers. Follow-up studies with the student teachers after they have been employed could reveal insights on the impact that a practicing teacher who uses alternative assessment has on one's protégé. Do those preservice teachers go on to become student-centered teachers who use alternative assessments? How do the phenomena under consideration in this study, such as professional development, context, and philosophy impact those teachers' transitions?
Finally, as a teacher educator, I wonder how might I most effectively facilitate a teacher’s transition towards using alternative assessments. This study has suggested that developing a student-centered philosophy is one way. Providing increased opportunities of collegial interactions is another. But at what point, and how, might teacher educators assist teachers to construct knowledge of assessment techniques so that it is not a matter of trial and error? The empirical studies documenting that preservice teachers are inadequately trained in assessment strategies do not provide insights on how that might be done.

I am left wondering what impact a strategically placed course that helped teachers develop assessment strategies in a program like EPIC might have had in their transitions. Studies reviewed in Chapter II (Airasian, 1991; Gullickson, 1986; Gullickson & Hopkins, 1987; O’Sullivan & Chalnick, 1991) revealed that roughly fifty percent of preservice teachers are required to take a course on assessment. The majority of the teachers who take such a course report discrepancies between what is taught and what they view a relevant assessment training. In light of those findings, if greater efforts are made to assist preservice teachers with the development of assessment strategies, then the design and content of that assistance would be critical.

A teacher education program can assist preservice teachers to develop alternative assessment strategies through several initiatives. First, preservice teachers should be assessed in their own course work through alternative methods. If their teachers begin looking for alternative lines of evidence to document growth and achievement, then the preservice teachers will see first hand that such strategies provide valuable data to teachers.

Just as the teachers in this study have their students keep showcase portfolios to show growth over time, preservice teachers ought to keep their own professional portfolios throughout their preservice program and be encouraged to continue to do so.
into induction and beyond. The requirement of a professional portfolio could be supported throughout the entire professional coursework and field experience sequence. The uniqueness of such a requirement is that it would help bridge all the course and field work over an extended period of time. It is highly likely that students would collaborate and with one another as they develop and maintain their portfolios, resulting in socially shared cognition. The teachers in this study indicate that they learned most by doing. Requiring preservice teachers to develop their own portfolios would have a similar learn by doing element.

If a separate course were designed to assist preservice teachers with the development of alternative assessment strategies it would need to offer more than just statistics and test item construction. The course should explore alternative assessment strategies such as portfolios, reading conferences, writing conferences, anecdotal records and running records. While some of this knowledge can come from reading it would seem wise to engage preservice teachers in a clinical component in the schools where they have opportunities to use assessment strategies with students.

An emphasis on assessment, which is increasingly being recognized as critical to quality teaching and learning, should be woven throughout the professional sequence of course and fieldwork. For example, if a methods instructor or field supervisor is focusing on a lesson plan, then that focus should include the assessment strategy which is being employed to find out what the students understand from the lesson. Decisions of what to teach next should be inextricably tied to data that the assessment strategies reveal.

A study that identified and described preservice programs or professional development strategies that effectively facilitated teachers' development of alternative assessment strategies would be helpful and timely. The transition towards using alternative assessments need not be accomplished on a trial and error basis.
REFERENCES


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