# IMPLEMENTING WHOLE LANGUAGE:

## A CASE STUDY OF

## A TEACHER

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**April, 1988**

A Creative Project Submitted to the Faculty of Education

in Partial Fulfillment

of the

Requirements for the Degree

MASTER OF EDUCATION

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# ABSTRACT

This is the story of a teacher. It is the story of how this seemingly ordinary teacher adopts the attitude of 'teacher as learner.' It emphasizes those aspects of his life which have been instrumental in the development of a personality which accepts and promotes the concept of whole language as a way of life.

The purpose of this study was to examine the process of being a whole language teacher in the light of experiential learning theory and personal practical knowledge within the realm of a biographical study. It is about idealism and realism. It is about learning which emerges through experience rather than being imposed from without. It is about using what one knows and reflecting on it in order to bring about new understandings. Finally, it is about the celebrations, revelations and frustrations in the life of one person who has refined his way of knowing and understanding to a point where the ideal and the real are near to becoming one.

# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Thanks to all the beautiful, caring people in the Education Research Centre, especially Beulah Sinclair who went out of her way to help me with administrative details more times than I care to count.

Finally a big bouquet to my family. To Hank for his love, understanding and support which have gotten me through the most difficult times. To Peter and Ryan who were always there to give their mom a hug when she needed it. And to my mom, Cecilia Dziedzic, who was always there to help out.

# CHAPTER 1

# INTRODUCTION

## The Problem

The whole language approach to learning is one which is closely related to aspects of the models of experiential learning proposed by Dewey (1963), Lewin (1951) and most recently, Kolb (1984). It has a grassroots impetus which surely would be endorsed by Paulo Freire (1986) because its focus is on the needs and experiences of the individual learner, and how learners come together as a group to engage with a significant other (teacher) in the process of learning. Learning emerges through this engagement with experience rather than being imposed upon the learner from without and above.

One of the basic tenets of a whole language classroom is "teacher as learner" (James, 1986, p.7). Each new school year all teachers must learn new names, new personalities, but the whole language teacher goes several steps further. Instead of attempting to fit all her/his students into her/his style of teaching, s/he adapts the environment of her/his classroom to the various styles of learning found there. Instead of teaching a linear progression of skills to help students master the arts of reading and writing, listening and speaking, students are assisted in using reading, writing, listening and speaking to learn. The

whole language teacher garners a wide variety of resources in order to let 'life experiences' emerge from their classrooms. Her/His primary goal is to instill in students a love of learning. And s/he is ever searching for new ways of bringing learning 'home' to her/his students, making it authentic for each individual. Disappearing is the notion of a one-to-one correspondence between teaching and learning, i.e. "I teach, you learn." Heidegger (1968) sums up this idea beautifully:

> Teaching is even more difficult than learning. We know that; but we rarely think about it. And why is teaching more difficult than learning? Not because the teacher must have a larger store of information, and have it always ready. Teaching is more difficult than learning because what teaching calls for is this: to let learn. The real teacher, in fact, lets nothing else be learned--than learning (p.15)

## Rationale for the Study

Much of the educational psychology literature has focused on children and how they learn. The result has been an attempt to adapt the curriculum to what many key educators such as Dewey (1963), Rousseau (1982), and even Plato (1974) have proposed as education based on personal experience, which has been termed a whole language approach, or holistic approach or integrated approach. This 'new' approach is a culmination of theories from

fields of study such as psychology, linguistics, philosophy, sociology, as well as education.

It has been only recently that attention has turned to those who have chosen to implement this approach -- teachers. This is unfortunate because the teacher is the key to the success of such an approach. "Whole language teachers choose people over programs, they reflect a belief in the learner that must be central to any real education."(Rich, 1985, p.720). Whole language is an underlying attitude teachers have or acquire, not a method. Teachers have certainly not been ignored in the 'whole language' literature, however the focus has been on what teachers 'do' and what they 'know' rather than how they become holistic teachers. It is this 'becoming' which is interesting, and puzzling.

There are teachers who begin their teaching careers with such a holistic attitude, either in response to the way they have been taught, or because of a dissatisfaction with the methods used in their education. There are, however, teachers who have been instructing in a traditional, skills-based, basal reader manner for many years, who have decided to discard old beliefs and direct teaching practices in favour of an approach which views reading as a means to an end rather than as the end.

## Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study then is to examine the process of becoming a whole language teacher in the light of experiential learning theory and personal practical knowledge and within the realm of a biographical study. The intent is to gain some insight into the process by which a teacher adapts teaching practices, as well as why and how the teacher has come to this decision or commitment.

In order to introduce the context of the study, it is necessary to review the pertinent literature including, not only the area of whole language, but those concerned with modes of adult learning as well as those which focus on the resources a teacher already has at his/her fingertips. Finally it will be necessary to take a brief look at the literature concerning the method of gathering information which will be used, and why it is effective. The following review of the literature is divided into four sections which serve to inform this topic: whole language; experiential learning; personal, practical knowledge and case study.

# CHAPTER 2

# REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

"The way we look at a situation will determine

what we can do about it."

Edward deBono (1982, p.41)

## Whole Language Literature

Research of the last twenty years by Smith (1979), Harste (1983), Britton (1970), Barnes (1975), Moffet (1973) and the Goodmans (1980, 1981, 1986) has been leading us to a point where we must re-examine the way we believe students learn in order that we may free ourselves from misconceptions about learning to read and write, and point ourselves toward other ways we can assist children in becoming literate. This is precisely what a whole language approach attempts to do -- view learning from the child's perspective.

As parents, when we 'teach' our children to talk, we do not sit them down at a desk for five hours a day requiring them to repeat what we consider to be important words, and by drilling grammar rules. As Britton (1970), Donaldson (1978), Holdaway (1979) and Harste (1983) point out "language learning is...

closely bound up with all other learning that is going on" (Donaldson, p.33).

Language is a vehicle by which children learn, and by using it they also learn

language.  In essence, language learning is almost secondary to the meaning

making which is going on in the child's mind.  In schools we focus on the

language, because it is the 'visible' act which indicates that the child is learning

and developing.  Therefore language is not the simple act of acquiring and

repeating words just as reading and writing are not the simple acts of

recognizing, and being able to produce words on a page.  The key to children's

acquisition of language as well as their acquisition of literacy is their ability to

make sense of a situation -- their meaning-making capacity.

It is now argued by many including Harste (1983), and Goodman (1981)

that the whole is not the sum of its parts.   "No collection of pronunciations we

might recognize as words--no matter how vast -- in itself constitutes a language"

(Harste,1983).  The same may be said about reading - no collection of skills,

subskills, or rules concerning syllables or words can constitute reading.  "To

learn to read children need to read" (Smith,1978.p.5), just as they learn to

speak by speaking.  However, in teaching students to read we make the

process difficult for them.  As Smith (1978) has said: "children cannot be taught

to read."   A teacher's responsibility is not to teach children to read but to make it

possible for them to learn to read" (p.6).

In schools we expect children to become literate through the

fragmentation of the acts of reading and writing. This is done with the best of intentions. We believe the process is made simpler by splitting up the written language into its component parts. Hence a basal reader is used with a controlled vocabulary, stories with stilted language, workbook pages and worksheets having very little to do with actual reading and writing. All children are considered to be at a similar level of literacy upon entrance to grade one, and are moved through the 'steps of literacy' carefully and slowly beginning with the smallest parts of language, i.e. the letter and working towards words, sentences, etc. Little attention is paid to individual differences, and every effort is made to keep the class together.

An approach to literacy where virtually all students are successful is one in which language is treated as the vehicle for learning instead of the thing to be learned; where emphasis is placed not only on what the child is to learn, but the meaning s/he brings to the learning environment. This approach has been explored by the Goodmans (1981, 1986) who have based their work on that of language researchers such as Holdaway (1979), Britton (1970), and Smith (1978) calling their perspective "a whole-language comprehension-centered view of reading development" (Goodman, 1981). To them it is necessary to "keep language whole and involve children in using it functionally and purposefully to meet their own needs" (1986, p.7). "Children speak, listen, write or read as they need to" (p.30). They learn to read by reading, in an environment rich in good literature, and where it is accepted that as individuals

they bring their own unique experiences to their reading and obtain meaning in the light of those previous experiences. This requires that the material put at the child's disposal be meaningful. "Material that is meaningful - that can be related to what a child or student knows already - is essential if reading skill is to be developed" (Smith, 1978, p.41-42). Relevancy to the child's world is important so that he can easily fit new knowledge in with the old -- that he has basis to work from, and build on. Consequently in reading, for example, he can feel confident when attempting new and more difficult words since he can try to predict how they sound and what they mean from the words surrounding it, i.e. the context.

In the area of writing, Graves (1983) describes a similar process. In his view the most important part of learning to write is getting ideas down on the page - one's own ideas which are meaningful because they are ours. Spelling, sentence structure, verb agreement and the multitude of other grammar rules come later, after the writer has been successful in creating the meaning he wants to share with others. Grammar is certainly not ignored, but allowed to develop as the natural consequence of wanting to better communicate. Graves (1983) contends "children want to write" (p.3). Success in facilitating this desire to write is partly the ability of allowing children to have control over what they write, partly a knowledge of the process children go through in learning to write, and mostly of how to put these two together in a classroom situation so that children will feel comfortable and safe expressing themselves.

Creating an environment where learning is real, language is authentic and writing is purposeful is not an easy task. It is the teacher's attitude, his/her beliefs and prior knowledge which make a whole language approach work. The whole language teacher has a sincere belief in the capabilities of his/her students and trusts them to take on the responsibility for their own learning. S/He reads and writes for his/her own enjoyment, and takes pleasure and pride in the reading writing of his/her students recognizing the small successes of each individual as they occur and celebrating those successes. S/He has the background knowledge to sustain his/her beliefs in the manner in which children learn best, and keeps up-to-date with the latest theory and research. S/He is adaptable to the needs of the students and makes them the primary focus of the school day. S/He cares, and wants them to leave his/her classroom, reading and writing to the best of their ability, and excited about learning. All of this sounds rather idealistic, but as Van Manen has said "good teachers are what they teach" (1986, p.47).

So what is it exactly that whole language teachers do? It appears that they simply provide a warm body who accepts children for who they are. It is said that they work hard, but at what? First and foremost, whole language teachers must work diligently at creating an environment where children are allowed to make choices and can safely take risks with their learning. That is, a place where there is a wide variety of purposeful activities from which to

choose; where a student can say what s/he really thinks or feels without fear of

ridicule; where learning can be developmental, not completed in one short year;

where the communication and understanding of meaning is the major focus;

and where small successes are viewed with satisfaction and mistakes are

looked upon only as the opportunity to learn more.


Ultimately, it is the atmosphere created by the teacher which is the key to

the whole language classroom. "The sense of mood or atmophere is a

profound part of our existence. "... Atmosphere belongs to all aspects of human

existence" (Van Manen, 1986, p.32). It is important. It speaks to the students

more loudly than words ever could. The atmosphere of a whole language

classroom tells students that they are important or special, that their ideas are

important, and that they are able to make decisions about their own learning, for

which they are responsible.


The change from a traditional skills-based approach to a more

integrated approach is not simple, nor can it happen overnight. It begins with a

need -- the need for a better way to help students learn. Coupled with that need

is a belief and trust in children and their ability, and a background knowledge of

the way they learn. The decision brings with it many hours of extra work to

create the kind of atmosphere where students will learn and enjoy it -- gathering

and scrounging materials, writing anecdotal records, reading the latest

research, planning, coming to grips with new knowledge, and discarding old

beliefs and practices "that contradict new information and evolving theory" (Edelsky and Smith, 1984, p.25). All of this takes time and effort, but as with the students, it is a decision that can only be made by the individual teacher. It will happen only when they are ready for it, when they are at a point in their teaching and learning when old methods are no longer satisfactory.

## Experiential Learning

And what of this decision to change? From prescriptive and rigid to cooperative and consensual engagement? What is involved in the decision to relinquish the control of student learning to those most affected by it -- the students? Where does the impetus for change originate? Is it largely a conscious decision based on the awareness of one's own philosophy of education, or is it one which is based on an intuitive sense that 'there's gotta be more' to learning than workbooks and a prescribed curriculum based on what someone else has rationalized the students should learn? The decision to implement a new concept, philosophy, strategy (whatever term one wishes to use to describe it) is inextricably bound up with our awareness of our own learning. It is as much a part of who we are as our bodies. The purpose of this study is to identify some of the considerations about how teachers/adults learn something new, as well as why the decision is made to implement a new program in their classrooms.

Many adults believe that the only true learning we do in our lives must come from books. We are aware that we learn from our day-to-day real life experiences, i.e. "You learn something new everyday." However, in order to do some serious learning we must enroll in a course, buy a book, read it from cover to cover, and finally, write a paper or take an exam to prove that we have learned. Kolb (1984) makes a strong case for what he terms experiential learning. He introduces his model of experiential learning by defining 'learning' as "a holistic process of adaptation to the world...[which]... involves transactions between the person and the environment... [in]... the process of creating knowledge" (p.31, 34 & 36).

He does not deny the importance of a formal education in the learning process; however, he attempts to emphasize what each individual brings to each learning situation as well as the 'process' which goes into each 'learning.' Chickering (1976) defines experiential learning as "the learning that occurs when changes occur in judgements, feelings, knowledge or skills result for a particular person from living through an event or events" (p.63). Kolb cites the Lewinian Experiential Learning Model as important in the development of his more complex theory (See Figure 1).

From Lewin's model (in Kolb, 1984) the steps in adaptation to a new situation are clear. Consider the example of an adult learning to water-ski. Having mustered the courage to attempt something new, she accepts the well-

Concrete Experience

Testing implications of
concepts in new situations

Observation and
reflections

Formation of abstract
concepts and generalizations
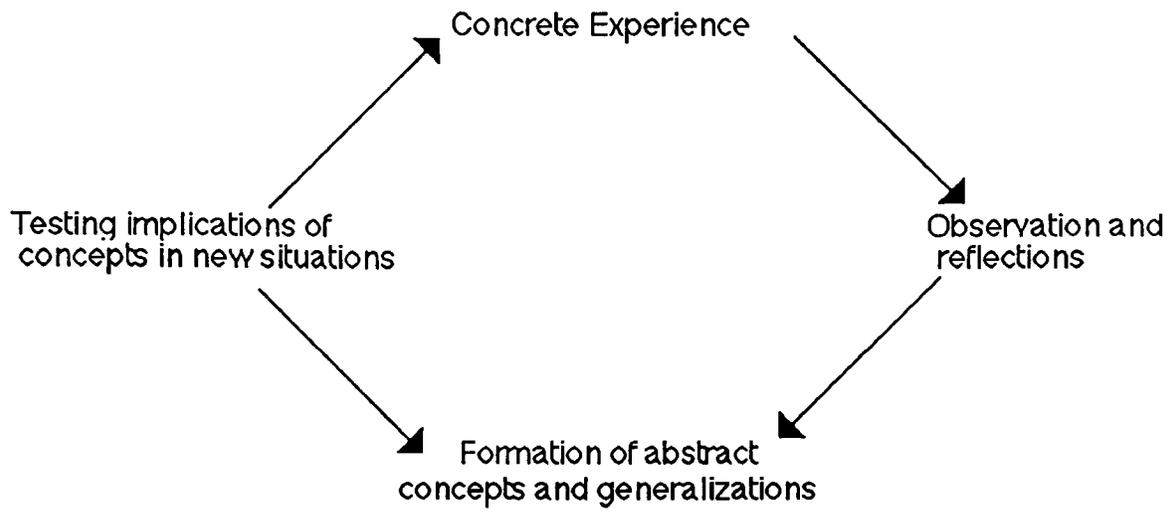
Figure 1. Lewinian Model of Experiential Learning

meaning instruction of those familiar with the sport. Plunging in, she makes an

intial attempt, and fails. She accepts more advice, tries again, and fails again.

While patiently hanging in the water waiting for the boat to make yet another

circle to pick her up, she reflects upon her previous performances, as well as

her observations of the performance of those more successful. She compares

her stance in her mind's eye to the others, sees some differences and

determines the changes she could make. On the third attempt, she succeeds in

emerging from the water only to lose her balance in the excitement. Having

partially succeeded, she begins to gain confidence and with a decision to

remain calm and to hang on in order to 'get the feel for it,' her next attempt is

successful. The embarrassment of so many failed attempts and the

interminable waiting in the cold water sets up in her a kind of "dialectic tension

and conflict between the concrete experience and analytic detachment (Kolb, 1984, p.9) such that she is determined to 'do it or die in the attempt.' Each time she tests out a new theory or idea, the process is refined such that successive attempts bring her closer to achieving her goal.

This is in contrast to what Coleman (1976) terms 'information assimilation' which is essentially "instructor induced learning" (p.50). He describes it as occurring through a series of steps:

1. Receiving information... . Information is transmitted concerning a general principle or specific examples as illustrations of the general principle.
2. Assimilating and organizing the information so that the general principle is understood.
3. Being able to infer a particular application from the general principle.
4. Moving from the cognitive and symbol-processing sphere to the sphere of action.

It is essentially in this final step where information assimilation ends and experiential learning begins. Referring again to the example of the water-skier, if she had taken an information assimilation attitude to learning the sport she might have enrolled in some 'dry-land' lessons prior to entering the water. Here she would have been bombarded with facts about water-skiing, the hand signals used, and safety rules, in addition to the 'how-to's' of the sport. These

bits of information would certainly be useful, but not until she had some actual experience in the water.

Though the two models described are similar to some extent, it is the experiential learning model which is in use constantly, on a minute-to-minute basis for the many decisions which are a part of our daily lives. It is a continuous process, and one about which we are not always aware. In actuality, it may be that learning of the experiential sort may be an extension of, or a complementary process to, information assimilation. Kolb suggests, as well, that there is individuality in the manner in which people learn, i.e. different people have different learning styles. He states "...it appears that the physiological structures that govern learning allow for the emergence of unique adaptive processes that tend to emphasize some adaptive orientations over others" (1984, p.62). The key to this lies in one's uniqueness. Each person lives through a vast set of experiences or events which then affect future experiences or events. The way individuals then cope with life experiences or problems helps define the way in which they will cope in the future. "Human individuality results from the pattern or "program" created by our choices and their consequences" (Kolb, p.64). Kolb has identified four basic learning modes:

1. concrete experience - being involved in experience and dealing with immediate human situations in a personal way,

2. reflective observation - understanding the meaning of ideas and situations

by carefully observing and impartially describing them.

3. abstract conceptualization - using logic, ideas and concepts... emphasizes

thinking... and a concern about general theories...,

4. active experimentation - actively influencing and changing situations...

emphasizing practical applications,... a pragmatic concern with what

works... and an emphasis on doing... . (p.68-69)


This is not to say that people can be easily slotted into one of these four

categories. All individuals, at some point, use all of these ways of learning,

essentially relying on one in particular to be their primary mode of learning.


But the question in this study is how does one teacher go about this

process of learning to adapt to what s/he feels the students need for learning?

How does his/her learning relate to the needs of his students? Is there an initial

experience which motivates the teacher to want to change, or a growing feeling

of dissatisfaction with the status quo that provides the impetus for seeking new

ways of teaching? Whatever it may be, how does the adult whose formal

education is relatively complete, become fully aware of his/her own learning

process with respect to the students in his/her charge. Is it with a conscious

decision or goal in mind, or simply a matter of 'going with the flow'? And once

the decision is made, either consciously or unconsciously, how does s/he

proceed? What past and present events affect what s/he learns and how s/he

learns it? If as Dewey (1963) suggests, "every experience lives on in future experiences"(p.27), then all of these learning experiences get filed away into our brains to become what Clandinin and Connelly (1986) refer to as a teacher's personal practical knowledge.

## Personal Practical Knowledge

...teachers develop and use a special kind of knowledge. This knowledge is neither theoretical, in the sense of theories of learning, teaching and curriculum, nor merely practical, in the sense of knowing children... A teacher's special knowledge is composed of both kinds of knowledge blended by the personal background and characteristics of the teacher expressed by her particular situation (Clandinin, 1985, p. 361).

This personal, practical knowledge, as Clandinin terms it, appears to be the sum total of who we are and what we have experienced in our lives both professionally and personally, i.e. what we have learned experientially.

Personal practical knowledge is an emotional and moral knowledge. It actively carries our being into interaction with classroom events. Personal, practical knowledge is furthermore intimately connected with the personal and professional narratives of our lives (p.382).

This differs from the accepted role of the teacher as a transmitter of knowledge. Elbaz (1981) points out that the role of the teacher is far more complex than the act of teaching, i.e. lecturing to a class. In any one day a teacher takes on the role of curriculum builder, curriculum reformer, developer of curriculum materials, resource person, librarian, systems analyst, author, counsellor, as well as a host of unrelated roles such as manager, nurse, mother/father-figure, referee, friend, coach, and accountant. Though it is evident that teachers have 'content knowledge', it is not generally accepted that teachers have a body of knowledge peculiar to their profession. However, Elbaz (1981) disagrees with this view and illustrates this practical knowledge in terms of five categories: knowledge of subject matter, curriculum, instruction, self, and the milieu of schooling. It is through the method of the case study which she attempts to 'get at' the practical knowledge of a teacher.

Consequently if there is an interest in how a teacher came to be and teach in a certain way, it is necessary to look at their rich store of personal practical knowledge, how they acquired their own personal depository, what it means to them as unique individuals and how that applies to their lives as classroom teachers. What is the impact that events and/or experiences and/or people have had on them to mold them into the person that they have become? What is the glue which has melded these experiences together into a single life and outlook? Certainly all events play a role in determining our personality and

viewpoint, however, some are more significant than others with regards to the impact they have on the day-to-day reality of teaching and learning.

When we go about the "spontaneous, intuitive performance of the actions of everyday life" (Schon, 1983, p.49) we rarely stop to consider this special knowledge we possess even though it expands hourly. When we do take the time to critically reflect on where we have been, as well as why and how we got there, it is a valuable experience. Schon (1983) writes about 'the reflective practitioner' as someone who

> ...recognizes that his technical expertise is embedded in a context of meanings. ...He recognizes that his actions may have different meanings for his client than he intends them to have, and gives himself the task of discovering what these are. He recognizes an obligation to make his own understandings accessible to his client, which means that he needs often to reflect anew on what he knows (p.295).

And isn't this really that task of the teacher within the act of teaching -- to discover whether the students are learning, what they are learning and how they are learning it? And if the students are not learning it is the responsiblity of the teacher to reflect upon what he needs to do (because ultimately it is the teacher who is **held** responsible for what the students learn, though this may not be as it should), and adapt his/her way of teaching, and/or being so that

students do learn. In the adaptation process it is necessary to reflect on the way s/he thinks of things and very possibly on how s/he, him/herself learns.

Teaching and learning are very much like cloud formations racing across the sky on a windy day. The clouds we have seen in the morning are thousands of miles away by late afternoon and have so changed in shape and substance that we may not be able to identify them as the same clouds seen hours previously. The teaching/learning process is similar though, of course, it doesn't happen as quickly. The students we send to the next grade at the end of the school year bear little resemblance to those who sat before us in September. Their facial features and their bodies, though recognizable, have matured, and their minds have been altered through their experiences in and out of our classroom. We may compare the students to the clouds and the experiences to the wind. The clouds above look very similar with variations in color, depth, and shape, and as the wind blows patches of blue sky show through like the intuitive leaps, connections and ah-hahs! which happen daily with students learning new things. As teachers we are observers and facilitators. We cause the wind, but as it blows we cannot predict with absolute certainty the alterations which will take place in those clouds/students, because each is an entity, a unique piece of the universe with it's own peculiar way of forming. We have an idea of the general direction we would like the clouds (our students) to go, but each has their own particular way of getting there and as teachers we must allow that. The more experiences we can allow them to have,

and the more we as expert observers and facilitators of experience can interpret the results of those experiences, the more able we are to provide the kinds of learning experiences which are meaningful to our students, i.e. the more we are able to predict how the clouds will change and which direction they will move. It is through the critical reflection of the events of the classroom, and how students respond to those events which should set the stage for new experiences.

Most teachers, at the end of the day, unit, year, reflect back over the events which took place in their classrooms in order to plan for the next day, unit, year. They decide what has worked and what has not and alter their plans accordingly. However, the true reflective practitioner would not only alter plans, he would also reflect on why a certain activity or unit did not work. Did the students not enjoy it? Were the assignments too difficult, too easy? Were the students given choices -- too many, not enough? Were the concepts too difficult or too easy for the students? Was the day, unit, year teacher-centered or student-centered? He would reflect on individual students' reactions to an activity, and their learning as a result of the experience. And this reflection would inform the planning of the true professional. It is what Van Manen calls "pedagogic thoughtfulness," (1986, p.12) that is, seeing, listening and responding to the actual learning of our students.

Schon also writes of what he calls "reflection-in-action" (p.49), that is,"...in much of the spontaneous behavior of skillful practice we reveal a kind of

knowing which does not stem from a prior intellectual operation" (p.51). It is here where a teacher's personal practical knowledge comes into play. It is that "tacit knowing" (p.49) which informs a teacher's spontaneous actions or reactions. It helps a teacher know intuitively what to do at a certain time, and what informs their decision-making not only in the classroom, but on the playground when a student has broken the rules. This reflection-in-action appears to be the ultimate basis for all of the activities which take place within the realm of the school.

Returning to the metaphor of the wind and the clouds, not only are teachers the wind, they are also clouds, that is they are also learners, although different in that they are both teacher and learner. In accepting both roles, they are now clouds with a purpose, creating their own wind, and like the tornado, selective in their learning. While not leaving devastation in their wake, they are sucking up knowledge, coming to terms with what they already know and adapting that to the new knowledge obtained in their quest. Within the realm of this study, the question is: how does a teacher, using his personal practical knowledge, i.e. what he already knows, adapt to the relatively recent development in the teaching field - 'whole language?' Does this also require a teacher to be more reflective in terms of his own teaching and the learning of his students?

Methodology Literature

In order to discover what a teacher holds as his/her personal practical knowledge, and for each teacher this is unique, one must investigate his personal reality. As Greene (1978) writes,

To talk about the personal reality of teachers is to consider their lived lives and their pursuits of meaning in contexts that include a concern for the social dimensions of teaching, for the strategic and the existentially unique (p.24).

For a teacher who is implementing an approach or philosophy such as whole language it is doubly important to obtain a clear picture of his/her personal reality and the incidents in his/her life which have gone to make up his/her personal philosophy of teaching and learning. With the whole language approach comes a view of children and learning than is quite different from the traditional view of the classroom, that is, "I teach, you learn," for as Goodman points out, "there is no one-to-one correspondence between teaching and learning" (1981, p.3). This approach requires teachers to view children as active learners responsible for their own learning, as well as view themselves as learners along with their students. Consequently in order to discover why a teacher might choose to implement such an all-encompassing approach to learning, and how s/he goes about this monumental task, it is necessary to

probe deeply into the life of the teacher. A philosophy of this nature does not come into play full-blown with the discovery of supporting evidence. It appears to be one which is constructed and nurtured throughout a teacher's career as s/he learns from his experiences with children. Thus it is necessary use a qualitative approach to study what the teacher knows and how s/he knows it. As Schon (1983)writes:

> ...researchers and practitioners enter into modes of collaboration very different from the forms of exchange envisaged under the model of applied science. The practitioner does not function here as a mere user of the researcher's product. He reveals to the reflective researcher the ways of thinking that he brings to his practice, and draws on reflective research as an aid to his own reflection-in-action. ...[The researcher] must somehow gain an inside view of the experience of practice. Reflective research requires a partnership of practitioner-researchers and research-practitioners (p.323).

This type of research then, can best be accomplished through the dialogue between two professionals who become partners in the attempt to discover together. The vehicle for such a discovery process is crucial, and great care must be taken so that nothing of importance is left out. It is for this reason that a biographical approach would appear to be the best choice for this study. "A biography is a formative history of an individual's life experience (Berk, 1980,

p.90). ...It attempts to infer how a person came to be the way they are" (Butt, 1984, p.95). It is a way of delving into a person's life in a non-threatening, conversational manner. And as Berk (1980) says ..."Biographic study... is a disciplined way of interpreting a person's thought and action in the light of his or her past" (p.94).

Questions may arise, however, as to the type of data which would be obtained from a study of this nature, using this particular methodology. What kind of information would one expect to obtain? What inferences or interpretations would one be able to make from the data? Patton (1980) answers these concerns quite succinctly.

Qualitative data consist of detailed descriptions of situations, events, people, interactions and observed behaviors, direct quotations from people about their experiences, attitudes, beliefs, and thoughts; or entire passages from documents, correspondence, records and case histories (p.22)

Bogdan and Biklen (1982) refer to the data collected through qualitative research as

...the rough materials researchers collect from the world they are studying; they are the particulars that form the basis of analysis. Data

include materials the people doing the study actively record, such as interview transcripts and participant fieldnotes" (p.73).

It is important, however, for the researcher to enter into data collection with an open mind so that it is the data collected which inform her/him rather than her/his own presuppositions of what the data might be. Therefore after posing the initial study questions, choosing the subject for the study and providing a baseline from which the study will be done, it is necessary for the researcher to take a 'back-seat' role, allowing the practitioner to take charge of supplying the data which is meaningful. Admittedly the researcher would hold some idea of the data that might be supplied in a general sense, for if s/he did not the study would not have been undertaken. However, it is important in this type of study to allow the subject to inform, from his viewpoint, on those topics which are important to him. It is the job of the researcher to then analyze the data in such a way as to present the subject's point of view.

The strategy in qualitative design is to allow the important dimensions to emerge from the analysis of the cases under study without presupposing in advance what those important dimensions will be (Patton, 1980, p.41). "...the interview is used to gather descriptive data in the subject's own words so that the researcher can develop insights on how subjects interpret some piece - 'of the world" (Bogdan & Biklen, 1982, p.135).

Within the context of a 'whole language' approach it is even more critical that we use a method which attempts to 'get inside the skin' of the teacher. Since this approach takes into account the learner as a person embedded with feelings, values, knowledge, and personality, these things must be taken into account in the teacher as well. His/her learning is just as important as the students, as is his/her personal practical knowledge, an his/her ability to critically reflect upon his world and how s/he can make it better. It is important to delve deeply into the heart and mind to discover the characteristics which make the concept of 'whole language' attractive. Though it cannot be said that this is a strictly emotional approach to teaching, feelings are not denied within its realm. There is room for the person, and what s/he knows in the classroom. A qualitative approach acknowledges the whole in 'whole language'.

The literature points to the complexity of the process learning and change. The picture of the ideal whole language teacher is a difficult one to achieve and certainly does not come into play full-blown when a teacher decides to make a change. The process is one which requires many years of discovery, reflection and experimentation, in addition to coping with the multitude of outside influences. The framework is present, however, and the attitudes and beliefs become the basis upon which each new year/month/week/day is built.

This study will attempt to determine the context of a teacher in process of

implementing a change from a more traditional approach to teaching to a more holistic approach. Specific study questions which will be addressed are:

1. What causes the teacher to begin the process of change?

2. What aspects of the teacher's life have led to the teacher we see today?

3. What are the frustrations encountered?

4. What in his view ensures the continuation of the process of change?

5. How does the individual teacher cope with all of the factors inherent in the change?

6. What effect does the environment have on the process?

# CHAPTER 3

# DESIGN OF THE STUDY

Since this study is an attempt to 'get at' a teacher's motives for radically changing the manner in which s/he teaches, and the attitudes and perceptions of a teacher who embarks on such a change, the most appropriate methodology to use is a single case study (Patton, 1980). This type of research design lends itself to a more in-depth examination because it allows the data to emerge from the respondent rather than relying on the researcher to uncover the data by discerning the key questions which would need to be asked. It is also more telling because it allows the researcher to get an historical perspective on the subject -- both personal and professional background -- and thereby able to see the inherent reasons for the subject's behavior.

This case study consists of a series of interviews with one teacher, and observations of the setting in which he teaches. These include observations of the school, collegial relationships and classroom environments which are all important aspects of the teacher's daily life, and which inform his perspective almost as much as personal beliefs and values.

Though every attempt was made to allow the subject to provide the

information without undue bias from the researcher, it was necessary to develop topics for consideration in the interview. These were carefully laid out in order to allow the subject to respond in a meaningful manner. Questions and topics were open-ended to avoid a directive question and answer interview, but not too ambiguous so as to confuse the respondent. Some of the general categories of topics explored were:

1. Personal life history,

2. Educational history,

3. Professional or career background,

4. Personal philosophy of education,

5. Views on curriculum construction,.

6. Views on how children learn,

7. Views on children in general,

8. Views on management of a classroom.


Through discussion of these various topics and others a profilehas emerge of this person who is attempting to alter his way of teaching to fit the learning styles of the students.


Sample


The subject is of one of three teachers from a Southern Alberta school who are attempting to create an atmosphere of holistic learning for their

students. After attending a Whole Language conference sponsored by the International Reading Association, these teachers decided that the concept of whole language made sense to them. This was their concrete experience (Kolb, 1984) which initiated their process of experiential learning. I became involved when one of their number suggested they might require some assistance in their learning and implementation. For three months I supplied them with information (articles and books), ideas, and materials to further their goals. It was through observation of these teachers and discussions with them that the concept for a study of this nature emerged.

It would have been preferable to study all three teachers. This may have yielded greater insights and possibly some commonalities which may have been generalizable, however the limitations of the nature of this creative project required a focus on only one.

## The Interviews

### Choosing a Candidate

I became interested in this specific topic after having worked with a group of teachers attempting to implement whole language in their school. Initially I became involved through general discussions with one of these teachers who was essentially the instigator of this school-wide project. Because we had been

previously acquainted and were enrolled in university classes together, we discussed the topic in depth many times during the months I was involved in their project, both in school and out of school. We eventually got to know each other quite well and found it easy to discuss the topic. Therefore when the time came to choose a willing candidate for a case study, 'R' was the logical choice. When invited, he was very willing and continued to be so throughout the interview process. In fact when the interviews were essentially over, both 'R' and I felt that this time for discussing such an involving topic would be missed as we both learned a lot, not only about the topic, but about each other as well.

The Interview Process

The interviews themselves could hardly be termed formal in any sense of the word. They were more like a conversation between two friends, albeit with a specific purpose in mind, i.e. to draw out the life story and thoughts of one of the participants. I began the interviews with what I considered to be a clear list of general topics which I hoped to pursue, as well as some specific questions. It soon became abundantly clear that 'R', being the forthright person he is, had certain expectations of the type of information and aspects of his personality and life which he considered to be important. This turned out to be a workable situation wherein I would present 'R' with a general topic at the beginning of the interview and he would basically take it from there.

During the first two interviews where I attempted to gather information about his past, I directed the interview for the most part, however when we moved on to more philosophy or 'now' related topics, 'R' took over the discussion more and more. I deferred to whatever topic he felt it was necessary to cover even though it may have been something quite different from what I had planned to discuss that day. On occasion 'R' came to the session with something he wanted to discuss, so whatever I had decided to do that day was put off until the next time, unless that discussion led to something totally different which was the case with Interview 3. It was clear that he had taken the time to reflect on his background and pedagogy, garnering the facts, feelings, knowledge and philosophies which when put together, construct who he is now and how he come to be the teacher he is today. I feel that this was an important aspect of the interviews since it was clear that he took on the responsibility of presenting himself to me rather than me drawing him out with questions or topics which may have had little relevance to him. Although for much of the time we appeared to be on similar wavelengths, since he would often answer in his talk a question I had needed to ask. Upon studying the transcripts of the interviews it is clear that 'R' did most of the talking, particularly in the later interviews, with me simply interjecting occasionally to clarify or ask a question relating to something he had said.

I set no specific time limit on each interview, nor did I predetermine the number of interviews to conduct. Most of the interviews, except one (Interview

2) appeared to end quite naturally when both of us had exhausted the topic for that day -- he had nothing more to say and I had nothing more to ask. The interviews lasted from forty-five minutes to an hour and a quarter.

In the beginning I felt that the interview process would also come to a natural conclusion. At about Interview 3 however, I began to worry that we could go on discussing the nuances of the issue at hand for a considerable period of time. The only reason I was worried, of course, was because of the need to bring closure to this project. I certainly enjoyed our sessions. However at Interview 6 it was clear that the discussions had become redundant. If we had continued we may have gained some new insights, but I felt that for the purposes of this study I had most of the information I needed. I did ask 'R', though, if he would mind doing one more interview several months down the road in case there were some things I needed to clarify, or some small bit of additional information I needed. He agreed to this, and it turned out that once I had read over the interviews in depth and tried to make some sense out of them, I felt there were still some important questions I needed to ask. All in all the interview process was a most enlightening experience for myself and 'R' as well. We had the opportunity to discuss a topic that was important to us both, in addition to coming to be good friends. I felt that this process was important to both his learning and mine. The sharing of ideas, feelings and information is an essential aspect of human learning that should not be overlooked in our educational system. Certainly an initial experience is important, but it is what

we do with that experience that determines what we learn and how well we

learn it. Reading about 'whole language' was very enlightening, however,

discussing the realities of putting the approach into practice added an entirely

new dimension to my own learning in the area of whole language as well as in

the area of teaching.

# CHAPTER 4

# RESULTS OF THE INTERVIEWS

Initiating the interview process with the biography of the man, who he was and the events and people in his life which helped create the personality we see today, gave 'R' the chance to inform from a perspective which only he could know about. This gave him the confidence to discuss his beliefs and his attitudes on a topic with which he was not completely comfortable, but on which had definite opinions.

Throughout the five interviews, events from his past and certain themes were woven through the talk. From his biography and the influence events and people had on his life, he launched into his beliefs about children, learning - especially about learning language -and about literacy. He spoke about his reasons for 'getting into' whole language and the influences in his life which contributed to this in both his distant and recent past. Throughout all the interviews, his beliefs emerged -- his spiritual beliefs, and his 'real world' beliefs, in addition to a world view which he considers important to his life as a teacher. He stated his strong views on curriculum, the way it is and the way it should be for teachers and for children, and what he did in his classroom to make learning real for students. He stated his concerns about students learning

in relation to curriculum wherein they can truly learn to their individual potential and in their unique way without compromising standards set out by the province. He went on to emphasize the importance of support from administration and parents as well as the necessary cohesiveness among teachers who take on a project of this nature. In fact there isn't much under the umbrella of the educational process that he didn't touched on in one way or another. He is a person/teacher with wide experiences and a reflective nature which he has brought to his classroom and his profession with far-reaching results in both his school and school district.

Having gathered this information it was difficult to decide how 'R's thoughts and his speech might be conveyed in print so as to give the reader an accurate picture of 'R', both in his past and present lives. In order to convey the essence of 'R' in a way that his spirit might also be captured, I decided that I knew 'R' well enough, from our interviews and previous involvement through the university, to write as if I were him. Having read Progoff's (1975) work on journal writing, it seemed a next step to attempt to write 'R's journal in the manner Progoff has outlined.

Since it was his past, both recent and distant that I wished to convey, I chose the two segments of Progoff's journal writing process which deal with the past and its effect on the present: the Steppingstones and the Period Log. The Period Log was completed before the Steppingstones so as to place 'R' in the

present (present being defined as the past year). Once this was completed, it was a matter of choosing the Steppingstones in his life that seemed to lead to his present as illustrated in the Period Log. The order of the two is reversed in this report, however, so as to give the reader a chronological account of 'R's life.

## Steppingstone Entries

Progoff(1975) suggests beginning the list of stepping stones with birth, however this journal has a certain purpose, specifically related to learning and the shaping of a style of teaching. This particular collection of steppingstones is selective or exclusive in that it portrays a limited number of dimensions in the life of 'R'. It is not intended to portray his life in it's entirety since the information is limited to that collected during five interviews.

The Steppingstones portion of his log begins with the first significant event related by 'R' which appeared to initiate this cycle of personal learning creating the person and teacher we have before us today. Any one person can have many different sets of Steppingstones, each representing a vantage point in his/her life. Therefore these represent one vantage point in 'R's life as a holistic teacher.

Each Steppingstone Period begins with the statement representing the Steppingstone followed by the phrase: "It was a time when...", in order to

conjure up for ourselves "... the atmosphere of the period, the quality of feeling, the tone of energy and striving at that time, the difficulties, the hopes and the anxieties which comprise our inner world and our outer experience" (Progoff, 1975, p.122). It is hoped that each of the chosen Steppingstones represents a period in 'R's life which "are the significant points of marking along the continuity of [his] life" (Progoff,1975, p.107).

It is begun with a metaphor which symbolizes the idea of the Steppingstones so as to get a picture of how they flow in a person's life.

**A child is making a tower of multi-colored blocks. He carefully places each colored block on top of the last. As he balances each precariously, oftentimes his point of balance is off the mark and the tower, or part of the tower topples, leaving only the base. At other times another walks by, creating a micro-earthquake with thudding steps vibrating the floor. The tower teeters but does not collapse. Another child, angry that this tower is taller than his own, strikes out destroying its height. But the child begins again, continuing toward his goal of the highest tower he can build.**

## 1. Getting Thrown Out of School

**It was a time when...** schools were conservative, and "free-thinking'
was discouraged. "I grew up in a very traditional Catholic family - very
traditional, conservative. ... That was in the forties and fifties. [There was the]
Baltimore Catechism and everything was black and white, and there was no
grey" (Interview 1). Things were done according to tradition with heavy
emphasis on the Church's teachings. Life revolved around the church in many
ways, which was one of the reasons I attended a Catholic boarding school in
Edmonton - St. Anthony's College - for high school. "It was a minor seminary in
the sense that a lot of kids that came out of there ended up being priests, [but] I
think I had no intention of being a priest, ever" (Interview 1).

School went very well through grades ten and eleven. "I liked school. I
was a good student all the time. ... They ranked you there, and one time, when I
was in eleventh grade, I was first out of the eleventh grade there. ... I worked
hard [although]... I think math was sort of an innate ability" (Interview 1).

Halfway through grade twelve [however], I got thrown out [because of] ...a
lot of things that had built up [over time]" (Interview 1). When that happened "I
didn't go home. ...I packed my suitcase,... stuck my thumb out and ended up in
Prince Edward Island" five days later (Interview 1). I hadn't told anyone where I
was going, not even my folks, so "when I got down there, I phoned my mom...
and I told her where I was at.... And she said, Fine. ... You have to do that"

(Interview 1). I suppose there wasn't anything much she could do at that point, but at least I felt "I had that blessing" (Interview 1).

I spent four months travelling trough the Maritimes, working when I needed to. I worked on a farm there for awhile..., I picked potatoes, worked in a drugstore, in a brewery, and various other jobs to get me through those four months. I had some contacts in Nova Scotia - relatives of my brother-in-law, but "I really didn't know them, ...[so] it was really scary [being] alone" (Interview 1) at the age of seventeen with only myself to depend on.

I came home at the end of August, and because I hadn't completed any of the requirements for grade twelve, I went to the local high school. "I went all year and... I passed Math 30, Physics 30 and Math 31 (Interview 1), but I failed English 30, Social 30 and Biology 30. "I just wasn't ready. Then I got married and started to farm" (Interview1), and forgot about school for a time.

The time away from home was good for me, because it forced me to be independent of all the traditional structures and strictures in my church and family life.

## 2. Back to School

**It was a time when...** I just wasn't satisfied with the merry-go-round of

farming. "I liked farming, but I hated sitting on the damn tractor, going round and round. ... [It was] boring, and [there were] so many boring things to do. I thought that there must be something better than this to do in my life' (interview 1). Also, "my younger brother wanted to farm..., but the farm was only viable for one person so we had to do something" (Interview 1).

"I think I always wanted to be a teacher. I had been accepted into Gonzaga in Spokane for a degree in Education when I was thrown out of school" (Interview 1). So it was a combination of that and the farm business that made me decide to go back to school. I Except "they wouldn't let me into the university as a mature student at that time. ...I think [it was] because of my [low mark] in English 30. ...So I went to [the local high school] for a semester and took English, Social and Biology, and did well. ...It was neat actually, [although] I was scared to death when I first went in -- mostly for having to study. [But] they coaxed and helped and encouraged, and also I was twenty-nine and had four kids [so I was] reasonably responsible" (Interview 1).

It was this decision to return to school and the subsequent struggle to gain acceptance into the university that made a major impact on my life in terms of the direction my life has taken since that time. After the decision was made, things fell into place. I "got my degree in about two and a half years -- hurried, really hurried" (Interview 1). Being at the university for this intense period of time certainly "had a big, big, influence on my life..." (Interview 1) in terms of the

people and information I came in contact with, but it was that initial decision to go back that really made the difference -- making a commitment to an unknown future. To leave everything (or nearly so) behind, and begin anew was difficult, especially since I had a large growing family who needed me. But they supported me in doing what I had to do, and it is through their efforts and mine that I am here today.

## 3. Ad Hoc Language Arts Curriculum Committee

**It was a time when...** I had fun. So many things were coming together as far as teaching was concerned, and I was doing so many things and learning so much.

It started when 'B' came into my classroom to observe and evaluate. 'M' School had a regional office evaluation that year. It was my first year of teaching and even "... that first year, the business of workbooks and basal readers, and stuff just blew my mind. I just could not understand a child growing, or getting any meaning, or making themself a better person from doing that. So we had a lot of free time activities that first year. I had some motors... and a transmission..." (Interview 2) and the kids would work on them, and other things we were interested in, almost everyday. But "'B' came into my classroom, and he was really excited about what was going on there" and because of that "my name was placed with the Department of Education... to work on the Ad

Hoc Language Arts Committee" (Interview 2).

This was an incredibly interesting and productive time for me. I met so many wonderful people and did so many interesting things and I did a lot of writing. There was 'P', "...principal of an inner city school in Calgary, and he had a tremendous effect on my life. He was a Brit. He had studied under Jimmy Britton, Tony Burgess and Margaret Spenser... and had a really strong whole language philosophy" (Interview 2) at a time when no one had even heard of 'whole language'. It was through him and through my work on that committee that I "learned more during those three years working on that committee than I did in university. ... I started to see that language was functional and that we don't learn it sit[ting] in a classroom from 9:00 to 9:30, learning the rules about language... we have to spend those hours each day using language for purposeful things for kids, not for me" (Interview 3).

During those years the people on that committee did so many things together to further our own learning about the way kids learn language. "...we got to go to conferences. There was unlimited amounts of money with the government at that time. They would send us all over the place, and we'd learn this, and learn that... and we had speakers in, and the University of Alberta had an elementary conference and we used to get to go to that every year" (Interview 3). One of the places they sent us was a school in Victoria where two women, a teacher and a graduate student, were doing research on how kids

learn to read. "She [Anne Forester] was saying that kids learn to read the same way they learn to talk. And that's what they were doing in that classroom.... They were immersing those kids in print, meaningful print" (Interview 3).

Before the experience on the Language Arts Committee, and when 'B' first came into my classroom, "...I couldn't articulate what I was doing, or I couldn't give it a goal, ...or an objective, ...or a purpose, ... except for the excitement within the classroom. And the kids were very busy all the time, and they were doing some things... with their hands and they were talking, but even the sense of talking didn't mean anything to me at the time" (Interview 3). But being on the committee, and doing and learning so much over those three years with those people gave a "...theoretical base, a philosophical base. It gave a purpose and meaning..." (Interview 3) to those things I was doing that came naturally to me. I suppose I could say that these experiences were some of the most significant in my becoming the teacher that I am today, because what I learned during that time has stayed with me all these years.

## 4. The Interim -- A Backwards Step

**It was a time when...** the tension in the community over what I was doing in the classroom became too great and I had to get out for awhile.

The parents were wondering if their kids were learning anything in my

classroom because we were doing so many different things rather than focusing on basal readers and workbooks. "...There [were] some interesting comments from the community [about] what was happening... [for example]: How can they learn when they don't do the workbook pages? Are the kids just having fun in school?" (Interview 3) My philosophy is and has been that kids **do** learn when they are enjoying what they do, and in fact, that's when they learn the most.

However, "my superintendent came in one day; just knocked at the door... with a whole box full of Canadian Test of Basic Skills, and said, there's some parents out there that don't think your kids are learning anything. [So] he gave them the ...Language Arts test, and they did fine, because they were bright kids" (Interview 2). And though that allayed some of the concerns for a time, the parents were not completely convinced that school didn't have to be rigorous to be meaningful - after all, that's the way they had been taught.

I didn't do a particularly good job of dealing with the questions and concerns either, because I was having "a difficult time... articulating the theory behind the things I was trying to do... in terms that people could understand..." (Interview 3).

"...there was lots of turmoil within the community [about] what was going on in the classroom, [and even though] I had lots of support from my principal, ..." (Interview 3) I decided I needed some time away. So I took a year's leave of

absence and sold farm machinery, just to do something that was not in anyway related to education.

The next year "I came back as principal at 'C' School. I had forgotten those things... and I didn't teach much for [the next] eight years" anyway (Interview 3). Nor did I attempt to stir up the teachers to make changes. I suppose the experience at 'M' School had taught me to go carefully, and though we did a lot of exciting things at 'C' School, such as exchanges with students from Quebec City and trips across Canada, I didn't really attempt to make much of an impact on the staff with regards to teaching in a more holistic way.

## 5. Principalship at 'X' School

**It was a time when...** I felt I needed a change. I'd been principal at 'C' School for nine years. "I don't think anybody should stay in one place forever. ...It was a good time to move, ...this job came up, and I wanted to try a bigger school" (Interview 1). At 'C' School I had pretty much "allowed the teachers to go on as they had. ... I wanted to be a successful principal. You don't stir things up when you're a successful principal" (Interview 3).

Anyway I think I just got tired of the status quo and I wanted a change. I hadn't done much teaching over the years, so all I had learned while associated

with the Ad Hoc Language Arts Committee and from the courses I'd taken at the University of Calgary with Jimmy Burgess and Margaret Spenser were all but forgotten in the urgency of creating a school that was administratively sound.

I had the idea that a change of schools might bring new and exciting things into my life, but I realized after I'd been there a short time that I had simply traded the status quo for more of the same. I quickly discovered that the elementary people at 'X' School "were totally devoted to the workbook and to worksheets. ...[F]rom 9:00 in the morning until 3:30 in the afternoon [kids would do] pages and pages and pages and **pages** and pages of workbooks" (Interview 5). As I watched this happening day after day I got the feeling that I **had** to do something, so I began talking to them about "children learning and making sense of their world and [that] the things that they were doing in the workbook really didn't have much meaning for them [children]. They [teachers] were doing it mostly just to get through the day and keep them [children] busy" (Interview 5).

I wanted to make changes in the teaching staff, or at least shake a few people out of their complacency. But I went about it the wrong way. I didn't document cases as I should have, and I tread on the toes of a few too many people. Even though by the end of the year "there were a couple of teachers that were coming around a little bit, [who] were at least listening to what I was [saying]" (Interview 5), I felt I couldn't continue there as principal because of the

residue of tension that would always be there until some major changes were made in the staffing.

It turned out to be one of the best choices I've ever made, because I am now back in the classroom at 'W' School and loving every kid and minute of it.

The Period Log

The period log answers the question: Where am I now? It establishes the present in the writer's mind, and acts as a transition between the past and the future. But the 'now' is elastic (Progoff, 1975, p.64). The 'now' may encompass the day, the past week, month, year or more. It is the description of "the main outer and inner events that come to the fore of our minds when we reflect on the period and recall its primary aspects" ( p.64). The Period Log essentially brings us up to date so that we might then look deeper into the past in order to reflect on the events which have led us to this point in time, and finally allows us to continue on with our present and future while recognizing the influence of past events on our future, as well as helping us to recognize those types of events which will have an impact on our lives at a later date.

As with the Steppingstones, the Period Log begins with a metaphor which is a visualization of the past in a single frame -- the passage of time in a single moment.

**I feel like I am walking along a beach. The brisk wind is stirring up the waves and as the tide ebbs, each wave leaves a treasure from the depths of the ocean. As I walk, I come upon these treasures and ponder them.**

The walk is my recent past -- this past year at' W' School. The treasures are the new ideas, friendships, skills and information I have come upon throughout the course of the year. All of these treasures have created a newness within me and have conjured up from my past all the goodness and prosperity I enjoyed as a teacher many years ago.

It began with a new teaching assignment -- Grades 3 and 4. Coming from the position of principal at 'X' School, I found myself uncomfortable at the thought of being responsible for these children and their learning day after day. "... we came back from Ontario, or back from Nova Scotia and I paced around here. I'd go out to the school and pace, and I wouldn't do anything, trying to get books in order and curriculum guides and I knew that I had to have things according to the curriculum. So finally that last week before school started I made sure that I had everything I needed to teach in a traditional way, i.e. basal readers, science textbooks..." (Interview 5).

But I wasn't satisfied. I was bored and the students were bored. I knew

there was a better way. Also, I was under pressure. Very early in the school

year (the first week), one of the teachers from 'X' school asked me -- " Are you

using any workbooks? And I was at the time but I told him [that] no I wasn't"

(Interview 5). The previous year I had tried to encourage the teachers at 'X'

School to be less devoted to their workbooks. "I talked and I talked and... I

didn't gain anything... just nothing" (Interview 5). I now felt I had to practice what

I had preached for so long. "...so gradually we got rid of one workbook and I got

some other books in, and... we started doing some projects... acting out some of

the stories we were reading... and doing some painting" (Interview 5). "I got

spelling out of the way" (Interview 5) by giving the kids their own personal

speller - a little telephone directory. They'd use them to write the words they

needed in their stories, and every week I would have them test each other on

ten of their choosing .

It was at this same time that I started Kathy Berry's class - Teaching

Writing. I was reminded of the class that I had taken from Tony Burgess in

Calgary many years ago. Kathy Berry -- "her gentleness, her 'probingness' (if

that's a word)... her making you want to read and to think and to write" (Interview

3). I began to try some of the ideas presented in her class - the Donald Graves

method of teaching writing, using drafts and conferencing, but not worrying

about spelling or sentence composition from the beginning, just getting their

ideas down on paper. We did a lot of writing, and it was difficult to let go of the

need to put my structure on their work. "We made some class books at the

beginning of the year that weren't particularly successful because... there was too much of my input... too much of what I wanted to say rather than what they wanted to say" (Interview 5).

But I was learning, slowly but surely and each new step was a step toward my goal of making those kids happy, "... because if they're happy and they want to go back in the morning, they'll learn" (Interview 5). "The important thing is what I think about kids, or how I deal with them and what I think about are the important things for me to make their life valuable" (Interview 2). And in the process of making their life valuable I have to feel that mine is valuable as well. I need to want to get up each day and come to school because I'm important. "I have to affect somebody, or touch somebody in a positive way, or make somebody grow somehow" (Interview 2).

"I started out the year quite traditional[ly], but I knew I wouldn't stay particularly traditional... . I wanted to see who was in the school and what 'J' [the principal] had to say about these things" (Interview 3). I was apprehensive about how the other teachers would react to a more humanistic or holistic style of teaching. I suppose I could have simply buried myself in my classroom with the door shut and not let anyone know what I was doing. But 'W' is a small school, too small to hide in, and neither was that my style. The year began with trepidation on the part of all staff members. "... I had a reputation within the county and people knew who I was, so they were... wondering what this was

going to be like to have 'R' in their school" (Interview 5). It didn't take long for them to realize that I was just an ordinary person/teacher like them. In fact "we got along so damn well... that it was just magic" (Interview 5). It "... didn't take very long for us to open up and start sharing some things, ...watching each other"(Interview 5). We'd leave the doors open and wander in and out of each other's classrooms. After a short time the kids thought nothing of it, and in fact wanted to get in on the act.

It all started on day when 'L' was reading **The Pain and the Great One** to the class during our morning meeting. "And she said, 'Let me get my brother and let me read it to him.' And so she [got] her brother." Eventually the entire Grade 1/2 class came in, "... and another brother and sister or cousins would start reading back and forth" (interview 5) And I thought: this is what's meant by meaningful interaction with print. Were these kids learning to read better? Certainly! They had a purpose, and that purpose was related to a very important part of their lives - family relationships. They were also having the time of their lives because they had the opportunity to tell their siblings, in a nice way, just what pests they were. And it didn't stop there, in fact it snowballed. "...sometimes at recess time two kids would work out a little play or act out a little poem... and they'd come back in and want to do it..."(Interview 5) for the rest of the class.

But these were the kinds of events that 'just happened'. They weren't

part of a long range, or even daily plan. They were the magic that occurred when students were given the freedom to interact with each other, and with books and print that had importance in their lives. "We were trying things... all the time... and that's a fault... [because] we had no direction... nothing written down, and lots of times we'd do that planning as we walked into the classroom in the morning"(Interview 5). We did have a goal -- we wanted to help our students learn to read and write, to be literate, to learn from what they read and what they wrote. So we'd try new things on the spur of the moment because it 'felt right', to see if those things would help acheive our goal. It was a time of experimentation, and tremendous learning and growth for us, as teachers as well as the students.

We all realized, however, that though this year of experimentation was fun and a learning experience, we had an obligation to our parents, students and school board to be conscientious and well organized in our planning, in addition to meeting curriculum requirements for the province. "...I am going to spend the last couple of weeks of August out there and I think we're going to get some themes going and try to get some specific activities that we might do with some specific skills that hopefully [the students] will learn..." (Interview 5). "...we have lots of ideas for field trips and for getting the kids out of the school, and out of town, even right in town. 'J's' going to do a month, I think in November, on Old Time. Many, many people have been in the 'W' area for two or three generations, and... every other week we're going to have someone come in...

an old senior citizen maybe... . The kids will talk to them, ask questions,

interview them and do some writing as a result of it, and maybe some

interpretations via art... ." (Interview 4). It will be fascinating working with the

other teachers on these themes. The magic and cooperation is already there

among us, and I can see our relationships growing stronger as we work

together to make our school an entity - not separate and disparate classes in

the same building, but working and growing together to a common goal.

We had some definte curriculum highlights that had an impact on the

students. Close to the beginning of the year I began reading **Anne of Green**

**Gables** to them, because the book was of interest to me, "...and some of the

kids knew it from the CBC production" (interview 5). They all loved the book

and it ended up as part of our Language Arts curriculum in some way for the

rest of the-year. "And I wonder about that in terms of curriculum... . ...it was only

one book... but it sure wasn't superficial... it was really an in-depth study of one

book, but definitely not planned" (Interview 5). We talked and discussed the

story, rewrote parts in their own words, or elaborated on other portions. We

wrote letters to the girl who plays 'Anne' in the P.E.I. production (she happens to

be a former student of mine). We also painted murals and acted out scenes

from the book. The culminating activity for the year became a production the

students performed for their parents -- a series of excerpts from **Anne of**

**Green Gables** for which the students wrote the script, up against the play

based on **The Diary of Anne Frank** which the junior high students were studying. One might think that the students would become bored using the same material throughout the year, but they didn't! They loved it - probably because we were doing different activites all the time, many of which were their choices and ideas.

Another curriculum highlight was a project that began as a Social Studies unit but eventually extended in other curricular areas. This was our train project. Essentially it was a map of the rail lines of Southern Alberta built on a plywood platform which took up half the floor space in the room. On 'train days' we would plan and discover what we needed to make a scale map of the rail lines of Southern Alberta using an electric train set. We studied the Southern Alberta area - roads, rivers, lakes, towns, and contours - as well as the intricacies of setting up an electric train. After sketching it out on an 8' X 16' plywood platform we began constructing the rail line. There were days of quiet activity - reading, writing and drawing - as well as days when the school was filled with the sounds of sawing, pounding, laughing and talking. Everyone looked forward to 'train days'. The students brought materials from home, read a tremendous amount about Southern Alberta and electric train sets, learned to use maps and were generally very excited about the entire project. When the map was finished I allowed them to 'play' with the set for a few weeks before taking it down. This project lasted several months and the students grew so much during that time. Everyone contributed, and everyone felt important. By

the time we were finished the entire class knew something about Southern

Alberta and a lot about building an electric train set!


Was this 'whole language'? I don't know. "...whole language isn't

anything really. It's sort of a word that we banter around..." (Interview 1). Maybe

a better question would be -- Did they learn? The answer to that is obvious

because of course "...we always learn... if we're in the right environment and the

right things are happening to us. And whether it's from reading or writing or

viewing or playing or talking or whatever it's from (and whatever it is isn't so

important), but it's that we're going from this place to another place" (Interview

1). That's what's basic -- the expansion of our 'knowing', because as long as

we do that we're the dynamic, active people we were meant to be. That's what I

want my classroom to be - a place where students are allowed to grow, a place

where "...they'll grow and they'll feel so good and they'll feel that they're

worthwhile... that they're viable human beings within they're society or even in

their family or in their school" (Interview 3). Learning doesn't have to be

drudgery nor should it be. "I think it should always be joyful... [There] should

always be super feelings inside of you when you're learning new things and

expanding those little things in your mind that get bigger" (Interview 4). "My job

is to strive for that in that community of 14 kids that I have. I like to develop

those feelings..." (Interview 4), because a positive attitude is so important when

it comes to learning. A student doesn't learn what s/he doesn't want to learn

regardless of how hard I try to teach it. This is something that all teachers need

to realize about teaching children if they want to get through to them. We like to think that kids are learning exactly what we teach them, but we can never be sure. "People's minds go in so many different directions and we can't control what happens in those minds. [But] if we allow them to talk and be reasonably free about their talk... everybody will learn something a little bit differently" (Interview 5). And I don't think there's anything particularly wrong with students each learning a concept in a different way. It happens regardless of whether we allow it or recognize it. However, if we do consciously allow it and recognize it then we as teachers and curriculum builders must give up the control we believe we have over students' minds with regard to what they learn and how they learn it. "I sort of believe that the kids will learn what they want [in order] to make sense of their world... particularly if they're happy and if they have a good environment..." (Interview 2).

Each child is unique. They come to me with an entire storehouse of experience and knowledge and I must recognize and accept them as such and then try and build on that. If I try to forcibly rearrange their experience to what I perceive it should be, I've lost whatever impact I may have had on the lives of those students. "You just can't hurt people... . You can't make people feel lesser, ever. And that's in a classroom or wherever, whoever we associate with... . We just can't make them feel like lesser human beings" (Interview 4).

My students are important to me. I know each of them personally, their

families and much of their family background.  It's an essential part of my role as

a teacher to find out why my students are the way they are.  Each day they bring

with them into the classroom all the thoughts and feelings about their

experiences of the past twelve hours or previous weekend.  If I negate or ignore

those thoughts and feelings, I am essentially telling them that what they think

and feel is unimportant as far as their 'real' learning is concerned.  And that's

wrong, dead wrong, because everything that affects them affects their learning.

Each student's learning is strictly personal.  When I look out upon my class I

have a choice as to how I see them.  I may see them as a group of students who

learn concepts collectively or I may see the individual struggle of each student

as s/he tries to make sense of their world.  An example which illustrates that

personal struggle occurred when we took a field trip to 'R C' and on our second

day there, 'J' found a snake.  "He wanted to take the snake home, but he

wouldn't hold it, and... before the end of the day I wanted him to hold that snake.

And I never kidded him or anything, but we just spent a lot of time with the

snake, and finally by the end of the day he put a kleenex in his hand and held

the snake.  ...that was successful for me that day and successful for him..."

(Interview 2).  'J' struggled between apprehension and the desire to take the

snake home, and finally came to a suitable compromise wherein he could hold

the snake on his own terms.  These are the kind of individual, personal

successes that need to happen daily or weekly for students in school.  It is my

goal to see that they do happen, but I also want to recognize the occurence in

each child.  That requires that I not only spend time with each student during the

day/week, but also that I give up my teacher control to allow them the freedom to learn on their own terms. And that's so hard, because I'm so used to being in control, so used to being right and 'in the know'. Also I need a tremendous amount of patience, because kids need to **do** things and to make mistakes in order to really learn. I've learned over the years that "if you just wait, if you just talk and listen to them through, if you just was they all change. Nothing's finite, nothing's absolute" (Interview 1).

Except curriculum. "We make things finite. We make things absolute. We make learning in a package -- that there's these things to learn, and then it's over and you might learn something else" (Interview 2). There doesn't seem to be any connection between the building of knowledge or making sense of the world, and curriculum construction. "The minute we talk about curriculum construction that means we put parameters around learning because the curriculum-has to be defined with a beginning, an end and a middle..." (Interview 5). **But** is there actually a beginning, a middle and an end to learning? Can a person actually note the moment when s/he began to learn about a concept. It's impossible because knowledge is so interrelated and complex that no matter what s/he is learning, s/he has learned something before that related to it.

"I sometimes wonder - why do people have to write curriculum that we have to follow? I know there has to be some structure... . But if we were all

professionals... and said: my job is to spend time with you and we're going to learn. We're going to become wiser together... then why do people have to write curriculum and say there are things that you should learn in this particular time of your life" (Interview 5). Curriculum is too concerned with kids learning **things** rather than **kids learning**, and to me that's what's important - the growing, learning, feeling being and the expression of those things. It is impossible to put parameters around life. I can't stop the waves from washing up flotsam onto the shore any more than I can stop learning and experiencing. Living is learning whether or not we are aware of it. Therefore teaching is helping students live a full life and creating for them, and helping them to create new experiences which they will inevitably learn from and build upon.

# CHAPTER 5

# CLOSING THOUGHTS

It would seem that after doing such a study of one person's life, I ought to be able to come to some conclusions concerning how this person came to be the teacher that he is and how the concept of whole language teaching fits into his life. Certainly the events and people in his life have shaped his personality to be what it is today, but I would have to conclude that 'R' is not an ordinary teacher (i.e. if one could find an ordinary teacher with which to compare him). Also I could not say that he and the ficticious ordinary teacher do not have some common characteristics. However, his ordinariness is simply a result of the day-to-day implementation of the required duties of a teacher. There is an added dimension to 'R,' as there is with any other ordinary person, but for 'R' his uniqueness appears to stem from an internal drive to know as well as to be and act as he knows.

It is evident from his life as we see it in this abridged version that for 'R' it has always been important to know and to question what he doesn't know as well as what he does know. The constant need to build on existing knowledge is evidenced by his return to high school at age twenty-nine, the completion of a Bachelor's degree in two and one-half years, the continuing need to take

university courses, and finally the need to return to school yet again to earn a Masters' Degree in his chosen profession (this was not mentioned previously as it occurred in the period of 'R's life after these data were collected). It is this constant need to know, coupled with a reflective nature which continually creates in him new understandings, and new and adaptive ways of viewing his world. This relfective nature was apparent in the presence he brought to this study. It was clear as he entered into the conversation of each interview that his mind had not been idle in the interim. He had considered what he had said previously and was ready, either to build on that or discount it.

It is apparent that he is the kind of teacher/person who is not necessarily satisfied with the 'status quo', and is not hesitant to go his own way if he considers the situation or his role in the situation to be lacking. As a first year teacher, dissatisfied with the teaching and learning potential of basal readers and workbooks he instigated a 'free-time' program where the students could work on their own projects or on those suggested by him. Throughout his career there were innovations such as this, e.g. student exchange trips across Canada; sharing his beliefs with the teachers at 'X' School, and attempting to produce changes in the attitude of the teachers there; and then finally leaving the basal reader behind and adopting a more holistic approach to his own classroom teaching. Any other person might be apprehensive about the consequences of these drastic actions, but this is not the case with 'R'. Even after the unpleasantness at 'X' School, he was still willing to leave himself open

for scrutiny at 'W' School by leaving his door open as an invitation for anyone, teachers, students or parents to enter and be welcome partcipants in the happenings there.

There were certainly frustrations encountered in this process of becoming. There were parents, superintendents and other teachers to deal with and convince along the way, and it was not easy by any means. He freely admits that his own inability to articulate and support his beliefs about children and their learning was often the cause of his problems in earlier times. But these frustrations have not deterred him from his goals, nor have they changed his attitude towards children and how they learn. If anything he has become more firm in his commitment to a more holistic style of teaching, and has commanded the attention of other teachers around him such that they have also adopted a similar approach. In fact, because of the work done by 'R' and his colleagues in this area, it may be said that his influence is spreading to other teachers in his district via the media. The local newspaper as well as the Lethbridge Herald have carried articles relating the events taking place at that school. It has been like a stone dropped in a calm pool, with 'R' as the stone and the ripples being the effects felt in the community and the region.

I have felt his influence most profoundly during the time we were working together on this study, and previously while working with him and the other teachers in his school toward a whole language attitude. I have felt his spirit as

we spoke during the interviews, and I have seen the real person behind the man. He knows well the positive effect he has on people and uses it to his advantage in both classroom, professional and social situations. His talk of "helping kids make sense of their world" makes sense to me, and if I can adopt this type of attitude when I return to the classroom then all of the reading and work I have done to complete this study will have been worthwhile. From discussing and sharing with 'R' I have been able to increase my own knowledge on both theoretical and spiritual levels, as a teacher who cares about student learning, and one who is learning herself from each experience, everyday. Theoretically, our discussions have forced me to articulate my framework with regard to teaching holistically, and spiritually, I have borrowed his idealism concerning the way children learn and the way I could teach. The adoption of the attitude of "teacher as learner" is central to a holistic approach to teaching, and this concept is embodied in 'R'. This attitude is acquired, but does not necessarily come automatically once a teacher has decided to teach the whole language way, but it is the result of being open to learning, as well as the acceptance of children as they are.

His influence is felt by both the teachers with whom he works, myself, and hopefully those who reads this study will capture some of the spirit of this man and of his teaching. Do not dismiss it as trivial for to be fully a whole language teacher one must accept, teach and live the attitudes and beliefs demonstrated by 'R'.

Epilogue

This paper has been entitled, "Implementing Whole Language: A Case Study of a Teacher," however it is not clear that 'R' still considers what he is doing to be 'whole language' per se. The reason for this is related to what the whole language movement is becoming. Initially the value of such an approach was its response to conventional methods, and the plea to teachers to open themselves to what they intuitively knew to be true about children and learning, ie. the importance of learning through engagement with others in the processes of reading and writing. However, there has been a co-opting of the whole language movement such that teachers are demanding materials to make whole language teaching easier, and publishers are responding by providing whole language series with readers and workbooks. These are similar to the traditional basal readers and may compromise the basic philosophy of whole language. As a consequence,'R' disagrees with the version of whole language which is now being used in many schools and does not wish to be considered a 'whole language' teacher defined in these terms. He is not willing to compromise his unique style which is a result of his own inner beliefs and attitudes formulated over many years of experience and reflection on that experience.

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