

**A CONVERSATIONAL INQUIRY INTO STUDENT ASSESSMENT
IN SCHOOL DISTRICT #59**

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We dedicate this work to

Anne Cook

... a tough act to follow!

Abstract

This project documents an investigation of student assessment in School District #59 (Peace River South). The concern that prompted this investigation was the large number of referrals for formal assessment to the school psychologist. On her retirement, the district needed to redefine the process of student assessment and the roles of school-based and district-based educators in that process. To proceed with this investigation, the authors examined their own experiences with assessment, provided a general history of assessment, collected historical and current information on assessment in School District #59, and identified common issues from the works of noted authorities. Conversation is the primary mode of inquiry. The work consists of five chapters. Following the introductory chapter, the second chapter deals with personal reflections by the authors on their own experiences with assessment as student and teacher. The third chapter is a chronology of assessment practices and trends since 1100 B.C. This chapter includes a section on the history of assessment practices in School District #59. The fourth chapter explores the Dinner Party and is a narrative account of the thoughts and feelings of the participants within each of their conversations. In the interest of anonymity and a practical format for presenting the information, each disguised participant is invited to an imaginary dinner. The final chapter is a gathering together of the thoughts and issues from the first four chapters. This final chapter also includes a section on the recommendations this investigation generates. These recommendations plus the conversations they create, will encourage a variety of assessment practices aimed at meeting student needs with confidence and efficacy.

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Table of Contents

Dedication.....	iii
Abstract.....	iv
Acknowledgements	v
Table of Contents	vi
Chapter 1: Introduction.....	1
Chapter 2: Our Reflections	4
Reflections on Assessment by Jill Hartwell	4
The Moral of the Story is ... Assessment Equals Fear of Failure	5
The Moral of the Story is ... Assessment Equals Reward	6
The Moral of the Story is ... Assessment Equals new Understandings	6
The Moral of the Story is ... Assessment Equals Learning	8
The Moral of the Story is ... Things Have a way of Coming Full Circle.....	8
The Moral of the Story is ... New Knowledge Equals More Questions.....	9
Reflections on Assessment by Marlene Deith.....	10
The Moral of the Story is ... Assessment Equals Competition.....	11
The Moral of the Story is ... Assessment Equals Punishment.....	13
Another Moral ... Assessment Equals Completing the Obstacle Course.....	14
The Moral of the Story is ... The Assessment of Others Shapes my Beliefs	14
The Moral of the Story is ... My Beliefs About Assessment.....	16
Reflecting on our Reflections	20
Chapter 3: History of Assessment.....	23
Defining Formal and Informal Assessment.....	23

Early Assessment Practices	24
Assessment in the 1800s.....	24
Assessment in the 1900s.....	27
Assessment Within British Columbia	29
Assessment and Testing Within School District #59 (Peace River South).....	32
Recollections of School District #59 Assessment Practices by John Kendrew .	33
Change Within the District.....	38
Chapter 4: The Dinner Party	40
Chapter 5: Gathering our Thoughts.....	54
Introduction.....	54
The act of Conversing	54
The art of Questioning.....	55
Formal Versus Informal Assessment	57
Teacher Lack of Confidence in Their Abilities to Assess.....	59
Teacher Accountability to Provincial and School District Policies and Parents	60
Teacher Lack of Time to Conduct Formal and Informal Assessment	60
Recommendations	61
Recommendation 1: Form Collaborative Teacher Groups	62
Recommendation 2: Develop an Alternative Delivery Model.....	63
Recommendation 3: Participate in District-wide Assessment Training	66
Conclusion.....	68
References.....	71
Selected Bibliography	73

Appendices.....	77
A: Sample of Reasons for Referring Students for Formal Assessment	77
B: Intervention Process Slides	78
C: School-Based Team Slides	80
D: Functional Behavioural Assessment Slides	82
E: Learning Assistance Teachers' Training Needs Survey	87

Chapter 1: Introduction

As teachers employed by School District #59 (Peace River South), we view student assessment from a variety of perspectives: as educators at the elementary level, as educators at the secondary level, as special education teachers, and as administrators of formal assessments. Due to these experiences, we have many questions about assessment practises. Perhaps the most critical question took the longest to evolve: What is student assessment in School District #59 all about? In trying to understand the true nature of educational assessment practices in School District #59, it became clear that we needed to define what assessment means to us, and to the world around us. To achieve this understanding, we chose to collect information and impressions from fellow educators through the inquiry method of conversation.

Conversation has been particularly attractive, both because of its richness and because it is a friendly and natural form of intercourse which allows for an easy exchange of experiences. But to treat the information merely as data does little to narrow the rift between research and practice in a way, which will lead to good practice. (Carson, 1986, p. 81)

Our long-term goal was to use these conversations, coupled with a study of the literature, to improve our practice.

Chapter 2 chronicles the beginnings of our efforts to remain open with our individual personal reflections about assessment. It was important to identify and record our personal beliefs about assessment. This allowed us to look at information more objectively, knowing our personal predispositions towards assessment. This was the first time we had asked ourselves, what do you think about when you think about assessment? Jill's answer to the question includes her experiences in School District #59 as both a student and a teacher. Although Marlene was with School District #59 in many capacities

for twenty years, her answer to the question began in the 1960s as a student and then later as an educator in Ontario. These reflections combine to highlight our common beliefs about assessment. We are two people, coming from different backgrounds and generations, but with a clear understanding of the philosophy we share. Our reflections have provided that understanding.

Chapter 3 explores the history of testing and assessment, beginning with the first civil service tests in China. This chapter also identifies the testing and assessment trends and practices in the 1800s, 1900s, and the present time. The last part of this chapter outlines the history of assessment in British Columbia, and then focuses more specifically on assessment history within School District #59. It provides a look at the district's past through the recollections of one of its retired teachers. This chapter identifies the trends from the past that influence the current assessment practices in School District #59.

In Chapter 4 we gathered around us, in conversation, six people who deal with assessment in a variety of situations: as classroom teachers, learning assistance teachers, counsellors, school psychologist and director of instruction. The actual conversations took place over several meals in comfortable environments, such as a coffee table in front of a fireplace, and a breakfast cafe. We opened each conversation with our question, "What do you think of when you think about assessment in our district?" and let the conversation flow from there. What resulted was a rich collection of stories, memories, experiences, and practices. We have taken the liberty of combining this collection into one fictitious "Dinner Party."

In the spirit of open and honest exchanges, we felt it inappropriate to debate our own points of view. Instead, we allowed the conversation to be directed by the participants.

To conduct a conversation means to allow oneself to be conducted by the object to which the partners in conversation are directed. It requires that one does not try to out-argue the other person, but that one really considers the weight of the other's opinion. Hence, it is an art of testing. But the art of testing is the art of questioning ... to question means to lay open, to place in the open. (Gadamer, 1975, p. 330 cited in Carson, 1986, p. 76)

Carson (1986) also wrote that the conversational question is quite different from the interview question. An interview question gathers information about perceptions and practices but the conversational question refers to something shared by the participants. Were these conversations or interviews? If we define conversations as being open and honest, built on trust, and sharing a common concern, then these were conversations. Once we decided that we were indeed using conversation as our mode of inquiry, we examined past assessment practices within the testing community and within this district, and participated in conversations with peers.

The issues raised in all of these conversations helped us identify our own common beliefs about assessment and develop recommendations to improve the practices of any interested educator. Will we be able to learn more from within the culture of School District #59, or will we be, as Carson says, "attempting to develop new practices within an old research culture" (p. 84)? The answer to this concern appeared at the end of this process, when we engaged once more in conversation with each other. These final conversations became Chapter 5: Gathering Our Thoughts. Within this chapter, we looked at the nature of questioning, hermeneutics, conversation, and rationales for recommendations. Then we returned once more to the question that set us on this search, "assessment in School District #59: what is it all about?"

Chapter 2: Our Reflections

Our journey to understand the nature of assessment began with our own reflections. The narratives that follow help us discover personal answers to the question--What do you think of when you think about assessment in our district?

Reflections on Assessment: by Jill Hartwell

In 1997, I started my teaching career in a Grade 3/4 classroom in a small northern British Columbia town. I accepted a teaching position to cover a maternity leave so my stay was short. However, what I learned had a lasting effect. Then I moved to another small northern British Columbia town to fill a learning assistance position in a small elementary school. This time I replaced a teacher who had moved halfway through the school year. In 1998, I returned to my hometown, Dawson Creek. During my three years at Central Middle School, I provided learning assistance and taught Career and Personal Planning, Drama, and Social Studies. All of these positions required me to think about assessment of students in different ways.

Assessment is a reality of school life. However, who am I to be talking about assessment? I am a new teacher with more learning assistance background than classroom teaching. Why would teachers listen to what I have to say about assessment? What credibility do I have with students, colleagues, and parents? I wonder if my experiences colour my view of assessment today? Do I even believe that assessment has value? I feel I need to learn more about assessment.

As I began to think about what assessment meant to me as a student, I found myself thinking back to the academic struggles in my life. They were few in number, but left

significant marks on my school memories. It was interesting that almost immediately I thought of the negative before the positive. I wondered if all students felt this same way.

The moral of the story is ... assessment equals fear of failure.

As a young student, I remember wanting to do my best, and working hard for those good marks. My first recollection of struggle with assessment was a geometry test in Grade 3. I did not do very well and I remember my dad explaining things to me as I studied hard for the next test. I remember quite clearly thinking that I was never going to get it right. Hard work did pay off in the end and the geometry unit was finished. For this seven-year-old, it was a new understanding about assessment: tests highlight what we do not know.

I remember my very first Science 9 test. We were using a new piece of technology. We had to identify objects taken from a CD-ROM. I studied for weeks so that I would know everything that could possibly appear on the test. I got up an hour earlier every morning during that final week to be sure that I stuffed everything I needed into my brain. It paid off in the end. I received an A for my efforts. However, about thirty minutes after that test, I am sure I remembered next to nothing of what I had crammed into my mind.

My last struggle with assessment in high school was a painful one. I always received an A or B in math right to Grade 11. However, I found it impossible to pass a Math 12 test. Math became my focus that semester. I quit the volleyball team in order to get extra math help and worked hard every day after school just to pass homework assignments and unit tests. I could not understand the material. I even resorted to “lucky pencils” during a provincial exam in order to succeed! In reflection, I now realize that I had to

learn math on my own during class time and it was not my best learning style. The teacher would put an example on the overhead, get us to copy it down and then practice independently with no explanation, no modelling, just “figure it out on your own.” I ended up passing the year with 65%. I worked hard for that grade. That experience opened my eyes to what other students face when they prepare for tests and sometimes fall short. If I became a teacher, would I base grades for an entire course on tests alone?

The moral of the story is ... assessment equals rewards.

In Grade 5 at Grandview Elementary School, I participated in an enrichment program. I was one of six students who left the class each Wednesday morning to do mind-twisting puzzles and fun games. I never inquired as to why I was invited to participate. Did my teachers use informal assessment, observations, and work habits, or did they use formal assessment criteria to make that selection? I did not question it at the time. Regardless of how I was assessed, I was excited to be included as a “smart” kid.

During my time as a university student, I was able to demonstrate that I was intelligent in a variety of ways. I found out that written tests were not always the standard mode of assessment. I soon realized that essays, book reviews, presentations, and projects could also be used for assessment. I was pleased with this because I could demonstrate my knowledge to the professors without the anxiety that came with paper and pencil tests.

The moral of the story is ... assessment equals new understandings.

Assessment is a large part of teaching. What do I want students to know? What is the most important skill, concept, or information they need to learn? How are they going to demonstrate their knowledge to their classmates and to me? My first experience teaching

middle school students was Drama 8. I taught a group of 20 students for two semesters. They were a fantastic group of teenagers. My task was to come up with culminating assignments for the major learning outcomes that reflected the curriculum, were meaningful for the students, and were engaging for 16 girls and four boys. I found that collaboration with students worked best. The students became part of the assessment process by negotiating what they felt was a demonstration of their skills. For every assignment, presentation, or journal entry, the students were involved in the means used to assess their work. When students were involved in the assessment of their work, they had ownership of the process. They were interested, motivated and, best of all, they enjoyed themselves.

My next teaching assignment was more traditional: Social Studies 8. I did not want to give up my practice of involving students in the assessment process. I planned with two other teachers who had never taught social studies before and thought that team planning would be beneficial. Consistency among the three classes would ensure a common ground for our students when they entered Grade 9. Both teachers wanted to give a chapter test with each section covered. I was afraid that the students would forget about learning. Instead, they would cram for that one test score. Was there a solution that would lead me to follow the team-planning model and not compromise my beliefs? I chose to blend the traditional test with a detailed study guide and a one-hour study session during the class before the test ...no surprises. When students used the study guide and showed up for the review class, they knew exactly what they needed to know for the test. In this way, I assessed their knowledge of the material, not what they were unable to remember.

The moral of the story is ... assessment equals learning.

At present, my position is learning assistance teacher. With assessment being part of my responsibility, I try to tie assessment to the child's educational plan. This educational plan may include classroom support, adaptations, or modifications to the student's program. The plan may also include a referral to outside specialists such as speech and language pathologists, mental health counsellors, occupational therapists, and /or physical therapists. Children have a better chance of learning when we start where they are and move on from there.

Learning assistance is littered with assessment, both informal and formal. Central Middle School has a population of very young teachers. Some of these teachers welcome the chance to use informal assessment strategies and to adapt their teaching methods before referring struggling students for formal assessment. Others seem unsure of how to help their students, so they fill out referrals for formal assessment before they have exhausted all possible interventions. Some teachers feel that formal assessment will tell them something about their students that they do not already know.

The moral of the story is ... things have a way of coming full circle.

I had the unique experience of being a student within the same district that now employs me. I found my *School Days Book* (this book is like a portfolio of work, certificates and report cards) and began my search for what assessment was like as a student for me in this district. As I read old report cards, I was surprised to find that the assessment tools used in my classrooms were much the same as today. Tests, projects, and group presentations were all included. Technology has changed the nature of those assignments. Presentations were oral and accompanied with colourful poster board charts.

Today those same assessment practices include PowerPoint™ presentations and slide shows. One difference I suspect is the manner in which these assessments were marked. I remember knowing what you had to include or accomplish to achieve an A. However, I do not remember knowing how marks were determined. Today, with criteria and rubrics, students know what to include and the value of each portion of their assessment. This is a small but significant change to classroom assessment.

The moral of the story is ... new knowledge equals more questions.

As an assessor of students on a more formal level, I have yet another outlook on assessment. As part of my current position, I have used tests such as the Wide Range Achievement Test [WRAT], Peabody Picture Vocabulary Test [PPVT], Expressive Vocabulary Test [EVT], and Raven's Progressive Matrices to learn more about possible areas of weakness in cognition, reading skills, math skills, visual perception, and general language development. I have had the opportunity to work with our district school psychologist over the past year. I have learned the importance of observation and trying to understand the student, you are there to assess. It is not enough to administer a few standardized assessment tools, see the child for an hour, and then attempt to make an accurate interpretation of the child's learning difficulties and needs. Unfortunately, time is an issue. Some psychologists are in Dawson Creek for two days and have several students needing assessment. Is this small snapshot really an accurate picture of the child? I need to remember that informal assessment tools are as powerful as formal ones. I wonder if teachers want formal assessments completed on a student to give credibility to their "gut" instinct about that child. Is it simply their wish to help that student, which creates the referrals? Do teachers believe that after an assessment, the student's problems

are “fixed” and life can continue? I am concerned that formal assessment may be over-used as a way to fix children.

Is it likely that this “fix” is what parents want when they push to have their child assessed by the school psychologist? Parents are a factor in formal assessments. They seem to want to know the IQ scores. Sometimes that is all they remember. The scores alone do not provide a total picture of their child’s abilities. Formal assessments need to connect with an educational plan, developed with the student, parents, teachers and, possibly, outside specialists. Students are included so they may have ownership of their education and input into what will work for them.

I hope that I will always value the importance of what children are feeling and thinking. Whether I am preparing a spelling test, assessing a dramatization or administering the WISC-III, I am only looking at a snap shot of their lives. I need to remember the essence of the child.

Reflections on Assessment: by Marlene Deith

I began my teaching career in 1973, teaching Grade 5 and 6 in a small rural elementary school in Ontario. Since 1990, I have been living in a small northern British Columbia community. I have experience teaching in primary and intermediate classrooms, in learning assistance and, in Reading Recovery™. Most recently I was appointed and as a district helping teacher. Each of these roles is full of assessment moments. In some, I am the subject of assessment. In others, I do the assessing. My career has also given me cause to reflect about what assessment means to me. I have many questions. I hope that I will find answers for some of them upon completion of the study that follows.

Assessment takes many forms. For the purposes of these reflections, I speak of assessment in general terms, from curriculum-driven assessment, to formal types of achievement and IQ assessment. Teachers assess their students' progress in curriculum areas. Teachers and counsellors assess the overall abilities of their students and where best they will fit in the adult world ahead. Still more teachers and bureaucracies assess learners to see if they have the aptitude to be accepted to higher levels of education or other agencies. As educators, we are assessed by our students to see if we measure up to their last teacher or to their parents. Then, as those same educators, we turn around and assess them. This is why I believe our lives, as educators, are full of assessment moments: moments when we are assessed and moments when we do the assessing.

The moral of the story is ... assessment equals competition.

There was the time in Grade 4, when I looked at my report card and found that the letter grades inside were missing. I walked up to my teacher's desk, where she sat. I showed her the blank columns. She looked briefly at me and then, without a word, filled in each row of the page with the letter A. Was that look she gave me her assessment process? Did I get marks based on the person I was, or did she know her students so well that she could recall what their marks would be from her experience with them? It really doesn't matter because, when I saw her do that, I decided that marks on a report card could be as arbitrary as whim, and about as valuable.

What do those spelling tests mean? The gold stars, the silver stars, and the blue stars posted on the wall each week mark the passage of time. How must it have felt to those who never got a star? I know how it felt to me when I got a silver star, not a gold one. I was devastated. I could always spell. Even when I was a shy mouse in class, that was my

claim to fame. Spelling, or at least a perfect spelling test was a piece of my self-image. For those who struggle with spelling, my wish is that stars or the lack of them never undermined their self-confidence. My husband never could spell. He will tell you that he never earned a gold star or a silver star for his spelling. He did get one blue star and he feels that this must have had an impact because he still remembers it almost forty years later.

Then there was the time when I was in Grade 5 and Ellen was in Grade 6. Ellen was the smartest kid in our school. She received perfect or near perfect marks on every test. She consistently did well. However, she and I were in the same class and we all did the same social studies test. One day I got a slightly higher mark than Ellen did. I do not know who was more surprised ... everyone else in the class, or me. I could see disbelief in their eyes shift to surprise, and perhaps even admiration. I was the shy one in the class. What was I doing getting such good marks? I even recall Ellen's words to me after class. She said, "You had everyone fooled with your quiet act but I better watch out for you."

I remember aptitude tests that the whole class took when I was in Grade 8. In Ontario at the time, Grade 8 was the last year of elementary school. We marched through this long set of directions, delivered from the front of the room. We filled in bubbles, charged with reporting accurately about ourselves, when we really knew so little about the topic. That assessment recommended that I become a secretary when I grew up. That assessment should have streamed me into the vocational school down the street from my house. I have no real idea how I avoided that school. Perhaps the fact that I wanted to be a teacher from the time I was six had something to do with it. I watch all of the secretaries in my life now and I remain in awe of them. I could not do their job.

The moral of the story is ... assessment equals punishment.

I met my first male teacher in Grade 8. We will call him Mr. Smith. He was our homeroom teacher and taught us science. He gave a test on plants. It was not a successful moment for most of us. The day he returned our test papers, we spent all of science class listening to his angry lecture on our poor student qualities. He told us that he thought we did not listen and we did not study. He was frustrated with the time he had spent on the topic. He felt that everyone should have gotten at least 75% on that test. He told us that if we did not achieve 75%, we would be writing it again next science class. Disapproval oozed out of his every word, body movement and facial expression.

Actually, I was a little surprised that I had only gotten 66%. I thought I had listened, although I do not learn best by listening. I had studied and I thought I was prepared for the test because I could recall all the definitions. I went through the test paper to see where I had lost marks. I discovered that Mr. Smith had failed to mark one of my responses. It was to the question... What is photosynthesis? I should have done well on that question because I had memorized the definition while studying for the test. I was afraid to take the paper to Mr. Smith, but once I did, he checked it over. Yes, my response was correct and it was worth fourteen marks. That moved me to 80% and out of the rewrite group. Next day in class, Mr. Smith called everyone's attention to me, the only one who did not have to rewrite the test. I sat alone at the back of the room, pretending to read a book, while everyone else struggled through that test. I do not know who suffered more.

Another moral ... assessment equals completing the obstacle course.

Courses I have taken over the years, and there have been many, often had mid-term and final examinations built into them. For these courses, I can safely say that I remember the least amount of usable information, no matter how interesting or valuable the content area. I spent all my energy memorizing the content, knowing from the beginning that I would have to reproduce it later. For that reason, there was no way that the information could find its way into the life-long learning layer of my brain. I have often joked about cramming all the details of a course into my brain and then sticking cotton batting into my ears, so the information would not leak out before I was able to spew it onto the test page. However, as soon as the test was over, I happily forgot all or almost all of what the teacher thought he or she taught. I decided that this was just another hoop to jump on my path. Learning was not as important as completing the obstacle course my teachers set.

The moral of the story is ... the assessment of others shapes my beliefs.

Then there was Conquest. This was an enrichment program at the school attended by my children. When my oldest daughter was in Grade 3, she was assessed and found worthy of being part of the enrichment group. She was and is a very smart person. I am not sure what she learned in Conquest other than what she learned about herself, and how her abilities were viewed and valued by the outside world. Two years later, my youngest daughter took the same test. However, she was not invited to join the enrichment group. She was and is a very smart person, too. At the end of that school year, she won every red ribbon available to her at the school sports day. On that day, she came to me, her face all aglow, and said that her sister was the smart girl in the family and she was the athlete. It

was a serious revelation to me that these school-based assessments, whether it was the enrichment program or the athletics program, could have such a profound influence on the assessed person's concepts about herself. As I reread this section, I have questions. Do I question gifted programs, or perceived elitism? Do I question the impact of assessment on a person's self-concept?

The following year, I began my training to earn my Bachelor of Education, specializing in special education, at the University of Victoria. I took an independent study course about gifted education. From the research I did for that course, I came to look more closely at the labels which society gives people. The case studies I examined during that time made me realize that educators have a serious responsibility to the children they assess. Assessment must do something to benefit the learner. Teachers must be cognizant that the scores they award these learners may make a difference to the lives of these children and that this difference needs to be a positive one. From the study, I learned that people are gifted in many ways. My experience as a mother of two children with very different talents solidified my belief that the assessment of giftedness is very tricky. Giftedness is a label, the value of which I question. I understand the purpose of labels in our society and in the administration of our schools. However, labels are dangerous because people define others with labels. People diminish others with labels. People diminish themselves with labels. More soapbox spouting! I suppose I always stick a 'but' on the end of a sentence that contains phrases such as ... so-and-so is gifted ... or mildly mentally handicapped ... or dyslexic. I do not want anyone to feel obliged to live up to or down to a label, which some outside force has given him or her.

The moral of the story is ... my beliefs about assessment.

My belief is that in a perfect world assessment fulfils two purposes. First, it informs students of their strengths and weaknesses in a specific area. Second, it informs and guides further instruction in that specific area. I am not certain that this is always the role of assessment. My impression is that sometimes assessment is more like an obstacle course, competition, or even punishment. I need to talk to others to find out if my impression is a valid one. What is the true purpose of assessment? As I reflect on my own teaching years, I wonder if I have employed assessment that way. I am afraid that sometimes my testing did not provide an appropriate forum for each child to make apparent his or her strengths... only weaknesses. I wonder how I really used the information I gained from my classroom assessments... to guide my teaching or to judge my students.

At the beginning of my career, I am certain that I did not question my instruction as thoroughly as I needed, when reflecting on the results of assessment. I did not question my methods of assessment. I did not scrutinize test questions in an investigative manner, searching for “the good, the bad, and the ugly” tactics I was using to get the scores I was reporting with such confidence. I wonder if it was just me, or if many educators in the 1970s were the same. I suppose that this is one positive aspect of IQ tests because they are standardized by nature. Standardized assessment tools provide opportunities for the candidates to show themselves in both verbal and performance-type settings and many people are stronger in one than the other. The result each student earns can be more valid than teacher-designed assessment tools, since standardized test items have regular revisions by experts in test building. As I become more familiar with IQ tests, one

negative aspect that becomes apparent is the cultural bias that cannot be avoided in some of the tasks.

In ten years of teaching, I have cultivated a different view of assessment from the one I held when I first began teaching. I talk to my students about what they know. I have conversations with them to ask what they need to know. I have the entire class create an upcoming test on chart paper. I make them tell me what I should look for on their response sheets. They create the answer sheet and those delicious little bonus questions that allow people to get 22 out of 20 correct. They love those. In my classroom, assessment is a negotiated contract between student and teacher. The target is located by both parties and it does not move. Testing, for me, is not about what students have been taught. It is about what they know.

In my last few years of regular classroom teaching, I was introduced to the work of Fred Jones and Positive Classroom Instruction; William Spady and Outcome Based Education/Assessment; Howard Gardner and Multiple Intelligence; and Grant Wiggins with Understanding by Design. Each of these men has brought new flavour and dimension to assessment and what it means to me. The questions remain. More recently, I have worked with the children who struggle most to acquire literacy. I have used Reading Recovery™ to assist them. Reading Recovery™ is a model of instruction with assessment built into its core. Every day, the student is assessed one-on-one to determine his or her progress and this assessment guides instruction in a minute and detailed manner. Each nuance of students' behaviour tells the experienced and efficient observer where they are in this heartbeat, and where to take them in the next.

Another new piece of my teaching life is the opportunity to observe and support the district's school psychologist. The school psychologist uses a variety of formal and informal protocols in her quest to learn more about the child in question. Her guiding mission is to help the child, the parents, and the teachers. She is kind and gentle with her students. She is knowledgeable. She remembers the children she has worked with even years later when they are parents. She looks on the children as puzzles to explore, searching out the strengths as well as the areas in which they lack abilities. She strives to help them, through her reports to teachers and parents, to be as successful as they can be.

The local school psychologist trained me to administer some of the more informal assessment tools she uses. My first experiences with the tools were stressful for child, observer and me. I was nervous about being trained, observed, and actually assessing a child. As I worked with the instruments, I became more relaxed and rapport was easier to build. We were able to laugh together. In the beginning, this assessment practice was painful to me. I presume it was the same for the child because of the school psychologist's practice of awarding stickers at the end of each session. The school psychologist taught me to ask the child to comply with a vast assortment of requests. These requests were either enjoyable or frustrating for the child, no matter how positive the environment. I sat with the school psychologist while she presented her observations and interpretations of the child's scores and behaviours to teacher and parent. She showed me how to write a list of suggested remediation strategies.

It is difficult to know if formal assessment actually does provide any further guidance or direction for a child's learning. Is it too much to put a child through this procedure without being certain that this major goal of assessment can be met? The most

important question for educators to ask parents and teachers, who are requesting formal assessment, is - What do we hope to accomplish with this formal assessment?

I know that formal assessment has value because it is crucial in our present government-funding scheme. If teachers or parents suspect that a child has an IQ lower than 55, a formal assessment will provide the documentation to generate extra funding. Formal assessment is also vital to secure adaptations for those students with disabilities who wish to take provincial examinations in Grade 12, such as additional time for test taking or the provision of a scribe. Formal assessment instruments are standardized so that teachers and parents are able to compare any child with same-age peers. Formal assessment tools offer grade equivalence for the child and clearly pinpoint strengths and weaknesses.

However, there are disadvantages to this form of assessment: the procedures take a lot of time; they provide only a snapshot of the child's life; they are expensive to administer; they are limited by the trained personnel available to administer them; and they may or may not be culturally biased. In addition to these factors, there are other questions about the whole procedure of pre-referral, referral, and post-referral. What about those children referred by teachers or parents and found to be outside the range necessary for funding? Is formal assessment an exhausting and futile experience for them? Does being referred determine the assessed children's concept about themselves? Does it affect the relationship they have with their parents, teachers, or peers? Does it alter them in any way?

I have more questions than answers about what assessment really is. Is it punitive? Is it competitive? Is it a hoop to jump? Is it used to guide the next steps on the educational

path for students? Perhaps I am the right person for this task. I am the person who is wary enough of the assessment dragon to tame it so that it guards my castle without singeing my invited guests.

Reflecting on our Reflections

We have completed these recollections of our experiences with assessment, both formal and informal, as students and as educators. We have read each other's words with the purpose of seeing our own beliefs and practices and, hopefully, new knowledge about assessment, through a new pair of eyes. Where do we go from here? In *Educative Assessment* (1998), Grant Wiggins says that sometimes we need to "make the familiar strange" (p. 9). By looking at our practices in a new light, we may find a need to change them. We may also discover new ways to change them. The process for making the familiar strange begins by comparing our reflections. If we could uncover the common beliefs within our reflections, what would they be?

First, assessment motivates. When we reread each other's reflection, we found an underlying belief that assessment motivates. This belief showed up in many of our stories: success at spelling, the enrichment groups, and studying hard for math or science tests. We were both motivated to do our best work because of impending assessment. At the same time, assessment did not guarantee learning. We both recall studying extensively for a test, doing well on the test, and knowing the information was temporarily stored in our brains.

Richard Stiggins, in *Student-Involved Classroom Assessment* (3rd ed) (2001), makes a similar point about assessment as motivator.

The theory of learning that has exerted greatest influence on school efforts to motivate is known as *behaviourism*. Proponents of this theory explain how or why we learn as a function of schedules of rewards and punishments (Skinner, 1974).

This theory of motivation has spread so deeply into our classrooms and into society that it has now become an unquestioned ‘truth’.

In the classroom, assessment has served as the primary mechanism triggering those rewards and punishments. High test scores and grades are thought to reinforce behaviour that resulted in substantial learning, while failing test scores and grades are supposed to punish and thus extinguish the behaviour that resulted in insufficient learning. Sounds like a straightforward way to promote the pursuit of academic excellence! From a comprehensive review of decades of research, Kohn (1993) concludes that the use of extrinsic sources of motivation, such as stars, stickers, trophies, and grades, can bring students to believe that learning activities are not worth doing in their own right, thus undermining students’ natural curiosity to find out how and why things work as they do. (p. 37)

A second belief we share is that there are negative aspects to assessment and we wish to protect children from unnecessary and inappropriate assessment experiences. In their article, “Assessment Issues in Education,” Slate and Jones (2000) describe the risk educators take when they categorize children using diagnostic assessments.

The ultimate criticism of the use of diagnostic categories is that it involves applying pejorative labels to students. Heward and Orlansky (1984) summarized the potential dangers of labelling, which include focusing attention on students’ weaknesses rather than their strengths, causing self-fulfilling prophecies of low achievement, lowering students’ self-esteem, causing peer rejection, and providing a rationale for removing students from regular classrooms. In addition, Heward and Orlansky noted that students from minority backgrounds are more likely to be labelled than are other students and that, once these labels are applied, they are difficult to remove. Given that categorical diagnosis has failed to demonstrate treatment utility, the potential damage of labelling cannot be justified. (p. 74)

Third, our stories revealed that we share the belief that assessment is valuable, especially when used to improve classroom instruction and student learning. In *Children with Exceptionalities in Canadian Classrooms*, Winzer (1999) states, “Assessment serves little purpose if the process is undertaken merely to collect data. Data from screening and psycho-educational diagnosis are only useful when used to initiate more effective services and programming for children” (p. 65). The corollary of the last two beliefs is

that we believe the initial purpose and subsequent use of assessment determines the measure of its worth.

By participating in conversations with each other and with the text of our reflections, we identified these shared beliefs. Already, we have taken several steps on the path to understanding our relationship with assessment. Through the process of conversation and re-conversation, we are aware of and able to articulate these first steps.

The next set of conversations will take us along the historical path of assessment. As we travel that path, we will become aware of the choices made by School District #59 on its journey to reach its present beliefs about assessment.

Chapter 3: The History of Testing and Assessment

In this chapter we provide a brief overview of assessment practices. We begin by defining *formal* assessment and *informal* assessment. Then, we describe early assessment and testing practices, present a brief examination of testing and assessment trends to the present time, and illustrate how those assessment trends manifested themselves in the province of British Columbia, and in School District #59.

Defining Formal and Informal Assessment

Before embarking on our historical journey, it was necessary to agree on terminology. Our study of assessment could not take place without creating, as Gadamer says, “a common language” (1975, p. 341). The most common terms used throughout all of the conversations were *formal* and *informal* assessment. For our purposes, formal assessment is the application of *standardized tests*, as defined by Sattler (1988).

A standardized test is a task or a set of tasks under given standard conditions and designed to assess some aspect of a person’s knowledge, skill, or personality. A test provides a scale of measurement for consistent individual differences regarding some psychological concept and serves to line people up according to that concept. ... A test yields one or more objectively obtained quantitative scores, so that, as nearly as possible, each person is assessed in the same way. The intent is to provide a fair and equitable comparison among test takers. (p. 4)

With this definition, formal assessment separates into two categories. First, there is whole group or whole school or whole nation testing. These tests include the Canadian Test of Basic Skills [CTBS] and the Foundation Skills Assessment [FSA], to name two. The other category is an individual standardized test administered by a qualified assessor. One of these types of assessment is the Wechsler Intelligence Scale for Children [WISC].

All other assessment tools, such as criterion-referenced tests, teacher-designed tests, interviews, student self-assessment, and observations, are considered informal.

Early Assessment Practices

Assessment has a long and varied history. As far back as 1115 B.C., the government of China administered group assessment to select people for the civil service. The ancient Greeks used assessment to test mastery of academics and physical skills. In 1510, Firtzherbert introduced a test of mentality. This test required candidates to give their age, their father's name, and then count 20 pence. During the same time-period a Spanish physician, Huarte, defined *intelligence* as "docility in learning from a master, understanding and independence of judgment, and inspiration without extravagance" (Sattler, 1988, inside cover). Swinburne suggested, in 1610, that people held on criminal charges should be examined for common knowledge. In 1799, Jean Marc Itard studied Victor, the Wild Boy of Aveyron. He focused mainly on assessing the differences between normal and abnormal cognitive functioning (Sattler, 1988).

Assessment in the 1800s

In the 19th century, there was confusion about the differences between idiots and lunatics. There was growing interest in society's treatment of mentally handicapped and insane people. Institutions were established to take care of these people. In order for people to gain admittance, it was necessary to have a standard for judging levels of disability. Esquirol, a French physician, made a clear distinction between *mental incapacity* and *mental illness*. The distinction was made that people called *idiots* never did develop their intellectual capacities but the *mentally deranged* were those who had lost the abilities they had possessed earlier. Esquirol concluded that "the individual's use of language gave the most dependable criterion of his intellectual level" (Anastasi, 1976, p. 6), a belief that remains apparent in testing today. Between 1836 and 1838, Esquirol

proposed several different definitions for *mental retardation*. During this time, Sequin worked to train mentally handicapped people using “the physiological method of training” (Anastasi, 1976, p. 6). He believed that it was important to give mentally handicapped children intensive training in sensory discrimination and muscle control. Some of the tools he used to train children, such as the Sequin Form Board, were later incorporated into performance tests for intelligence. Sequin established the first successful school in France for children with mental retardation in 1837 (Sattler, 1988). Many years later, Alfred Binet carried on the work of protecting mentally handicapped children. He encouraged the Ministry of Public Instruction in France to improve the condition of these children by setting up a commission to safeguard their interests (Anastasi, 1976). This interest in intelligence and intelligence testing helped to establish psychology as a separate discipline.

Wundt set up the first psychological laboratory in Leipzig, Germany, in 1879. Many early psychologists took their training there. Anastasi stated that Wundt and other early experimental psychologists were not concerned with the measurement of individual differences. Rather, their principal aim was to formulate generalized descriptions of human behaviour. “It was the uniformities rather than the differences in behaviour that were the focus of attention” (Anastasi, 1976, p. 9). This aim guided the style of testing. These psychologists influenced testing in another way. All experiments were designed with rigid controls over conditions that might affect outcomes. This standardization of procedure became one of the main characteristics of psychological testing.

In 1884, an English biologist, Sir Francis Galton, set up an anthropometric laboratory at the International Exposition to collect data on human heredity. Visitors to

the exhibition could be measured for a fee of three pence. “These results, among others, were collected and became the first study of individual differences” (Anastasi, 1976, p. 8). Galton believed that tests of sensory discrimination could gauge a person’s intelligence. “The only information that reaches us concerning outward events appears to pass through the avenue of our senses; and the more perceptive the senses are of differences, the larger is the field upon which our judgment and intelligence can act” (p. 8). Galton also contributed to the field of testing by pioneering rating-scales, questionnaires, free-association techniques, and the use of statistics for the analysis of data on individual differences (Anastasi, 1976).

The United States soon followed Europe’s lead. In 1888, James McKeen Cattell opened a testing laboratory at the University of Pennsylvania. Cattell completed his doctorate at Leipzig. His dissertation focused on individual differences in reaction time, even though Wundt disapproved. While Cattell was lecturing at the University of Cambridge, he met Galton. Cattell shared Galton’s view that a measure of intellectual function could be ascertained through tests of sensory discrimination and reaction time. Upon his return to the United States, Cattell worked both in experimental psychology and in the testing movement. In 1890, Cattell used the term *mental test* for the first time in psychological literature. Anastasi (1976) states that the article “describes a series of tests that were being administered annually to college students in the effort to determine their intellectual level” (p. 9). Other tests similar to Cattell’s were developed during the 1890s and were administered to school children, college students, and adults (Anastasi, 1976).

However, in 1895, Binet and Henri wrote an article in which they argued that most tests available at the time were too sensory in nature, concentrating on simple specific

abilities. “An extensive and varied list of tests was proposed, covering such functions as memory, imagination, attention, comprehension, suggestibility, aesthetic appreciation, and many others” (Anastasi, 1976, p. 10). Binet and Henri believed that the key to measuring intelligence was to look at higher mental processes, rather than simple sensory abilities.

Assessment in the 1900s

By the turn of the century, testing in the United States had expanded to include state and national assessment. One such assessment was the College Entrance Examination Board [CEEB], established to determine college admission (Anastasi, 1976). Another assessment, the Binet-Simon Intelligence test, screened school children. Binet’s 1905 scale consisted of 30 problems or tests arranged in ascending order of difficulty. The tests covered a wide range of functions with an emphasis on comprehension, reasoning, and judgment. Binet regarded these three items as essential components of intelligence (Anastasi, 1976). His tests had a larger verbal content than other tests of the time. The 1908 version of Binet’s test was grouped into age levels, or mental levels. He never used the term *mental age* but translations of his work did and the term became popular. “Since mental age is such a simple concept to grasp, the introduction of this term undoubtedly did much to popularise intelligence testing” (Anastasi, 1976, p. 11). The 1916 revision of the Binet became the Stanford-Binet Intelligence test, under the direction of Lewis Terman. “It was in this test that the intelligence quotient (IQ), or ratio between mental age and chronological age, was first used” (Anastasi, 1976, p. 12). Terman revised it again in 1937 with Merrill and the name changed to the Stanford–Binet Intelligence Scales. This test had further revisions in 1960 and 1972.

In 1917, intelligence tests were administered to military recruits in the United States to determine their aptitude for the job (Sattler, 1988). These tests, the Army Alpha and Army Beta, still exist in revision, and are the foundation for most modern group intelligence tests. In 1939, David Wechsler devised an intelligence scale for adults, children, and preschool children. His assessment tools have been revised several times over the years and the WISC-III is widely used by psychologists today. Wechsler defined intelligence as a person's ability to act and think rationally and to deal with his or her environment effectively (Drummond, 2000).

Over time, scientists and test developers have made every effort to define intelligence and to build tests to measure intelligence accurately. The understanding of intelligence and the testing for that intelligence has evolved from sensory discrimination to an emphasis on judgment, comprehension, and reasoning. However, in *Student-Involved Classroom Assessment (3rd ed)* (2001), Richard Stiggins calls upon educators to consider different interpretations of intelligence than those measured by WISC-like assessment tools. When referring to the work of Gardner (1993) and Sternberg (1996) Stiggins states

The definition of this thing called aptitude or intelligence is far from clear. Scholars who have devoted their careers to the study of intelligence and its relationship to achievement do not agree among themselves as to whether each of us has one of these or many, whether this is a stable or volatile human characteristic, or whether it is stable at some points in our lives and unstable at others. Not only do they disagree fundamentally about the definition of these characteristics, but they also are at odds regarding how to assess them. (p. 419)

He stipulates that there is no agreement among those who have devoted their careers to the study of intelligence. He goes on to point out that these scholars are also unable to agree on how to assess the characteristics of intelligence.

Assessment within British Columbia

The world continued to investigate assessment tools that measured intelligence, development, and abilities. By 1946, the province of British Columbia had established the Division of Tests, Standards, and Research. Its purpose was to administer scholastic aptitude tests for pupils, to conduct research into curriculum standards, and to provide training in measurement, diagnosis, and remediation (Homeroom Timeline, 2001, [np]). In 1961, this same division employed computers to process matriculation examination scores. In 1975, American president, Gerald Ford enacted Public Law 94-142 (the Education for All Handicapped Children Act), which gave the right to a public education to all children in the least restrictive environment. This law and the ramifications of it made educators and lawmakers aware of the need for more assessment of intelligence. Even earlier, in 1970, the school districts of British Columbia had created Special Education departments within their organizations. These departments still exist today, although School District #59 has renamed this department Student Support Services. What follows is an excerpt from a letter written to the school board in May of 1994, suggesting the change in title.

Special Education began in B.C. and School District #59 to ensure children with special needs was [sic] provided the opportunity to receive an appropriate education. At this time, in School District #59, all children are included in the regular classroom. With the successes of the inclusive neighbourhood school, all of the district students with special needs can be included in their neighbourhood school and receive an appropriate education.

Therefore, it is recommended that, effective July 1994, SD #59 continue to emphasize the concept of inclusive education by focusing on Student Support Services. That the Special Education department be renamed Student Support Services and continue the concept of supporting students in an inclusive educational program.

The inclusive nature of British Columbia's public schools has made special education services much more of a team effort. These services include support and assessment in various forms, through school-based teams, counsellors, learning assistance teachers, special education teachers, school psychologists, speech and language pathologists, physiotherapists, and occupational therapists. The Special Education Service Department of British Columbia states the following:

The purpose of assessment and evaluation is to plan and implement an education program to help the student learn. The assessment support may include: criterion-referenced or norm-referenced assessment to level B as required to answer specific instructional questions; systematic observation and collection of behavioural data to establish baseline/progress data, or describe functional behaviours; synthesis of information from parents, student records, other service providers, and health-related information to aid the assessment process; and in-depth interviews with students to determine their knowledge of the learning process and / or thinking strategies. (Special Education Services Manual, D2-3)

Public Law 94-142 had an impact on British Columbia's education system. Another provincial initiative that had an effect was the *Year 2000: A Framework for Learning*, which was a policy document and major restructuring of how education was delivered. It was implemented in stages, beginning with the primary program, then the intermediate program and finally the graduation program. This initiative altered the nature of assessment and reporting in the province's schools. The assessment philosophy of the Ministry of Education, as presented in the *Year 2000* document (1992) was that "Assessment and evaluation are based on what and how the child thinks, knows, feels, and can do in relation to the five goals of the Primary Program" (p. 8). A complaint from parents during the implementation of this program was that report cards did not tell them enough about their child's progress. Teachers implementing the *Year 2000* initiative reported that children performed or failed to perform to widely-held expectations but

parents did not know what that meant. As parents and educators clambered to get back to basics, the provincial government made changes in policy and regulations, which seriously eroded the intent and the implementation of the *Year 2000* initiative.

Stakeholders want to know exactly where their students are in relation to a provincial standard. This public pressure has resulted in several policy changes and publications from the Ministry of Education. One of these, the Integrated Resource Packages [IRP], provides a prescribed curriculum, learning resources, teaching strategies and assessment suggestions. Another policy change is that the Ministry now assesses Grade 4, Grade 7, and Grade 10 using a standardized tool called the Foundation Skills Assessment [FSA]. This instrument measures reading comprehension, writing and numeracy. Since 1999, this assessment has replaced the Provincial Learning Assessment Program [PLAP]. The province still uses the PLAP on a sample basis when further testing is required. It measures student achievement in reading comprehension, first draft writing, math, science, communication skills and social studies. Other standardized tools diagnose learning disabilities and identify students for extra support at the school level. In 2000, the Ministry of Education published *A Review of Special Education in British Columbia*. In this document, Linda Siegel states “formal out-of-class assessment for special education purposes appears to be supplanting regular, systematic classroom assessment of reading, spelling, writing, arithmetic, and mathematical skills, and social skills of students” (p. 27). The review team noted that educators were referring students for extensive, formal, psycho-educational assessment in order to determine which students were eligible to obtain an allocation of funds and special education services.

Siegel (2000) also states that there was not enough effort spent in supporting the needs of the students.

It is important to re-evaluate current assessment/identification practices and implement alternative strategies, where necessary to ensure that more students are supported within the context of regular education and to ensure that those who do require special education supports receive them in a timely manner. (p. 27)

The review team also suggested to educators that simple classroom-based assessment and immediate action would be helpful in preventing the need for more formal assessment later, as well as more intensive support.

Assessment and Testing Within School District #59 (Peace River South)

School District #59 has struggled with the same issues around formal assessment, not just in the time-period Siegel was reviewing, but also at several other times in its history. In a document entitled *Why Assess Students?* [n.d.] and published for the school district by the Learning and Diagnostic Centre, school psychologist, Anne Cook writes “that formal standardized testing could provide documentation for funding purposes; documentation for the Provincial Exam Board; an indication of academic achievement; an indication of cognitive functioning, or something to stick in a student’s file.” Cook writes that formal assessment is an in-depth, involving observation, analysis and, interpretation. Cook states that formal assessment includes an understanding of any relevant background information, the child’s history, and learning environment. Cook (n.d.) offers this list of possible areas to examine with formal assessment.

An assessment might include a closer look at the child’s:

- Learning problems
- Expressive and receptive language development
- Verbal and non-verbal reasoning skills
- An analysis of strengths and weaknesses in cognitive functioning
- Attention problems
- Information processes skills

- Phonological awareness
- Written expression skills
- Reading and spelling skills
- Math skills
- Memory skills
- Learning style
- Use of strategies
- Emotional and/or behavioural problems
- Attitudes and interests
- Initiative and motivation
- Creativity
- Spatial skills
- Fine motor skills
- Perceptual skills

What would have prompted Cook to create such an informational brochure? Perhaps it was to make the nature of formal assessment more apparent to her teaching colleagues. By the time Cook came to the school district, Peace River South's educators had travelled down several paths in their study and analysis of assessment practices.

Recollections of School District #59 assessment practices by John Kendrew.

The following history of assessment within School District #59 was collected during several conversations with John Kendrew. He was a classroom teacher, school administrator, the district's first school psychologist, and a former director of instruction responsible for Student Support Services. John worked in the district for over thirty years and is often called upon to recall district history.

When Kendrew came to the district in 1965, the students were taking their first formal standardized assessment. The provincial government mandated formal standardized testing at the end of Grade 7, Grade 10, and Grade 12. The Grade 7 and Grade 10 versions were retired from use in the early 1970s. However, the Grade 12 provincial examinations remain today. Between 1965 and 1969, Milt MacLaren administered all of the individualized formal assessment. His job was to assess the

children who were attending the Open Door School, a school district facility that accommodated children with cognitive and physical disabilities. MacLaren also assessed children from the regular schools. The purpose of this assessment was to identify children as *educable mentally retarded* or *mildly mentally retarded*. The only assessment tool Kendrew remembers him using was the Goodenough Draw-a-Man Test, published in 1926.

In 1969, School District #59 hired Roy Prystai to teach in the district. He was the first teacher with any training in individual assessment tools like the Wechsler Intelligence Scale for Children [WISC]. Group standardized tests such as the Gates-MacGinitie Reading Tests [GMRT] were popular then and classroom teachers administered them for all grades. Teachers liked them because these tests gave a grade level. Prystai left the district after two years but teachers still wanted to have direction on whole grade assessment tools and training in how to use them. After Prystai left, the district began using the Canadian Test of Basic Skills [CTBS] and the Stanford Math assessment instruments in Grade 4, Grade 7 and Grade 10.

The year 1971 brought Dale Fiddick to School District #59 to fill the new position of director of special education. He continued to administer the WISC to individual students, while training teachers to use the Frostig Developmental Test of Visual Perception (1966). These materials provide early identification of fine motor skill delays. Fiddick provided training for teachers in the Peabody Picture Vocabulary Test [PPVT] and the Raven's Standard Progressive Matrices [Raven's]. The PPVT is a measure of receptive vocabulary where the student selects one of four pictures in response to a stimulus word. The Raven's is a nonverbal task that involves visual perceptual and

abstract reasoning skills. It involves selecting one of eight patterns to fit into a given design. It is important to remember that these trainees were regular classroom teachers. Fiddick still administered the formal assessment required to move students into the Open Door School or into special classes for *mildly mentally handicapped and learning disabled* children at Dawson Elementary School. Classroom teachers, using tools such as the PPVT and the Raven's, did all other assessment at the school level.

In the early 1970s, School District #59 hired its first reading specialists. These teachers travelled from school to school providing support to the children struggling with reading. The training of regular classroom teachers in the PPVT and Raven's and the creation of the position of reading specialists signalled a change in approach to assessment within School District #59. Teachers started looking differently at students having academic difficulties.

Up until that time, children either could do it or they could not and if they could not do it, they sat in Grade 6 until they were 16 and then they went out to work. ... We were beginning to see more parents showing concern over their otherwise bright child who as unable to read. (Kendrew, 2001)

Around this time, the district sent Kendrew to receive training as a school psychologist. Upon his return to the district, Kendrew, a school administrator, used WISC scores to generate the funding for special programs for cognitively disabled children. Later, Anne Cook administered formal assessments and provided more training for teachers using the PPVT and the Woodcock Reading Mastery Test. In 1978, the district set up the province's first learning assistance training program in conjunction with the University of Victoria. Ron Tinney, from the university, provided workshops on severe learning disabilities ranging from reading disabilities to Fetal Alcohol Syndrome.

David Bateson, from the University of British Columbia, addressed the district's educators during the late 1980s. His presence and his influence helped the district take a more critical look at standardized assessment. He proposed that criterion-referenced assessment was most appropriate. He argued that standardized tests should not be used unless you are going to teach to them. "Standardized tests test for things we don't teach" (Kendrew, 2001). Bateson also made the point that standardized tests are norm referenced using white middle-class children. Children from poorer backgrounds did worse on standardized assessments than their more affluent peers. In response to Bateson's presentations, the district stopped using the Canadian Test of Basic Skills for system-wide standardized assessment. Bateson initiated the district's drive towards outcome-based assessment.

However, in the early 1990s the government of British Columbia mandated the administering of the Provincial Learning Assessment Program [PLAP]. In the last two years, the province replaced the PLAP with the Foundation Skills Assessment [FSA] as the primary assessment tool for districts. These tests changed the way teachers worked. Results from these tests are routinely published in provincial newspapers. As soon as the results of these standardized tests began to appear in newspapers, there was pressure on all schools to do well. On the Ministry of Education's website, there is a reminder to the public to consider the value of the test scores within the culture of each community and that this test provides only a snapshot. Typically, students in lower socio-economic communities do not do as well on these tests as students from communities that are more affluent. These standardized instruments appear to measure stimulation and experience more than intellectual abilities.

This affirms Bateson's arguments that standardized tests are biased. If this is true, why has the education system resisted a change to non-standardized assessment?

From the public point of view, teachers and schools need to be held accountable for the type of graduate they release into the work force. Governments do not want to hear about Grade 12 students who are unable to read or write. On the other hand, classroom teachers do not like informal assessments because there are no grade level scores indicated. Parents love a grade level and so do teachers. As Anne Cook got better at doing her whole-child assessments, the district's teachers got poorer at assessing their own children. The teachers relied on Cook to do the assessment in the schools. She took over the responsibility from the schools and without practice, classroom teachers lost confidence in their own abilities to assess children accurately. (Kendrew, 2001)

The non-retention policy passed in February 1999 (<http://www.sd59.bc.ca/>) also added to teacher stress. Since students moved with their peers from grade to grade, teachers were now facing a broader range of abilities and finding assessment a challenge. Parents were confused by this policy and expressed concern that the public education system had no standards.

The Board believes that all students should receive their educational program with age appropriate students. There is to be no grade retention of students. Students who are not able to complete the learning outcomes of the provincial curriculum are to have either an Individual Education Plan (or a specific intervention plan) developed as soon as it is determined that the student is experiencing significant difficulties. (Retrieved from <http://www.sd59.bc.ca/>, 11/24/01)

During the conversations in 2001, Kendrew talked about his experiences with training teachers on assessment instruments only to have them move away. He was clear on what he feels the district and the province need to do to address the teacher turnover issue, and the change in assessment practices over the last twenty years.

We need to train people regularly to use informal assessment tools. We need to relay to teachers and parents how powerful those informal and criterion-referenced assessment tools are. We need to get into early identification of at-risk children. We spend too much money assessing in the later years. The fiscal funding demands formal assessment so it is important to get the scores generated by the standardized

tests but if no funding is forthcoming, is that type of testing really what is best for kids?

Conversations with Kendrew provided insight into where the district came from, the impact of provincial influences, and where the district is currently.

Change within the district.

Cook reported administering over 100 formal assessments each of the last ten years. In addition, many of the referrals made to her did not result in an assessment. Of the assessments she completed, only 2% of the students were low enough cognitively (an IQ of 55 or less) to warrant full funding from the province (personal communication, February 14, 2001). Is this a common occurrence in other school districts? What does it matter if it is? Is there anything that we could or should do to change all of that? Is the system really broken or are we stuck in an old paradigm?

As well, in the last ten years, educators in School District #59 have been rethinking their own assessment practices. If David Bateson was the catalyst who opened teachers' eyes to the possibilities where assessment is concerned, then Bill Spady and Outcome Based Education [OBE] moved the district further towards a close link between assessment and instruction. The district has encouraged educators to learn more about many aspects of assessment by providing professional development in cognitive coaching, Fred Jones' Positive Classroom Instruction™, Outcome-Based education and assessment, multiple intelligences, and Understanding by Design™. British Columbia's Integrated Resource Packages [IRPs] and Performance Standards have taken educators even farther towards clearly defined assessment criteria and practices. As soon as all of the stakeholders negotiate the assessment target, it will be easier to hit. *Target* is the word

that Richard Stiggins used in an interview with Dennis Sparks in 1999. He said, “adults and students can hit any target they can see and that holds still for them” (p. 4).

In his book, *Educative Assessment* (1998), Grant Wiggins says that the aim of assessment is to educate and improve student performance, not merely to “audit it” (p. 7). Wiggins argues that schools are worried about teaching students to succeed on tests that do not measure “what we value nor provide useful feedback about how to teach and how to learn” (p. 7). He goes on to say that, “the greatest impediment to achieving the vision described is not standardized testing. Rather, the problem is the reverse: we use the tests we do because we persist in thinking of assessment as not germane to learning, and therefore best done expediently” (p. 7).

Winzer and Mazurek (2001) state, “the primary purpose of classroom assessment is to inform teachers and to improve learning” (p. 65). If these and other people are to be believed... Where do we go from here? The investigation for Chapter 3 proved to us that assessment has a long history, that School District #59 has a place in that history, and that we as educators will have a part in making new history. The district has followed the trends and mandates of the world and the province. In spite of that, School District #59 deserves recognition for its innovations, training, and financial support. Now we need to engage in conversations with our colleagues in order to discover which way our district is moving, and what is best for our students.

Chapter 4: The Dinner Party

Although it is set in an actual dining establishment, the dinner party is fictional. The scene, written in the third person present tense, incorporates our actual conversations and research. In “textualizing our exchange” (Low & Palulis, 2000, p. 68), the conversational fragments are placed in our assessment mosaic. Some of our conversationalists chose to remain anonymous so their names and characteristics were changed.

At the Imperial Room, the chef and servers are putting the final touches on a meal to remember. Candles illuminate the Royal Albert china on the large circular table, set for eight. The maitre d’ greets the guests as they trickle in for dinner. By the time the waiter finishes serving the wine, everyone has arrived.

As Jill looks around the table, she pauses to reflect on each guest in turn. On her immediate left sits Rene Chadwick. Rene is a high-profile employee of the school district. She taught in elementary classrooms in southern British Columbia for many years. Ten years ago, Rene became an elementary learning assistance teacher in this district and recently took on the new challenge of training to be a school psychologist.

Mrs. Thomas, who taught Jill Grade 5, is to Rene’s left. After thirty-five years with School District #59, she views her impending retirement with mixed emotions. During her long career, Christina Thomas has taught in both elementary and secondary classrooms, has been a learning assistance teacher at both levels, and currently holds a position as Director of Instruction in charge of curriculum. Her passion is Reading Recovery™.

As Jill glances further around the table, Sarah catches her eye and winks. Sarah Cunningham’s first teaching experience was in a one-room school in a small town in

Barbados. Her husband, Jacques, is a doctor who worked for 'Doctors without Borders' before returning to Canada to take over his retiring father's medical practice. Sarah and Jacques have no children. Since returning to Canada, Sarah has worked in the local secondary school close to her husband's office. She teaches French, Spanish, and Portuguese. As foreign languages are not in high demand in this northern community, she now teaches children with special needs and handicaps, following her husband's passion for working with children in need.

Jessie Wetherall juggles Sarah's wine glass as she reaches across to the warm dinner rolls. Jessie has fifteen years of experience teaching physical education at a large secondary school, outside of the province. She also provided several blocks of learning assistance at the secondary level. After the birth of her third child, Jessie became an elementary school counsellor in School District #59.

Jill smirks at her friend and colleague, Heather Winslow. Like Jill, Heather has been teaching for five years in elementary and secondary classrooms. However, Heather is not a local of Dawson Creek. Heather also had the opportunity to play in goal for the Canadian National Women's Field Hockey Team, while training to enter the teaching profession.

Next around the table is another thirty-five year veteran of the district, John Kendrew. During his time in the area, he has been classroom teacher, administrator, school psychologist, director of instruction, and full time rancher.

Marlene Deith takes the last seat at the table, which happens to be next to Jill, her partner for the Master of Education culminating project. Marlene thanks everyone for coming, and describes the purpose of the evening. "We are here to meet, eat, and share

our experiences about assessment. This will support Jill and me while we move through the process of completing our project for our Master of Education.”

The well-dressed waiter, Jean-Luc, interrupts Marlene’s welcome by stating, “Good evening, ladies, and gentlemen. Welcome to the Imperial Room. Tonight’s specials are magnifique. We have herb-crusted fillet of salmon with a hint of horseradish and a cucumber relish; veal scallopini saltimboca which is pan fried and finished with Marsala wine; and the final entrée I would like to tell you about, is breast of chicken with sliced apples and Brie cheese wrapped in phyllo pastry, complimented by an apple curried sauce.”

As the diners settle down to contemplate their choices for dinner, John reflects on the news he had heard on the radio earlier in November. The Foundation Skills Assessment results had just been published in British Columbia. This is a concern to educators, as the public perceives this type of standardized assessment as the measuring stick for school excellence.

John (personal communication, October 23, 2001) leans toward Heather and says, “Did you hear that the government decided to post, on-line, the results of the 2001 Foundation Skills Assessment?”

Before Heather can respond, Jessie (personal communication, October 13, 2001) interjects, “I guess it is timely, talking about assessment now, in that I was listening to CBC radio last week, and they were talking about how the Fraser Institute now wants to publish the results of the FSA tests, for elementary schools, as part of their report card on schools.” [Previously the Fraser Institute had only rated secondary schools.] “So there was a lot of debate about what does this mean? Why would you publish this? Of course,

the educators, who know better, in my opinion, were saying things like ... that is just one very small measure of how a child does, how a school does. In addition, what is it that you are really measuring? Are you measuring the teachers? Are you measuring the schools? Are you measuring the student population? You have to look at the big picture. And I guess, in terms of my personal philosophy, I really think that any type of assessment, whether it is psychological, intellectual, whatever, emotional, has to be taken in the context of the big picture.”

Across the table, Rene, a former learning assistance teacher, nods as she listens to Jessie. When Jessie pauses, Rene (personal communication, October 17, 2001) exclaims, “We need to be careful and supplement with other tests. We need a well-rounded picture.”

Jill supports Jessie and Rene’s opinions of looking at the big picture by quoting J. Ellsworth’s (1996) article, “PEPSI: A Screening and Programming Tool for Understanding the Whole Child.”

To progress toward a view that takes the whole child into perspective, we must have ways to recognize more dimensions in the child, to have more knowledge about the development of the child, and to have ways of showing and discussing the child in a more integrated manner. (p. 33)

Rene (October 17, 2001) pulls the discussion back to the Foundation Skills Assessment, by voicing her concern that, “FSA tests for Grade 4 and 7 students are not an accurate measure, because the students do not really know how to write tests anymore. They have gotten away from test taking in the last years. When given time restraints, it was stressful for them. They could not work cooperatively, etc.”

Jessie (October 13, 2001) adds to Rene's concerns, saying, "Personally, I think that provincial exams should be thrown out the window, because I don't think that they are in line anymore with the kinds of learning outcomes that we want in our schools."

Christina (personal communication, October 17, 2001) enters the conversation by reminiscing about the Canadian Test of Basic Skills. She says, "When teachers gave the CTBS it got to the point where they were just teaching to the test."

John (October 23, 2001) joins in the conversation around him by saying, "Standardized tests test for things we don't teach. WISC is deadly. It does not reach the low socio-economic kids."

The dinner guests collectively sip their wine and try not to make eye contact with either John or Rene, knowing that Rene is an advocate of psychometric assessment in the district.

With a smile, Rene (October 17, 2001) looks across the table at John. "Here he goes again on his biased bandwagon. I like the formal standardized test, one-on-one, for figuring out a student's strengths."

Christina, (October 17, 2001) wearing her director of instruction hat, reminds the guests that formal assessment has value. "Without formal assessment, the school district cannot generate funds to help kids."

Jessie (October 13, 2001) looks agreeably at Christina and then goes on to say, "I understand why people want that, because there are schools that graduate lots of students who can't read, and haven't had any extra help, and have learning disabilities that went undiagnosed, and that sort of thing. I think it has gone too far in some places."

Christina (October 17, 2001) resumes with, “I like the Reading Recovery™ kind of assessment. One-on-one is valuable, because you have that rapport with the students. It reduces the student’s stress since there is often a lot of stress and anxiety for a student during formal assessment.”

Sarah (personal communication, October 15, 2001) adds her point to the conversation, “Formal assessment might seem like a safety net. It makes teachers feel more secure in what they are doing.”

“I think formal assessment has value,” Heather (personal communication, October 23, 2001) remarks. “It gives you a general idea of abilities, and I like the list of strategies and recommendations provided. Sometimes they are new, and I can work them into the program.”

Sarah, who teaches children with special needs, (October 15, 2001) quietly responds, “Sometimes we may not be teaching to the needs of the child, even after formal or informal assessment.”

Jessie (October 13, 2001) replies, “That’s right! If you are not going to do anything with the outcome of the assessment, why do the assessment other than, to have a report in his file?”

The appetizers arrive and people let their minds wander from education to food, far away friends, and family. Marlene and Jill make eye contact. The conversation is starting to make connections with their study. Marlene leans toward Jill so they can talk quietly together. Marlene asks Jill if she remembers the article in Winzer and Mazurek’s book that refers to current diagnostic systems. Jill responds, “Isn’t that the one that says, ‘systems were not designed to identify students who needed services, but to withhold

special services from all but a limited group of students' (2000, p. 73). Yes, I remember, but what is your point?"

Marlene replies, "Edgar and Hayden think that the tax dollars are being limited to a small number of students rather than being redirected to improve classroom practices. In addition, Lieberman (1984) wonders if only "ten percent of all children may be designated in need of special education, why are twenty-five percent of children being referred?" (p. 6)."

Jill thinks back to the beginning of the project. "This goes back to our very first question last January. We were concerned with the number of inappropriate referrals and what to do about them. With the school psychologist retiring, we felt that this was something worthwhile and relevant to pursue."

"What do we mean by inappropriate referrals?" said Marlene. "The issue of referring or over-referring does not seem to be a concern for our guests. Why is that? Is it because they do not see the number of referrals at the Board Office? Is it because teachers have gotten into the habit of referring students? I remember my first year as a learning assistance teacher. All of my referrals had been to Jane Smith who does testing that does not include the WISC. The school psychologist's office phoned and asked why I had not referred anybody for formal assessment. I explained that my understanding of the process was that we were to use Jane first and then, if necessary, go on to assessments that are more formal. They agreed that this was the process, but they were still surprised because it was unusual. Even the school psychologist's office had gotten used to dealing with the large number of referrals."

Jill replies, “Although other people at the table do not see the large number of referrals as an issue, we do. Why is that?” Jill pauses to sip some white wine, and then continues. “Perhaps the district’s culture finds this number of referrals appropriate. Each referral generates a costly assessment and there is no guarantee that the assessment will provide funding, or a new educational program. We use the WISC to generate funds. Do we always need to administer a WISC for formal assessment? I have questions about results obtained from the WISC since we have such a cross-section of students, especially First Nations children. Sattler (1988) says, ‘Children come to us from many different ethnic and cultural backgrounds, and these differing backgrounds must be considered in selection of test and interpretation of norms’ (p. 6).”

Marlene reminds Jill that Sattler (1988) also says that these tests have a job to do, and the critics of them have not come up with a reasonable alternative. He goes on to say that we are accountable to the children we serve, and our ethical and professional practices are part of that accountability.

Heather (October 23, 2001) finishes her appetizer first. She is famished after coaching field hockey. She puts down her napkin and gives a classroom teacher’s point of view of psychometric assessment. “Psycho-educational assessment is very frustrating with the huge waiting list, it takes so long, and the parents are anxious. How are you supposed to help the student, when it takes a year to get the assessment done?”

Sarah (October 15, 2001) joins in. “Parents push to get kids assessed. They know their kids better in many ways, but they are not objective, and they are not really trained to assess.” Rene nods at Sarah, “Parents do go to the teachers and ask to have assessments done.”

Marlene glances across the table towards Jessie and says, “You look like you have something on your mind.”

Jessie, who spends a lot of time with the public in her role as counsellor, (October 13, 2001) smiles. “Yes, I think that that is where some of the conflict comes between the public and educators, because the public wants a measure, and I think it is fair to have some kind of measure.”

John (October 23, 2001) laughs, “Parents love grade scores. Teachers love grade scores. Informal assessment drives teachers nuts. No grade scores.”

Sarah (October 15, 2001) speaks with confidence, “Observation is more valuable.”

Jessie (October 13, 2001) agrees, “Yes, but it is impossible to measure.”

Heather (October 23, 2001) joins in, “Oh, I like observation too. I think it is easy, on the spot ... you make notes and move on from there. When we get eTeacher™ up and going, it will make observation and reporting so much easier. It will be slick.”

Sarah (October 15, 2001) reminds the group that not everyone is a computer genius and says, “A lot of classroom teachers may feel that they are not adequately prepared to do informal assessment.”

John (October 23, 2001) suggests that as the school psychologist gets better at formal assessment, the teachers get poorer at assessing their own children. “They rely on her to do assessment in the schools. She takes a lot of responsibility away from the schools. Teachers lose the confidence to assess children.”

Marlene reports, “An article I read recently by Forness, Keogh, MacMillan, Kavale, and Gresham (1998), states that there was a study which shed light on the accuracy of teacher identification and classification of students at risk, for learning difficulties based

on their referrals to school based teams. In this study, children were classified as learning disabled, mildly mentally handicapped, or low achievers. The teachers were able to identify the combined at-risk groups from the control group with 95% accuracy.”

Christina (October 17, 2001) adds, “That’s right. Teachers don’t give themselves credit for what they have done in the classroom.”

Rene (October 17, 2001) says, “I think the teachers do things before they come to the learning assistance teachers, but they haven’t recorded them.”

Sarah (October 15, 2001) wonders, “Do teachers feel that they lack permission to assess in other ways? Is that why they are reluctant to use other forms of assessment like multiple intelligences tests?”

As the guests think about Sarah’s questions, the main course arrives. The group settles down to enjoy the meal.

Marlene glances at Jill, who leans forward. They talk quietly together.

Jill says, “It looks like you are struggling with something. Do you want to discuss it? We can eat and talk at the same time.”

Marlene takes a deep breath and says, “I have been teaching for a long time, and I am still reluctant to share the great things that happen in my class with other professionals. I do not advertise what I am doing in my classroom because I do not know if I am doing assessment right. I am a ‘closet’ assessor.”

Jill replies, “I think most teachers feel they are ‘closet’ assessors. They teach in isolation and assess in isolation. What do teachers need to become more confident of their assessment practices? Will that confidence help them share those experiences with others?”

After thinking for a moment, Marlene says, “I think that the confidence issue is important. I find that it helps me to read an authoritative source and hold my practice up to that standard. Sometimes it is humbling and sometimes it is affirming. One source that I have studied quite intently of late is *The Review of Special Education in British Columbia (2000)*.”

“What part of the review caught your attention?” Jill asked.

“It is the part where Siegel says, ‘It is important to re-evaluate current assessment/identification practices and implement alternative strategies, where necessary, to ensure that more students are supported within the context of regular education and to ensure that those who do require special education supports receive them in a timely manner’ (p. 27).”

After surveying the room, Marlene looks back at Jill and adds, “I like the part of the report where she says, ‘by skillfully using classroom based assessment, teachers can make adaptations to their instruction that will benefit students and may preclude the need for more expensive formal assessments and interventions’ (p. 28).”

Jill replies, “That’s what we want ... something that will benefit students.”

As the waiter clears dishes from the table, Jessie (October 13, 2001) brings the group back to the discussion on informal assessment. “If you want a true holistic measure, it is going to take an enormous amount of time. How can we give accurate and meaningful assessment when we have thirty students in our class?”

“I agree!” Heather (October 23, 2001) chimes in. “Student self-assessment is a wonderful tool, but very time consuming.”

Jill jumps in with, “My hero, Richard Stiggins, would also agree. He says, ‘Because the typical teacher can spend a third to a half of his or her professional time in assessment-related activities, teachers need in-service opportunities to learn assessment strategies’ (Sparks, 1999, p. 1).”

Before anyone can respond, the waiter wheels in the dessert cart. As people choose from a wonderful selection of desserts, Marlene and Jill speak quietly to each other. Their conversation revolves around the kind of support that would be best for teachers so that they can do their best for children.

John (October 23, 2001) smiles, content with his cup of coffee and says, “Well, this has been such an enjoyable evening. If you all had one wish to change assessment for the district, what would it be?”

Jessie (October 13, 2001) is the first to speak. “I actually have many, but two top my list. I wish that every child had an individual education plan, and I would like to see school-based teams function more effectively and consistently throughout the district.”

After a thoughtful pause, Sarah (October 15, 2001) says, “There should be a standard policy to protect the psycho-educational assessment referral process, like using the school-based team. I would like to see teachers get the time they need to confer with colleagues, have a buddy, or be part of a mentoring group. Another wish is to have someone come into each school to teach teachers how to do informal assessment.”

Heather (October 23, 2001) reminds everyone that the district does provide an abundance of training such as eTeacher™ and Understanding by Design™. “My wish is that every teacher is provided with these wonderful in-services and the cool technology

that accompanies them. I don't know what I would do without my Palm Pilot™ and laptop computer with its Airport™ technology.”

Christina (October 17, 2001) asks Rene to pass the cream and sugar. Then she says, “I think I can speak for Rene and myself when I say, that in a perfect world, it would be wonderful to have each struggling child assessed, then put a plan in place to ensure the child would receive one-on-one support.”

Rene (October 23, 2001) affirms with, “I completely agree.”

Marlene speaks up. “In a perfect world, children would be valued for who they are, not where they rank in the class. In my perfect world, all children would realize that they are gifted in their own way, and they would feel the respect of others for that giftedness. We would not need psychometric assessment to get money to support kids. Further, classroom teachers would have the time and energy to focus on what is important, individual student growth within the classroom setting.”

Jill, barely able to contain herself, blurts, “I agree with you whole-heartedly! In my perfect world, money would be no object, and teachers would have access to any kind of support and training they need, in order to teach the whole child. Every child comes to school from so many diverse backgrounds. We need to teach the whole child. We need to take care of that child's basic needs. The bottom line is that we are here to do what is best for each child.”

John (October 23, 2001) continues to smile and leans back. “Thank-you. Wow! What a wonderful bunch of ideas. Our kids are so blessed.”

With the disappearance of dessert, the guests become restless. Home lives are calling. Jill and Marlene thank everyone for coming and sharing their experiences. Each of them has provided plenty of food for thought.

Chapter 5: Gathering Our Thoughts

Introduction

Chapter 5 gathers and synthesizes the myriad of events, thoughts, and images of our inquiry into assessment. From our initial quest for the perfect question to the recommendations proposed, this journey has been one of discovery and self-realization. The inquiry processes of reflection, comparison, conversation, literature search, gathering artefacts, and hermeneutics, exposed many of the intricacies of assessment. Each step along the trail challenged our personal paradigms and beliefs, leaving us changed.

To reach an understanding with one's partner in a dialogue is not merely a matter of total self-expression and the successful assertion of one's own point of view, but a transformation into a communion, in which we do not remain what we were. (Gadamer, 1975, p. 341)

Our final steps begin by reviewing the journey taken and the knowledge assembled.

The act of Conversing

The history of the district is in the memories of its people. We chose conversation to expose and record these memories. There were surprising elements in each conversation. We learned from what people said, and from what they did not say. From the data collected, we formulated generalizations about assessment practice. However, in order to understand ourselves and remain open to the words of others, we had to step outside of our school district perceptions and culture. We used hermeneutics to find our place, to examine what we do, to determine who we are in relation to others in our district, and to help us create meaning, not just report on our findings. We needed to hear the intent of the conversations without overlaying our own preconceptions. Hans-George Gadamer (1975) in *Truth and Method* says that we understand the conversations we have with text, because we are part of the common tradition with the text. However, that same tradition

also makes self-understanding difficult, because we will consider the text from a more biased point of view. It is as if our tradition obstructs a new perspective of our culture. Only through a great deal of self-discipline, debate and dialogue, could we overcome those cultural obstructions, and then only in part.

The art of Questioning

To conduct a conversation means to allow oneself to be conducted by the object to which the partners in conversation are directed. It requires that one does not try to out-argue the other person, but that one really considers the weight of the other's opinion. Hence, it is an art of testing. But the art of testing is the art of questioning ... to question means to lay open, to place in the open. (Gadamer, 1975, p. 330)

In the beginning, we did not use the art of questioning. We thought we had all the answers. We spent eleven months in search of a question that would lead us to the answers we already had. Our initial question was born in our certainty that there was a systemic problem with assessment in our district. We had a tiny piece of the puzzle and we were sure we knew what was wrong. We were not even interested in the question, only in the answer, which we already knew. Reluctantly, we realized we did not have the answers; we did not even have the question.

For someone who uses dialogue only in order to prove himself right and not to gain insight, asking questions will indeed seem easier than answering them. ... In order to be able to ask, one must want to know, which involves knowing that one does not know. (Gadamer, 1975, p. 326)

Now the search for the question took on new importance. Our jobs in learning assistance, The University of Lethbridge courses, and our training with the district's school psychologist all influenced our search for the ideal question. Conversation, however, proved to be the most influential. Gradually, the pieces fell into place. Our question became *Student assessment in School District #59: What is it all about?*

Throughout the conversation and the questioning, there was a tension between our question and our preconceived answers. This is where the conversational mode of inquiry saved us. We thought that something was wrong with assessment in the district. However, what we thought was most important was not apparent in the six conversations with school district personnel. Was this our perspective alone? From the literature, we concluded that other jurisdictions were reviewing assessment with a critical eye. Lieberman (1984), Safran and Safran (1996), Siegel (2000), Wiggins (1998), and Stiggins (1999) all agree that educational institutions can improve assessment practices. In *Special Education in the 21st Century: Issues of Inclusion and Reform*, Slater and Jones (2000) state, “Today’s assessment system is fundamentally flawed and cannot be saved even with drastic modifications” (p. 69).

Initially we would have suspected that this quote is partially accurate, although we believe that today’s assessment system is not beyond redemption. The participants of the dinner party did not refer to assessment as flawed. This did surprise us. In our efforts to protect the conversationalists from our own agenda, we may have inadvertently prevented dialogue on what we perceived the issues to be surrounding assessment. Something else we gained from the conversations was a stronger sense of empathy and understanding for our colleagues. The conversations revealed four related issues – teacher use of formal versus informal assessment, teacher lack of confidence in their abilities to assess, teacher accountability to provincial and school district policies and parents, and teachers lack of time to conduct formal and informal assessment.

Formal Versus Informal Assessment

The use of formal versus informal assessment is a concern for both classroom and learning assistance teachers. Both use a variety of informal assessment strategies including observation and self-assessment to measure the progress of their students. Heather Winslow (personal communication, October 23, 2001) reports, “I like observation too. I think it is easy, on the spot ... you make notes and move on from there. When we get eTeacher™ up and going, it will make observation and reporting so much easier.” At the same time, the province mandates standardized achievement testing in Grade 4, Grade 7, Grade 10, and Grade 12. Jessie Wetherall expresses her opinion about provincial standardized testing by saying, “Personally, I think that provincial exams should be thrown out the window because I don’t think that they are in line anymore with the kinds of learning outcomes that we want in our schools” (personal communication, October 13, 2001).

In the 1980s, David Bateson helped the district take a more critical look at standardized assessment. He argued that criterion-referenced assessment was more appropriate than standardized tests unless teachers teach to the test. Bateson reminded the district’s teachers that standardized tests are norm-referenced, using white middle-class children. As a result, the district stopped using the Canadian Test of Basic Skills [CTBS] for system-wide standardized assessment. Christina Thomas’ (personal communication, October 17, 2001) memories of the CTBS were that “when teachers gave the CTBS it got to the point where they were just teaching to the test.”

When the results from classroom and standardized tests indicate that students are not making the anticipated progress, educators look for reasons for that lack of success.

When they have examined the child's behaviour, attitude, lack of parental support, attendance and health, among other things, teachers then must look elsewhere for the guidance. There are many informal assessments that teachers can use to help identify strengths and reasons for lack of student success. However, teachers in this district are reluctant to rely on these tools. Teachers do not trust informal assessment results or value these findings for building student programs. Instead, they depend on standardized assessments performed by experts. Jessie Wetherall, school counsellor, says, "I understand why people want that [formal assessment], because there are schools that graduate lots of students who can't read, and haven't had any extra help, and have learning disabilities that went undiagnosed" (personal communication, October 13, 2001). Heather Winslow, classroom teacher, supports this opinion when she says, "I think formal assessment has value. It gives you a general idea of abilities, and I like the list of strategies and recommendations provided. Sometimes they are new, and I can work them into the program" (personal communication, October 23, 2001). According to Forness, Keogh, MacMillan, Kavale, and Gresham (1998) teachers using informal assessment practices can identify students classified as learning disabled, mildly mentally handicapped, or low achievers with 95% accuracy. If this is the case, how valuable is formal assessment? To answer our own question, formal assessment is worthwhile because it provides a standardized measure of a child's ability to support funding and program planning. Whether teachers are using informal assessment as a classroom tool or as a precursor to a psycho-educational assessment, they still must contend with three more issues. Teachers do not feel confident to do the assessment, they feel pressured to do it, and they do not feel they have the time to do the assessment.

Teacher Lack of Confidence in Their Abilities to Assess

According to the conversations, teachers lack confidence in assessing students. This issue connects closely with the first issue of using formal versus informal assessment. Jessie Wetherall (personal communication, October 13, 2001) asks, “What if this kid has a learning disability that I have missed?” Other participants expressed the position that teachers do not give themselves credit for what they do. They feel inadequately prepared to do informal assessment. Sarah Cunningham (personal communication, October 15, 2001) says, “Sometimes teachers feel overwhelmed. They are inexperienced. Teachers do not realize that they do have the knowledge to assess children. My wish is to have someone come into each school to teach teachers how to do informal assessment.” John Kendrew also expresses the opinion that teachers have lost confidence in their ability to assess children. (personal communication, October 23, 2001) In a recent interview, Rick Stiggins proposed a similar opinion when he said of teachers,

Generally, they’re not very well prepared. Only a handful of states require competency in assessment as a condition of licensure. Even more troubling is that only three states require competence in assessment for principal certification. The vast majority of practicing teachers and administrators has not had the opportunity to develop the assessment literacy they need. (Sparks, 1999, p. 1)

In the past, School District #59 encouraged teacher confidence through training in several initiatives including the University of Victoria’s program for learning assistance teachers, and year-round professional development opportunities. Heather Winslow (personal communication, October 23, 2001) recalls that the district provided training for such things as eTeacher™ and Understanding by Design™.

Teacher Accountability to Provincial and School District Policies and Parents

Teacher accountability to employers and parents is another issue. Sarah Cunningham (personal communication, October 15, 2001) states, “Parents push to get kids assessed. They know their kids better in many ways, but they are not objective, and they are not really trained to assess.” Rene Chadwick (personal communication, October 17, 2001) says, “Parents do go to the teachers and ask to have assessments done.” Teachers often give into the pressure even though it may contradict their best judgement. Grant Wiggins (1998) offers the advice that

The gap between our teaching intent and our teaching effect is profound -- more wide and deep than many educators imagine. We can close it only by learning to think as assessors of our own and students’ skills and understanding, and by becoming better researchers into our own practice (p. 11).

Teacher Lack of Time to Conduct Formal and Informal Assessment

The demand for teacher accountability leads to the final issue – time constraints. Jessie Wetherall (personal communication, October 23, 2001) states, “Student self-assessment is a wonderful tool, but very time consuming.” She goes on to criticize psycho-educational assessment as “frustrating with its huge waiting list. How are you supposed to help the student, when it takes a year to get the assessment done?” Stiggins (2001) says that the greatest barrier to quality assessment from a teacher’s perspective is the lack of time to assess well. He includes a conversation between two experienced teachers as they discuss the issues:

Mr. Smith: I just can’t handle any more of this school improvement stuff. First it’s cooperative learning, then it’s thematic instruction and integrated learning. Now they want us to muck around with the schedules. You know, now, we’re ‘restructuring.’ Wow, so many changes. Oh, and by the way, when am I supposed to teach?

Mr. Lorenz: I hear ya. And on top of that, there’s all the new assessment practices we’re supposed to be using. Like performance assessment-observe ‘em and judge

‘em. Why can’t I just give ‘em a test like I used to? I don’t have time to do all that work. (p. 106)

In the beginning, we believed that there was a systemic problem with assessment in this district. However, the dinner party conversations do not confirm this belief. Instead, this sample of district personnel appears to take assessment for granted. They do not question the fundamental issues. Their concerns are context dependent, except for Kendrew who seems critical of policies he helped put in place. Interpreting the text of the dinner party, we realized that the recommendations we make have to address the conversationalist’s concerns as well as our own. As we develop our recommendations, Wiggins (1998) reminds us that assessment reform is not as simple as throwing out the existing model. He advocates an assessment of deficiencies in the existing system, to enable changes that not only measure student progress, but also to encourage excellence. In the process of looking for deficiencies, it is also important to identify and recognize strengths.

Recommendations

Currently classroom teacher assess and then refer struggling students for formal assessment to a school psychologist. Sometimes these referrals go through the School-Based Team. Sometimes they go through the learning assistance teachers. There is a long list of referrals and the school psychologist works on a part-time contract. Based on this study, our recommendations place the responsibility for student assessment with the schools because they are dependent upon the school psychologist. If we want assessment to be timely, authentic, and guide instruction, it must begin in the classroom. What follows are three recommendations that have evolved from our research conversations and text review. Each recommendation is based on the related issues raised at the dinner

party -- teacher use of formal versus informal assessment, teacher lack of confidence in their abilities to assess, teacher accountability to provincial and school district policies and parents, and teachers lack of time to conduct formal and informal assessment.

Recommendation 1: Form collaborative teacher groups.

Many teachers feel overwhelmed by the current trend towards increased accountability. Recent government policies and expectations reflect this trend. This stress due to accountability undermines teacher confidence and pushes them into isolation. One example of this educational accountability trend was the *Year 2000* initiative in British Columbia in the 1980s and 1990s. The non-retention policy of School District #59 (February, 1999) also adds to the stress of accountability. This shift from grade retention to outcome-based assessment has created confusion for teachers, parents, and students.

Collaborative teams provide cost-effective and timely support for problem-solving groups formed within the school setting. “Given the diversity and complexity of today’s learners and their ever-changing life contexts, collaboration with families, across disciplines, and among agencies is not optional” (Villa, Thousand, Nevin, and Malgeri, 1996, p. 170). We recommend that teachers create collaborative teams with their colleagues to engage in meaningful conversation about classroom assessment practices. This is not to be confused with School-Based Teams. School-Based Teams are a mandate of the province, however, collaborative teams are teachers seeking each other out toward a common goal of improving their practice.

Only by attaining a sufficiently high level of assessment literacy - that is, an understanding of the principles of sound assessment - can we gain access to the equipment needed to remove ... barriers. We remain fearful about wisdom to make our assessment job faster, easier, and better if we do not understand the assessment economies we have at our disposal. (Stiggins, 2001, p. 107)

One model of a collaborative team in action is at Central Middle School. A group of Grade 7 teachers and two learning assistance teachers presented a proposal for a foundation initiative. The local teachers union and local school district jointly support foundation initiatives. Teachers submit proposals asking financial assistance to support targeted professional development plans. With this support, these educators committed to a yearlong study of reading instruction through a guided reading program. Their intent was to support each other and the literacy of their students. This group continues to meet once every eight days for training, problem solving, and conversation. This model has provided these teachers with the support they needed to take on a new challenge.

Collaborative teams give teachers a forum in which they can converse about changes in assessment practices and expectations. Participation in collaborative teams provides opportunities to share ideas and experiences, problem solve, give and receive support, and reduce teacher isolation. Teachers should be better able to meet society's demands for accountability if they can support each other through collaborative teacher teams. Within these teams, teachers have the opportunity to look critically at the assessment practices of colleagues, both in the classroom and in their planning documents. The trust and collegiality built within the team provide a safe venue for sharing and growth.

Recommendation 2: Develop an alternative delivery model.

Siegel (2000) says formal psycho-educational assessment is typically unnecessary for students with learning disabilities. It is not always in the best educational interests of the student, despite its current use to justify extra government funding. While there is a place for formal psycho-educational assessment, it is costly and time consuming. Our second recommendation consists of a new service delivery model that will eliminate

some of the unnecessary formal assessments. It consists of three pieces. The first component is training for learning assistance teachers in the area of formal assessment. When learning assistance teachers are able to perform preliminary formal assessment, most of the questions teachers and parents ask will be answered. The second piece is that the district define a clear referral process involving School-Based Teams and that each school adheres to this process. The final piece is providing encouragement and training for educators in the use of *functional behaviour assessment*.

School District #59's school psychologist retired in June 1999. With no replacement available, the district needed a new service delivery model. While there was a school psychologist, the purpose for referrals was predictable (see Appendix A). Teachers referred students for three main reasons: to acquire strategies that might help the child academically; to obtain tactics that might improve the child's behaviour; and to secure government funding for cognitive disabilities. In order to secure funding, a school psychologist must administer the assessment. However, only two percent of the students who receive a formal assessment qualify for funding. If the purpose is to acquire academic or behavioural strategies, there are several alternatives to assessment by a school psychologist.

In 1994, the school district developed a process for referring students for formal assessment and other outside interventions. This process received modifications in September 2001 (see Appendix B) to incorporate the role of the School-Based Team. Lieberman (1984) states, "In order for the system to function in line with its conceptualisation, a series of steps must be undertaken prior to the advent of special education services" (p. 12). We agree with Lieberman's statement and recommend that

school staffs adhere to the district's published process. Ensuring adherence to this process becomes the responsibility of the School-Based Team. An effective and functional School-Based Team is the responsibility of all educators. (A description of the School-Based Team appears in Appendix C.) School cultures influence School-Based Team processes but it is important to maintain the integrity of the referral process. If the referral process remains intact, it will mean timely support for both child and teacher.

Even without formal assessment, schools can recognize students who are experiencing learning difficulties. Forness, Keogh, MacMillan, Kavale, and Gersham (1998) provide an affirmation that teachers are able to identify children who are learning disabled, mildly mentally handicapped, and low achievers with 95% accuracy. Intervention programs provided early in the primary grades may foster student success by helping students to become effective learners before learning difficulties result in student failure/retention and low self-esteem. Such programs may also decrease negative outcomes for students, such as early school leaving, delinquency, and dependency on social assistance (Siegel, 2000). For instance, the classroom teacher can administer a *functional behavioural assessment* (see Appendix D). A functional behavioural assessment is a feasible alternative to a formal assessment, useful when referrals are submitted because of behaviour issues. A functional assessment does not deal with the pathology of the child's problem but identifies the antecedents of the behaviours. With this information, the teacher creates and implements a multi-element support plan that curbs negative behaviour and reinforces positive behaviour. The functional behaviour assessment's multi-element support plan reflects changes in the physical, biological,

environmental, and social settings that the child faces. As well, it reflects changes in the cause of the behaviour and the resulting consequences.

Recommendation 3: Participate in district-wide assessment training.

From the time of Dale Fiddick in the 1970s, this district has offered extensive training for teachers. This training continues to focus on improving the classroom practices of instruction, assessment, and intervention. These training opportunities, which were open to all educators, occurred during professional development days and summer institutes. Some of the professional development opportunities included training in the implementation of School-Based Teams, in-depth study of Outcome Based Education and Assessment, Functional Behavioural Assessment, and a practical look at Multiple Intelligences. With this training, teachers in the district are better equipped to meet the assessment needs of their students within the classroom itself. Siegel (2000) writes that, “By skilfully using classroom based assessment teachers can make adaptations to their instruction that will benefit students and may preclude the need for more expensive formal assessments and interventions” (p. 28). We feel that by continuing to offer and participate in these training opportunities, classroom teachers will become more skilful with assessment.

This guides us to the issue of teacher confidence in assessing abilities and teacher accountability to employers and parents. The district has encouraged teacher confidence by creating a cohort in the Masters of Education program at The University of Lethbridge. Within the district, there has been a concerted effort towards giving teachers the tools they need to improve their practice and their craft. Some of these tools include training in the use of Understanding by Design, Reading Recovery™, Fred Jones’

Positive Classroom Discipline and Positive Classroom Instruction, and Cognitive Coaching. Peace River South Teachers' Association, in conjunction with the District, provides Foundation Initiatives, such as the one proposed by Central Middle School's Grade 7 teachers, which supports teachers in their efforts to define what they need to know more about and how they propose to get that information.

In October of 2001, all learning assistance teachers in the district completed a training needs survey (see Appendix E). Student Support Services held a forum to discuss the assessment training needs of the district's learning assistance teachers. Most of these teachers indicated that they lacked training in formal protocols such as PPVT, EVT, Raven's, Rosner TAAS, Canada Quiet, Roswell-Chall, and the WRAT. The results also indicated that all of the learning assistance teachers, regardless of experience, felt that they would benefit from more training in the area of formal assessment. With this training in administering and interpreting formal assessments, school-based learning assistance teachers can help students without relying on outside interventions.

The lack of time is another issue for the participants. Within the district, training has been provided to help teachers find the time to do their job well. These programs include graphic facilitation training, Fred Jones' Positive Classroom Discipline and Positive Classroom Instruction, and Seven Habits for Highly Effective People™. All of the areas of professional development listed above have led school district personnel to seek further study in order to become trainers themselves. This focus of exposure and in-depth training in professional areas must continue since new teachers to the district need similar training opportunities. Experienced teachers will benefit from these initiatives as well.

We acknowledge the efforts and foresight of the School District #59 educators who implement these training opportunities. We recommend that they keep up the good work!

Conclusion

The question remains—*Student assessment in School District #59: What is it all about?* The answer is that assessment in this district is about several generations of teachers working hard to find reliable indicators of student progress. It is about teachers reporting that progress to parents and public. It is about teachers using that assessment to guide instructional practices and to adapt or modify that instruction to do what is best for students.

Every teacher has favourite styles of assessing, from teacher-directed formal assessment, such as the Reading Recovery™ Observation Survey, to informal assessment, which include checklists and student self-assessment. As with much else in education, it is easy to become attached to techniques that are familiar and comfortable. In spite of this, teachers in School District #59 value the opportunities to learn new things about assessment. One such teacher attended what was, for her, a stressful professional development day. It was stressful because she was asked to move away from comfortable strategies and attempt something new for the benefit of her students. At the end of the day, she stood in front of her peers and offered a metaphor for professional development. For her, professional development was like standing in the water of an ocean beach. One huge wave after another sweeps in and knocks you down. When you get to your feet and make your way to the safety of the beach, you put your hands in your pocket and find little treasures that the waves left behind. What you do with those treasures is up to you. For all those who listened to her heartfelt analogy that day, learning new things would

never be the same. Her words would be the first treasure they found in their pockets that day.

As teachers and researchers we continue to wrestle with the question – What is assessment and what is its significance? Teachers know that they are accountable for the progress that their students make. They know that test scores are published and the public is interested. Teachers sometimes feel overwhelmed by this responsibility. It is important for them to share their concerns and provide support for each other. As with everything else, resources change -- be they people, money, time, or expertise -- and new models must be considered to meet the needs of children within this new environment.

The greatest limitation to our study may be that we ran out of time. We could have held conversations with an almost endless number of people because education is their passion and ours. Another limiting factor is that we are still working from inside our culture and we are influenced by it in ways we cannot detect.

The study was valuable because we felt free to try new things. We learned new things about the district, our colleagues, assessment and teamwork. The process of reflection, comparison, conversation, literature search, artefact collection, and hermeneutics guided our inquiry into assessment. Determining what assessment in School District #59 is all about took us on a journey of discoveries. We discovered that assessment is inevitable and complex. We discovered that our colleagues are valuable resources who need ways to converse collaboratively. We discovered that conversation is an amazing instrument. Conversation has been the compass for this exploration. We discovered that assessment in School District #59 parallels world trends. The initial purposes for formal assessment were to protect the needs of handicapped children and

include them within the regular school population wherever possible. This underlying principle of assessment has been expanded to support and safeguard the needs of all learners.

As we reach the end of the journey, we see new pathways ahead.

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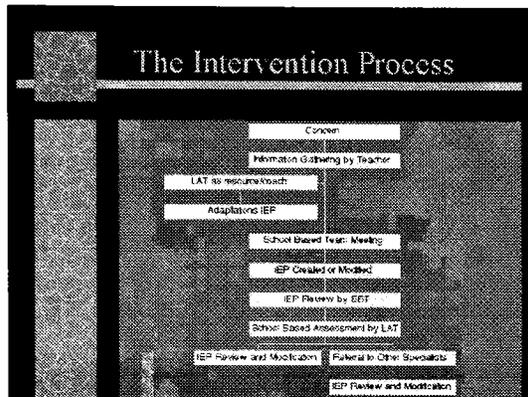
Appendix A

Sample of Reasons for Referring Students for Formal Assessment

- 1978 Academic(language), hearing loss? Is one ear better than the other?(Gr. 5)
- 1978 Academic and behaviour (Gr. 1)
- 1978 Academic (Gr. 3)
- 1978 Academic (inability to read and remember) and behaviour (Gr. 9)
- 1978 Academic (on probation) (remedial...Gr. 7?)
- 1978 Lack of achievement (Gr. 7)
- 1979 Spinal meningitis before starting school; academic concerns as well as behaviour (Gr 11)
- 1979 behaviour; slow writing ability (Gr. 8)
- 1979 Academic...performing below capacity...attendance (Gr. 8)
- 1979 Academic, attendance, performing below capacity, negative attitude (Gr.8)
- 1979 Low academic performance, low participation in science lab (Gr. 8)
- 1979 Academic and other (not specified)...possibly behaviour (Gr. 1)
- 1979 Academic, behaviour, and other (not specified)(Gr. 4)
- 1979 Inability to function in regular class (Gr. 5)
- 1979 Academic, speech and behaviour (disorganized, low attention span)(Gr. 3)
- 1979 Academic (Gr.6)
- 1979 Academic (from Blue Rose, age 17)
- 1979 Behaviour (frequent and violent outbursts)
- 1980 Academic (low spelling and math) (Gr. 9)
- 1980 Academic...little progress (Open Door and Blue Rose, age 12)
- 1980 Academic and other (Gr. 2)
- 1980 Academic (Gr. 7), Did not score on the Peabody.
- 1980 Academic and possible behaviour, poor work habits, second year in grade 1 (Gr. 3)
- 1980 Academic (had been in speech) (Gr. 3)
- 1980 Speech and Academic (Gr. 3)
- 1980 Academic...phonics and sight vocabulary (Gr. 3)
- 1980 Academic (Gr. 4)
- 1980 Academic (Gr. 1)
- 1980 Request for psychometric testing from Dr. (Gr. 7)
- 1980 Academic (Gr.4)
- 1980 Academic and Physical (Gr. 8)
- 1980 Academic (Gr. 2)
- 1980 Academic (Gr. 3) Notre Dame
- 1980 Speech and Physical (Gr. 1)
- 1980 Academic and Physical (Gr. 5), Perceptual difficulties.
- 1980 Academic (Gr. 3 or 4), Math.
- 1981 Academic, Physical, Speech and Behaviour (Kindergarten), CDC missed appointments

Appendix B

The Intervention Process Slides



1

Adaptations IEP?

- ◆ The classroom teacher lists student strengths based on observations, checklists and work samples
 - If an Adaptations IEP can resolve the concern, one is written (teacher and LAT)
 - If the adaptations resolve the concern, the process ends

4

A Concern

- ◆ A Concern is expressed about a student
 - Academic
 - Motor
 - Language
 - Memory
 - Health
 - Behaviour
 - Social

2

School Based Team

- ◆ At a formal SBT meeting an IEP is created or modified
 - The IEP may be written around adaptations or modifications
 - An IEP meeting includes parents and usually includes the student

5

Information Gathering

- ◆ The classroom teacher gathers information
 - This may be guided by the Learning Assistance Teacher in the role of coach or resource person
 - If the concern is resolved, the process ends

3

IEP Review

- ◆ The IEP is reviewed at least 3 times per year
 - After an IEP review the SBT may decide to recommend school-based assessment by the LAT

6

School-based Assessment

- ◆ Depending on the training of the LAT, there are several assessments that may be done.
- ◆ Information from these assessments are brought back to the SBT.
- ◆ Information from the assessment is used to modify the IEP and/or make a referral to other specialists.

7

Assessment Information

- ◆ Information gathered by the other specialists is used to modify the IEP.

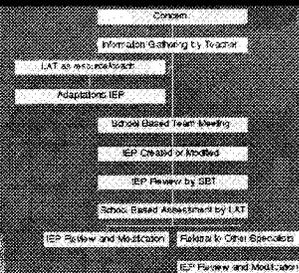
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Referral to Other Specialists

- ◆ Referrals from the SBT may go to
 - Speech Therapist
 - School Counselor
 - Family doctor
 - Audiologist
 - Optometrist
 - School Psychologist
 - Public Health

8

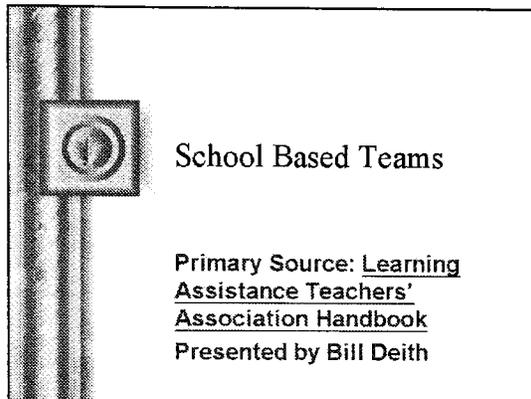
Pre-referral Intervention Flowchart



10

Appendix C

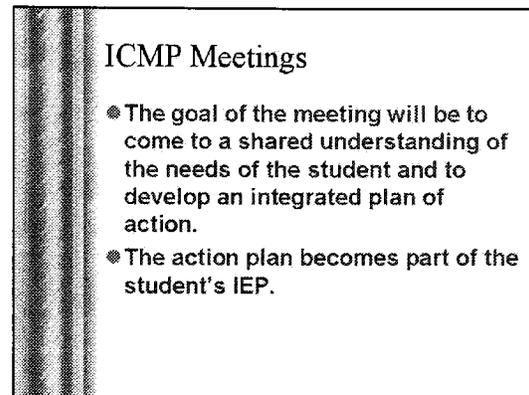
School-based Team Slides



School Based Teams

Primary Source: Learning Assistance Teachers' Association Handbook
Presented by Bill Deith

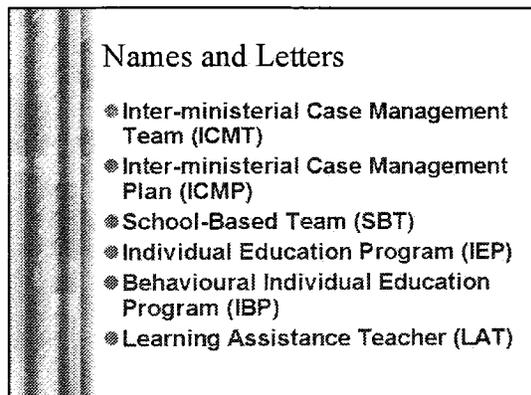
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ICMP Meetings

- The goal of the meeting will be to come to a shared understanding of the needs of the student and to develop an integrated plan of action.
- The action plan becomes part of the student's IEP.

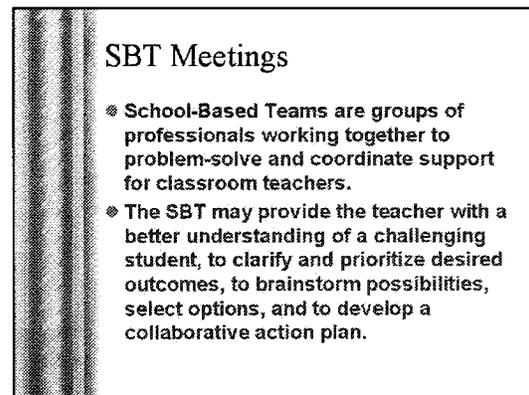
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Names and Letters

- Inter-ministerial Case Management Team (ICMT)
- Inter-ministerial Case Management Plan (ICMP)
- School-Based Team (SBT)
- Individual Education Program (IEP)
- Behavioural Individual Education Program (IBP)
- Learning Assistance Teacher (LAT)

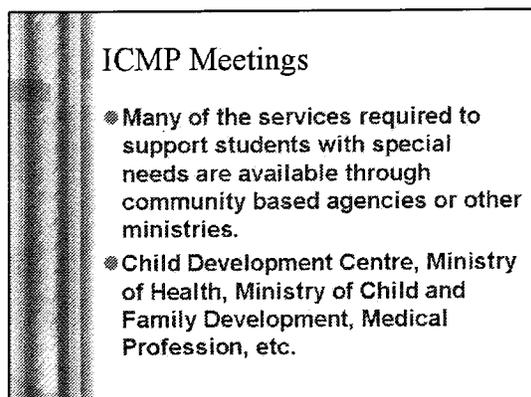
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SBT Meetings

- School-Based Teams are groups of professionals working together to problem-solve and coordinate support for classroom teachers.
- The SBT may provide the teacher with a better understanding of a challenging student, to clarify and prioritize desired outcomes, to brainstorm possibilities, select options, and to develop a collaborative action plan.

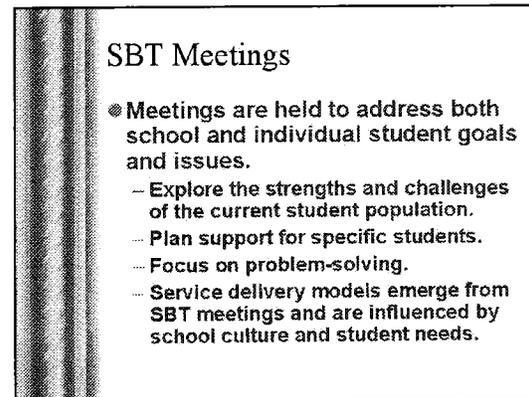
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ICMP Meetings

- Many of the services required to support students with special needs are available through community based agencies or other ministries.
- Child Development Centre, Ministry of Health, Ministry of Child and Family Development, Medical Profession, etc.

3



SBT Meetings

- Meetings are held to address both school and individual student goals and issues.
 - Explore the strengths and challenges of the current student population.
 - Plan support for specific students.
 - Focus on problem-solving.
 - Service delivery models emerge from SBT meetings and are influenced by school culture and student needs.

6

Student Needs Process

1. **The teacher notices that a student is struggling.**
2. **Observations are discussed with the parents or guardians.**
3. **Information is gathered (observations, parents, files, etc)**
 - * Informal, classroom-based assessment
 - * Classroom-based adaptations are planned
 - * Have hearing and vision checked

7

Student Needs Process

- **School-based Resources Include**
 - Learning Assistance Teachers
 - Counsellors
 - School-based Team
- **District-based Resources Include**
 - Speech and Language Pathologist
 - Vision and Hearing Itinerant Teachers
 - School Psychologist
 - Behaviour and Alternative Programs
 - District Helping Teachers
- **Community-based Resources Include**
 - Social Services
 - Mental Health
 - Medical Profession

10

Student Needs Process

4. **If the adaptations work, only continue monitoring of student**
5. **If adaptations do not solve the difficulty**
 - Additional assessment and intervention is required . . .
 - * Assistance in planning intervention is requested
 - Referral is made to access resources outside the classroom.

8

SBT Composition

- **School-based Teams have a small group of regular members that usually include**
 - An administrative officer
 - A learning assistance teacher
 - A counsellor
- **On a case by case basis other people are included**
 - Classroom teachers
 - Parents/guardians
 - Students (if willing and/or able)
 - District or Community Resource people

11

Student Needs Process

6. **An IEP is developed using School-based Resources and sometimes District-based Resources**
 - One teacher is designated as IEP coordinator
 - The coordinator could be the classroom teacher, the Learning Assistance Teacher, or other personnel as appropriate
7. **If community-based resources are included, an Integrated Case Management Plan (ICMP) is created**
 - This plan coordinates the efforts of all personnel involved with the student.

9

Appendix D

Functional Behavioural Assessment Slides

Functional Behavioural Assessment

Presented by:
Marlene Deith & Jill Hartwell

1

Outcomes of FBA

- Development of one or more summary statements that describe specific behaviour(s), when they occur and the outcomes / reinforcers maintaining them.
- Collection of direct observation data.

4

What is FBA?

- A process to determine the function or communication message(s) behind behaviour

2

By the end of this assessment we will be able to:

- View behaviour from a communication perspective.
- Figure out the message behind the behaviour.
- Teach a new communication skill that has the same message and is more effective.
- Implement multiple strategies reflecting best practices.

5

Primary Outcomes of FBA

- A clear description of problem behaviours
- Identification of events, times and situations that predict when behaviours will and will not occur.
- Identification of consequences that maintain the problem behaviour

3

The important communication messages are

- Tangibles ("I want person, place or thing.")
- Attention and social interaction ("I want social interaction and attention.")
- Escape / avoid ("I don't want, event, place or thing.")
- Sensory ("I am over or under stimulated.")

What does the person get or avoid by using this challenging behaviour?

6

A FBA is done by looking at the whole picture

- a) person
- b) behaviour(s) of concern
- c) setting events
- d) antecedents
- e) consequences

7

Determine the target behaviour

- We need to recall our definition for behaviour. A behaviour is an observable, measurable act an individual performs.
- We use the Functional Assessment Interview form to gather information for this piece.
- We pick one target (priority) behaviour.
- We describe the topography (what it looks like).

10

We need to see this person in terms of:

- strengths or gifts
- learning style
- communication profile
- sensory profile
- people preferences
- activity preferences
- environmental preferences

8

Setting Events (Slow Trigger)

- These are events that happen at the same time as the behaviour or at some point distant in time.

11

Discover the person using the Personal Profile

- The personal profile is built by talking to the person directly, and the people that know him or her best.
- The personal profile is built by searching the person's file to learn more about their history.
- The process is informal.
- It is a conversation and the beginning of the story, focusing on the person's strengths, preferences, hopes and dreams.

9

The three categories of setting events are:

- physiological or biological
- physical or environmental
- social or interpersonal

12

Antecedent (Fast Trigger)

- This is the event, action, or situation that occurs before the behaviour and influences the likelihood that the behaviour will occur.

13

Building the child's Behaviour Support Plan

A Behaviour Support Plan should:

- flow logically from the results of the functional assessment
- consist of multiple strategies for:
 - setting event changes
 - antecedent changes
 - teaching replacement communication skills
 - consequence changes

16

Consequence

- This is any event, action or stimulus that occurs after a behaviour and influences whether the behaviour goes up or down

14

Setting Event (Slow Trigger)

- events that happen at the same time as the behaviour or at some point distant in time

17

At the end of the FBA, you should be able to:

- "draw a picture" of the basic events that contribute to the behaviour
- and develop a summary statement about the communication message of each challenging behaviour

15

Setting Event Supports

There are two options for dealing with setting events:

- change circumstances to eliminate setting events
- provide supports to offset the impact of setting events

18

Antecedent (Fast Trigger)

- event, action, etc. that occurs before the behaviour and influences the likelihood that the behaviour will occur

19

Teaching Communicative Alternatives

2. Principle of Response Effectiveness

- People communicate in the most efficient and effective manner available to them at any given point in time.
- This means that the substitute behaviour must be:
 - at least as easy for the individual to produce as is the challenging behaviour
 - at least as effective at obtaining the desired result

22

Antecedent Supports

- Scheduling supports
- Increasing choice making
- Changing interaction styles
- Interspersed requests

20

Proactive Supports + Consequence Supports

- (95% of energy) (5% of energy)
- Setting Event changes
- Antecedent changes
- Teaching replacement communication skills

23

Teaching Communicative Alternatives

1. Principle of Functional Equivalence
 - When people communicate using an unusual behaviour, sometimes the most appropriate response is to teach them a better way to communicate the same message.
 - The replacement behaviour must "work" to communicate the same message as the "challenging" behaviour.

21

We need to remember what to do:

- when desired or replacement behaviour occurs, to maintain those positive behaviours (Positive Consequences)
- when challenging behaviour occurs, to break the link between challenging behaviours and desired consequences (Crisis Management)

24

Positive Consequences

- A consequence is positive for an individual when it results in them getting what they wanted.
- Our goal is to provide positive consequences for desired or replacement behaviours.
- To do this we must understand what the function of the challenging behaviour was. (what consequences the person originally wanted)
- We then need to provide a consequence that serves that same function.
- The goal is to make challenging behaviours irrelevant, inefficient, and ineffective.

25

Key Elements of Positive Behaviour Support

- a proactive, person-centered approach
- founded on a functional assessment of behaviour
- arrange environments to accommodate personal preferences
- making positive behavioural paths explicit
- using errorless teaching; reinforce positive behaviours
- making challenging behaviours irrelevant and ineffective
- *devoting only 5% of energy to crisis management*

26

Appendix E

Learning Assistance Teachers' Training Needs Survey

Protocol	Awareness of protocols		In-service desired	
	Unaware=1	Expert=5	No= 1	Yes=5
PPVT-III		3.1		3.2
Ravens		2.9		3.1
Roswell-Chall		2.3		3.4
Canada Quiet		2.0		3.7
WoodcockJohnson		2.3		4.0
Slosson Drawing		1.3		2.7
Wepman Auditory		1.5		3.1
WRAML		1.4		3.7
TOLD-P		1.5		3.3
TOLD-I		1.5		2.9
TOAL		1.3		2.5
TONI		1.5		3.0
Woodcock Reading		2.0		3.2
WRAT		2.5		3.3
Rosner TAAS		2.5		3.1
WIAT-II		1.6		4.6
Slosson Intelligence		1.3		3.4