

2010

## Teachers' perspectives on changes in general and special education: Examining the pieces of the puzzle

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TEACHERS' PERSPECTIVES ON CHANGES IN GENERAL  
AND SPECIAL EDUCATION: EXAMINING  
THE PIECES OF THE PUZZLE

A Dissertation

Submitted

in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Education

Approved:

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December 2010

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TEACHERS' PERSPECTIVES ON CHANGES IN GENERAL  
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THE PIECES OF THE PUZZLE

An Abstract of a Dissertation  
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Approved:

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Dr. John Henning, Co-Chair

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December 2010

## ABSTRACT

To understand the impact of special education and educational changes that have occurred in rural schools in Iowa since 1975, this ethnographic qualitative inquiry examined the dispositions, beliefs, contexts, and recalled experiences of four teachers who began teaching around the time the Education for All Handicapped Children Act (EAHCA) was enacted in 1975 and continued teaching until after the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) was enacted in 2002. In addition, the research project explored the teachers' views of the impact various educational changes had on them, their colleagues, and the students they taught.

The group of four participants, with a combined 123 years of teaching experience, met after the first two individual semi-structured, audio recorded, empathetic interviews were conducted; to conclude the study, a final individual interview was conducted with each participant. I examined transcripts to interpret the "jigsaw puzzle pieces" of the retired educators' contexts using the lenses of disability studies, teacher career cycle, and educational change.

In this study of change and special education, participants' "puzzle pieces" were related to six themes: responsibilities, technology, curriculum, law/accountability, factors outside school, and preparation and professional development. Among the pieces that differed by participant were educational background, relationships with principals, knowledge of special education, and beliefs about inclusion of students with disabilities in the general education setting. Insufficient professional development and ongoing

support for change led to lack of implementation or short-term implementation of innovations.

This interpretation may add a different perspective to the existing literature about educational change and special education, experiences of veteran teachers who actually served between the initial passage of the EAHCA and the passage of NCLB. Such information may be beneficial for educators seeking to increase academic achievement of students labeled with disabilities and other marginalized students, and lessen the negative impacts of ongoing educational change on students and teachers. It may also inform those who prepare teachers and who provide professional development opportunities for teachers and administrators so change is presented in a meaningful manner and differentiated professional development is provided throughout teachers' careers.

## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

Since the inception of public schools in the United States, changes in curricula and instruction have been implemented in the name of expanding and improving the system (Marsh & Willis, 2007). During the common school movement in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century, education became more widely available to those who were at lower socioeconomic levels and did not typically attend school. Expansion of public schooling continued through the 20<sup>th</sup> century as a result of factors ranging from the Industrial Revolution to special education legislation.

Contemporary education is dramatically different from the one-room common school of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Curricular and instructional changes have resulted from changing criteria related to the importance of subject matter, society, and the individual (Marsh & Willis, 2007). Over the years, reform efforts have been based on factors ranging from the need for the United States to remain economically competitive, for citizens at the lower levels of socioeconomic scale to improve their earning potential, and to increase teacher quality (Elmore & Associates, 1990). Each factor and innovation may be seen as part of the complex picture of education in the United States.

As in the past, the many criteria and factors involved in providing education to students in this country in the 21<sup>st</sup> century are not universally agreed upon by the various constituencies in society and seem to be constantly changing. There are many pieces to the puzzling situation educators face as they attempt to identify changes to the current

educational system that are needed in order to provide relevant, meaningful learning activities that prepare today's students for their futures.

In an effort to understand the change that has occurred in a few rural schools in Iowa in approximately the last 35 years, the primary questions that were explored in this qualitative study were, "What are teachers' perceptions and experiences related to special education and other changes that occurred in the educational system in the United States since 1975? What do their perceptions and experiences reveal about the impact of these changes on the teachers, the system, and the students they served?" To explore the first question, the study examined the dispositions, beliefs, contexts, and recalled experiences of four retired teachers in an attempt to understand how educational changes were implemented in the schools in which they taught. In addition, the research project explored their views of the impact of these different ways of conducting education

Why are the stories of long-serving teachers worth examining? Their observations of educational practices at the various stages of their careers and recollections of their professional experiences are a valuable pool of knowledge. Teachers who have been in the profession for more than twenty-five years, from the time they were novices until their retirement, have interacted with many students, learned about and implemented a variety of school change measures, and accrued many stories about happenings witnessed in the schools in which they worked. Teachers with many years of experience have seen and experienced what has been helpful for students and practices that may have hindered students' academic and social progress.

No two teachers, students, or schools are alike. The observations and perspectives of these four retired teachers shed light on the positive and negative aspects of educational change. In addition, examination of their experiences provided insight regarding why some proposed changes were written into school policy but were not evident in practice and others were innovations that faculty members talked about but did not implement. These teachers' recollections indicated why some of the changes they learned about during their careers were taken beyond the policy level or discussions in the teachers' lounge and fully implemented in classrooms but still others were not made part of school policy, teacher discourse, or practice and instead were left on the professional development "scrap heap."

The data shared by the four retired teachers chosen for this study may be viewed as different pieces of a jigsaw puzzle. Each teacher's story was comprised of pieces that formed a unique puzzle that changed over the course of his or her career. Some pieces of each participant's puzzle were similar, yet many puzzle pieces were very different.

The information gained from this inquiry may prompt the reader to formulate suggestions that may more smoothly and successfully guide change in schools. Currently practicing teachers, administrators, and others who are interested in the future of the educational system in the United States may identify key components that may lead to other creative ways in which educational reform could be approached. In addition, the teachers' stories could inform my work and that of my colleagues in preservice teacher education as we attempt to prepare future teachers to meet the needs of a diverse student population in the ever-changing educational system in the United States.

## CHAPTER 2

### CONTEXT

The context of contemporary education in the United States is extremely complex. Aspects that are critical to the context of this research project have occurred in the latter half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, and if this research project were to be viewed as a jigsaw puzzle, each may be seen as a piece of it. These include the passage of education legislation, especially special education laws; educational change, including changes in curriculum and instruction; the disabilities studies movement; and other factors including immigration and the pursuit of the American Dream, and increasing awareness of social justice and equity issues. Additionally, my personal context contributes to the context in which this research was conducted.

#### Legislation and Special Education

Legislation in the decades of the 1950s and 1960s began the Federal Government's increased role in public education and laid the groundwork for later laws related to special education (Martin, Martin, & Terman, 1996). In 1958, The National Defense Education Act was an effort to improve mathematics and science education and Public Law 85-926 provided funding to train teachers for students labeled with mental retardation. Also during this period, state laws provided access to education for some students labeled with disabilities. Since that time, federal laws such as The Education for All Handicapped Children Act (EAHCA) of 1975, The Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEA) of 2004, and The No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) of 2002, which are described below, have all had great impact on the education



of students in public schools in the United States. Other laws such as Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act and The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) have impacted education, largely in the form of litigation by parents on behalf of their children (Martin et al., 1996).

### The Education for All Handicapped Children Act

The purpose of The Education for All Handicapped Children Act (EAHCA, 1975) was:

...to assure that all handicapped children have available to them...a free appropriate public education which emphasizes special education and related services designed to meet their unique needs, to assure that the rights of handicapped children and their parents or guardians are protected, to assist States and localities to provide for the education of all handicapped children, and to assess and assure the effectiveness of efforts to educate handicapped children. (20 U. S. C. § 1401(3)(c))

This act made education available to many children labeled with disabilities who had previously been denied the right to attend schools or whose school experiences did not meet their educational needs (Martin et al., 1996).

### The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act

The EAHCA has been reauthorized by the U. S. Congress several times and is now commonly known as The Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEA, 2004). The most recent update of IDEA continued the EAHCA requirement for students to be provided with a free and appropriate public education (FAPE) and earlier versions of IDEA that stipulated that FAPE was to be provided in the least restrictive environment (LRE; Katsiyannis, Yell, & Bradley, 2001; Osgood, 2005; Yell, 1998).

Typically, the identification of students who are eligible to receive special education services occurs by conducting a full and individual evaluation. In the past, this may have been achieved by conducting a variety of assessments and determining if a student's performance on them met the criteria required for placement in the special education program. IDEA (2004) specifically stated that a response to intervention (RtI) model of identification may also be used. In this model, an intervention is designed to increase a student's skills in an area that is seen to be a deficit, and the student's progress is monitored. When the multidisciplinary team reviews the available information and determines a student's progress is at a low rate, the gap between the student's performance and that of peers is not decreasing or is increasing, and there is a need for special education services, the student may be found eligible to receive special education services.

While EAHCA provided access to education for students labeled with disabilities, the following statement from IDEA highlighted that individuals with disabilities deserved equitable treatment:

Disability is a natural part of the human experience and in no way diminishes the right of individuals to participate in or contribute to society. Improving educational results for children with disabilities is an essential element of our national policy of ensuring equality of opportunity, full participation, independent living, and economic self-sufficiency for individuals with disabilities. (20 U. S. C. § 1400 601(c)(1))

The language of IDEA differed from the wording of EAHCA and reflected a shift in focus from students labeled with disabilities having access to FAPE to assuring their active participation in the same high-quality educational experiences that had long been available to their peers who were not labeled as disabled. In addition, IDEA defined the

term “child with a disability” instead of the term “handicapped children,” as used in the EAHCA; IDEA put the *person first*, before the disability label.

Various interpretations of the language of EAHCA and IDEA have been presented over the years. For example, Hanushek, Kain, and Rivkin (1998) stated, “. . .an important element of the general set of [special education] programs is providing extra services that would enable handicapped students to compete with other students” (p. 10).

Quality of educational experiences and LRE are contentious issues that the reauthorization of IDEA (2004) addresses. For example, some parents and educators may view an alternative curriculum provided for students receiving special education services as being a lower quality than the general education curriculum. IDEA acknowledged the concerns about quality of education by stating, “However, the implementation of this title has been impeded by low expectations,” (20 U. S. C. § 1400 601(c)(4)). Many parents and educators may assume LRE for students is the general education classroom; however, others may interpret LRE as being a pull-out setting separate from the general education classroom for all or part of the day (Benner, 1998). Concerns about quality and LRE were addressed in IDEA (2004) via the following language:

Almost 30 years of research and experience has demonstrated that the education of children with disabilities can be made more effective by--  
 (A) having high expectations for such children and ensuring their access to the general education curriculum in the regular classroom, to the maximum extent possible, in order to--  
 (i) meet developmental goals and, to the maximum extent possible, the challenging expectations that have been established for all children; and  
 (ii) be prepared to lead productive and independent adult lives, to the maximum extent possible; (20 U. S. C. § 1400 601(c)(5)).

The controversy involved with the interpretations mentioned above is fueled by data indicating that when compared to the total school population, students who receive special education services do not achieve at the same level as their general education peers on standardized assessments (Iowa Department of Education, 2007; U. S. Department of Education, 2008a). Some states may not require many students labeled as disabled to participate in standardized assessment (Hanushek et al., 1998). Statistics provided by the Iowa Testing Program at the University of Iowa for the 2005-2007 Biennium Period indicate that between 72.3% and 80.6% of all students in Grades 4, 8, and 11 in Iowa achieved proficiency on reading and math assessments (Iowa Department of Education, 2007). For the same biennium period, between 24.7% and 49.1% of students who were classified in the disability category achieved proficient scores on reading and math assessments (see Table 1). The reading and mathematics assessment data from the 2007 National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) also indicate that fewer students who have individualized education programs (IEPs) attained the proficient level on these tests in fourth, eighth, and twelfth grades (U. S. Department of Education, 2008b). Future results of the state and NAEP assessments will indicate whether students who have IEPs improve their performance on standardized assessments in the coming years. This data will also demonstrate whether the achievement gap decreases.

#### The No Child Left Behind Act

The No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) of 2001 (2002) is legislation that has impacted all students; it is the reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary

Table 1

*Percentage of Students Achieving Proficiency on Reading Comprehension and Mathematics Assessments in Iowa in 2007*

Assessment	Grade 4	Grade 8	Grade 11
Reading Comprehension			
All Students	79	72.3	77
Labeled with Disability*	38.9	24.7	29.5
Mathematics			
All Students	80.6	75.5	78.4
Labeled with Disability*	49.1	29	33

*Note.* \*Students who have Individualized Education Programs (IEPs).

Education Act. With its increased focus on rigorous standards-based education and accountability, NCLB required schools to document that students are making adequate annual yearly progress with an ultimate goal that all students will achieve at proficient levels by the year 2014. In the event that schools do not provide evidence that students are making adequate progress in reading and mathematics during consecutive years, funding sanctions are imposed, the parents of students may choose to change the school in which their children are enrolled, students who are not achieving proficiency may receive free tutoring, and/or teachers whose students do not show progress toward or

Table 2

*Percentage of Students Achieving at or Above the Proficient Level on the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) Reading and Mathematics Assessments in the United States in 2007*

	Grade 4	Grade 8	Grade 12**
<b>Reading</b>			
All Students	33	31	N/A
Without Disability Label	35	33	N/A
Labeled with Disability*	13	7	N/A
<b>Mathematics</b>			
All Students	39	32	23
Without Disability Label	42	34	24
Labeled with Disability*	19	8	5

*Note.* \*Students who have Individualized Education Programs (IEPs); \*\* Data for Grade 12 in reading was not available; the Math – New Framework data from 2005 is reported here.

attainment of proficiency may be fired from their teaching positions and schools may be restructured (United States Department of Education, 2008a).

#### The Reading First Program

focuses on putting proven methods of early reading instruction in classrooms. Through Reading First, states and districts receive support to apply scientifically based reading research—and the proven instructional and assessment tools

consistent with this research—to ensure that all children learn to read well by the end of third grade... achievement and for successful implementation of reading instruction, particularly at the classroom level. Only programs that are founded on scientifically based reading research are eligible for funding through Reading First. Funds are allocated to states according to the proportion of children age 5 to 17 who reside within the state and who are from families with incomes below the poverty line. (United States Department of Education, 2009)

In addition to the percentage of students who are achieving at the proficient level, the reports of student achievement scores that States are required to submit to the United States Department of Education include information on subgroups of the total student population. Scores are reported for groups of students based on race, socioeconomic status, disability, and gender categorizations. It is important to note that the test scores reported each year do not compare like groups of students; the results may vary because of the diverse groups of students in a given teacher's classroom or a particular school each year. Yet, these high stakes involved under NCLB mean that educators must find and implement strategies that increase student achievement or face dire consequences.

Bejoian and Reid (2005) presented *the dangers* [emphasis added] of The No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB, 2002) for students labeled with disabilities, students who are non-native English speakers, students from non-dominant races or low socio-economic status groups, or other marginalized groups. There are four main points of NCLB: (a) accountability, (b) interventions based on scientific research, (c) parental options, and (d) additional local control and flexibility. NCLB's reliance on standardized tests to determine student's proficiency and the adherence to the "Gold Standard" of educational research give the illusion that the predominant values and beliefs behind it are neutral, objective, scientific, and based on "truth." Bejoian and Reid described a "one-size-fits-all

‘cure’ mentality” (p. 225) behind the interventions deemed appropriate by NCLB that indicates an adherence to the application of the medical model to education. They also stated that NCLB set up a dichotomy of those who are proficient and those who are not, without allowance for the many diverse students (e.g., students labeled with disabilities, etc.) who may fall between or have one foot in each of these categories.

### Changes in Education

In addition to the legislation that has been passed, additional pieces of my research puzzle were a variety of changes that have been implemented in the educational system in the United States since 1975. These movements impacted curriculum and instruction and appeared in a variety of forms over the years. Among the many changes that have taken place, several of these efforts germane to this study are presented here. I have chosen to highlight these because they are all designed to improve outcomes for students. Mainstreaming was a movement to provide students who received special education services with access to the general education setting and cooperative learning was intended to give diverse students the skills and opportunity to work together. Differentiated instruction provided an alternative to the “one size fits all” instructional approach that allowed learners with different backgrounds and educational needs to experience success in the general education setting and the rigor and relevance framework (Daggett, 2000) was intended to improve teaching and assessment and result in improved learning outcomes. One final piece of the change puzzle was Hall and Hord’s (2006) model of educational change; it will be presented at the end of this section.



### Mainstreaming, Adaptive Education, and Inclusion

Mainstreaming, adaptive education, and inclusion are terms that have been used since the 1970s to describe the change in providing services to learners who were considered exceptional (Glaser, 1977; Osgood, 2005). These students, who were served outside of the general education classroom for all or part of the school day, were labeled using terms such as learning disabled, educable mentally retarded, emotionally disturbed, gifted, etc. The pull-out model that had been commonly used to meet the needs of these students in the past did not always allow them to meet academic and behavioral goals (Delmore, 2003).

Once students were assured access to education through the EAHCA, the emphasis shifted to assuring these students received appropriate education in the least restrictive environment (LRE). Mainstreaming may be defined as an early effort to place students who received special education services and demonstrated the ability to exist independently in general education classrooms with their typical peers for a portion of the school day (Mastropieri & Scruggs, 2007). While mainstreaming provided part-time access to the general education setting, many parents, scholars, and educators advocated for the students to receive special education and support services within the classroom rather than a segregated setting. They interpreted LRE to mean students should receive instruction in the general education classroom for a majority of the school day, or even the entire day.

For students to be successful in the general education classroom, education must be adaptive (Glaser, 1977). An adaptive educational environment is one in which there

are many paths to success and any one path is not identified as the preferred way. In addition, students individually choose from a variety of goals on which to focus as they achieve success.

Inclusion is a term that has been commonly used in more recent years. Inclusion may be defined as “the practice of providing educational experiences for persons with disabilities in the same school and classroom that they would attend were they not disabled.” (Alper, Schloss, Etscheidt, & Macfarlane, 1995, p. 6) Alper et al. further describe tenets of inclusion as:

1. students are more similar than dissimilar and all can learn regardless of disability
2. learning often occurs through participating with and modeling competent peers.
3. diverse instructional supports that allow a student to overcome disabilities that detract from learning can be provided in the regular classroom.
4. everyone benefits from including students with diverse learning and behavioral features in the same classroom. (p. 6)

Inclusion evolved from the concept of mainstreaming, and meant that students who received special education services would receive their instruction predominantly within the general education setting (Mastropieri & Scruggs, 2007). It involves “*all children*, not just those who are clean, or who have agreeable parents, or who come to school ‘ready’ to learn. *All* means *all*” (Sapon-Shevin, 1999, p. 4). Sapon-Shevin clarified that inclusion differed from mainstreaming and integration because all children are entitled to an education alongside peers rather than being required to earn the right to be included or prove they belonged in the general education classroom.

Those who argue that students who receive special education fare better than if they received services in the general education setting will truly never know; once a

student has been pulled out of the classroom to receive services, there is no way to go back to a time before the pullout occurred to see if the student would have benefited less from the inclusive setting. However, it is possible to record and describe the negative effects that pull-out programs have had on students. The language of IDEA supports inclusion in the following section:

(C) ...to ensure that such children benefit from such efforts and that special education can become a service for such children rather than a place where such children are sent;

(D) providing appropriate special education and related services, and aids and supports in the regular classroom, to such children, whenever appropriate (20 U. S. C. § 1400 (601)(5) (B, C))

The literature about inclusive practices focuses less on the role of educational leaders and organizational, cultural, and structural changes needed to support inclusion than support for or arguments against inclusion. This body of literature seems to address including students with disability labels in the general education classroom more than the other students who could also benefit from receiving adaptive instruction in the classroom. This population includes students who are considered to be at risk of school failure (i.e., those who do not meet the criteria to be eligible to receive special education services yet who are not achieving scores at the proficient levels on standardized tests), English Language Learners, and students labeled gifted and talented or those who have already mastered a great deal of the general curriculum and score well above the proficient level on the standardized assessments (Frattura & Capper, 2006). Inclusion is another important piece of the educational jigsaw puzzle.

### Cooperative Learning

A second change, another puzzle piece that has impacted education and has relevance to this project is cooperative learning. Much research has been conducted on cooperative learning over the many years of implementation (for example, see Slavin, 1991, 1996; Ellis, 2005) and it is viewed by many to be one of the most influential school reforms in the history of education in the United States. One way to describe cooperative learning is that it transformed classrooms from the “one size fits all” lecture and independent seatwork model. For what might be considered the first time, students were encouraged to actively participate in situations where responsibilities were divided and they worked cooperatively to achieve group goals. Cooperative learning provided students with the opportunity not only to develop knowledge of academic subjects, but also to gain social skills. Research documented that student achievement and motivation increased when cooperative learning techniques were implemented in classrooms in the United States and internationally (Ellis, 2005; Slavin, 1996). Cooperative learning symbolically opened the door for meeting the needs of diverse learners in one setting; it set the stage for many of the foundations of differentiated instruction, including varying the instructional process and flexible grouping practices.

### Differentiated Instruction

Lower test scores; concerns about educational quality, equality, and LRE; and the call to respond to individual students’ needs are all pieces of the puzzle for which educators seem to be seeking answers. One potential solution would be to provide differentiated instruction for the diverse learners in an inclusive general education setting.

Differentiated instruction may be defined in a variety of ways by different people; however, I use the following definition here. When a teacher differentiates instruction, he or she uses knowledge of students' interests, level of readiness, and learning styles gathered via observation, interview, survey, etc., to adjust content, process, product, and environment for all students in a common setting, often referred to as general education. A teacher uses differentiated instruction to meet students where they are in their learning and to maximize their educational experiences, rather than adopting a one-size-fits-all approach to teaching (Tomlinson, 1999). Many educators would say that differentiated instruction is just good teaching or best practice.

Instructional strategies traditionally used in special education that research has shown to be effective for many students labeled with disabilities may benefit other students as well (National Research Council, 1997). When students' individual needs guide instructional decisions and instruction is characterized by active, intensive, and contextualized learning opportunities, students' learning is likely to improve. Instruction featuring strategies such as these is consistent with the principles of differentiated instruction and is likely to benefit not only students who have been found eligible to receive special education services, but also many other students in the general education setting.

Tomlinson (1999, 2000) and other authors (for example, George, 2005) provide rationales for differentiating instruction. It is to help "students who will be tomorrow's leaders, independent thinkers, researchers, professionals, and artists" (George, 2005, p. 190) obtain a "broadened sense of personal and social responsibility" (p. 190).

Differentiated instruction also provides opportunities for students to work with diverse others and helps prepare them to make informed decisions on daily life choices (e.g., whether to challenge and question accepted practices, to vote for political representation, etc.), to be self-advocates, and be independent learners who understand their unique processes of learning so they are able to gain knowledge in the future in ways that suit their learning preferences. According to these authors, teachers have a responsibility to differentiate instruction for the diverse students in their classrooms. Given the current context of education in the United States, I was curious to learn if teachers also see this as their role.

If students are receiving high quality, differentiated instruction using the same curriculum in the same setting that is modified based on individual student needs, the controversies surrounding educational quality and equality and LRE could be greatly diminished. An argument may be made that if students are not achieving proficiency in academic subjects such as reading and mathematics, one way to increase achievement is to differentiate instruction. When a teacher uses data to make educational decisions and finds that a student is not achieving at a proficient level, instead of continuing with the same strategies that did not enable the student to be a successful learner in the past, the teacher may use different instructional techniques. When teachers are responsive to students' learning needs and alter the content, process, product, and environment to meet those needs, the students may more easily learn and retain information included on the standardized assessments.

Pieces of the puzzle such as IDEA, cooperative learning, and NCLB have each contributed to the emergence of differentiated instruction as an important concept to be implemented in contemporary schools that provide inclusive education. IDEA provides impetus to differentiate instruction in the general education setting in order to meet LRE requirements and lessen concerns about the quality of educational experiences provided to students who receive special education services. Cooperative learning paved the way for inclusion and differentiated instruction by providing evidence that student achievement and motivation may be increased by the use of techniques that vary from the traditional model of lecture and seatwork. NCLB provides justification for teachers to use different strategies to help diverse students learn and perform well on standardized assessments.

This is not to say, however, that educators will not encounter significant challenges to large-scale and effective implementation of differentiated instruction. Among the challenges that may be encountered, other pieces of the puzzle are lack of time for preparation and collaboration, lack of knowledge and professional development, and lack of administrative support. Advocates of differentiated instruction and inclusion acknowledge that meeting the needs of all diverse learners in an inclusive general education setting requires additional time for planning, collaborating, and professional development (Kane & Henning, 2004; Tomlinson, 1999). Teachers' responses to surveys indicate that many do not have adequate time to plan and collaborate (Skruggs & Mastropieri, 1996). These surveys also indicate that while most teachers are willing to include students with disabilities in the general education classroom, they do not believe

they have the knowledge, skills, and support necessary to do so successfully. The support of administration is needed to provide teachers with ongoing professional development, classroom support (e.g., paraeducators, etc.), and adequate time to plan and collaborate in order to successfully differentiate instruction.

### Rigor and Relevance Framework

The advent of NCLB and the standards movement in education has shifted the focus of education from learning to proficiency on standardized assessments.

The focus on state assessments as the one true measure of academic excellence is slowly but surely limiting our young people's chances of experiencing any semblance of the success in life that we expect for them and that they believe school will provide for them... What is important is that students enter the global economy with the ability to apply what they learned in school to a variety of ever-changing situations that they couldn't foresee before graduating. That is the mark of a quality education and a truer indication of academic excellence. (Daggett, 2005, p. 1)

Schools can provide a better education for students when the focus of learning is shifted away from teaching to the test. "A rigorous and relevant education is a product of effective learning, which takes place when standards, curriculum, instruction, and assessment interrelate and reinforce each other." (p.1)

The Rigor/Relevance Framework (Daggett, 2000, 2005; International Center for Leadership in Education, 2008) "was developed to examine curriculum, instruction, and assessment" and "is based on two continua, a knowledge taxonomy and an application model." (Daggett, 2000, p. 69) The visual representation of the framework contains four quadrants: Quadrant A, Acquisition; Quadrant B, Application; Quadrant C, Assimilation; and Quadrant D, Adaptation. Quadrants A and C are related to knowledge, and Quadrants B and D "represent knowledge in action" (p. 70) Quadrant A is the most basic



knowledge, while Quadrant D means “students are able to use their extensive knowledge and skills to create solutions to perplexing problems and take action that further develops their skills and knowledge.” (p. 70) Using this Framework, “teachers have found...an effective way of making changes in curriculum and assessment that lead to improved learning for students.” (p. 70) This framework may be another piece of the puzzle for some educators.

### Model of Educational Change

For the purposes of this study, I have examined educational change via the framework provided by Hall and Hord (2006), who listed 12 principles of change. “Each principle is not mutually exclusive...these principles do not cover all aspects of change...change is highly complex, multivariate, and dynamic.” (p. 4) The principles they selected were:

1. Change is a process, not an event. (p. 4)
2. There are significant differences in what is entailed in development and implementation of an innovation. (p. 5)
3. An organization does not change until the individuals within it change. (p. 7)
4. Innovations come in different sizes. (p. 7)
5. Interventions are the actions and events that are key to the success of the change process. (p. 8)
6. There will be no change in outcomes until new practices are implemented. (p. 9)
7. Administrative leadership is essential to long-term change success. (p. 10)

8. Mandates can work. (p. 11)
9. The school is the primary unit for change. (p. 12)
10. Facilitating change is a team effort. (p. 12)
11. Appropriate interventions reduce resistance to change. (p. 13)
12. The context of the school influences the process of change. (p. 14)

In addition to the 12 principles Hall and Hord (2006) described, they identified aspects of change related to both teachers and principals. Teachers' seven stages of concern about innovations were awareness, informational, personal, management, consequence, collaboration, and refocusing.

Hall and Hord (2006) also described seven levels of use of innovation that categorize teachers as non-users or users. Each of these two categories is further broken down; non-users may have little understanding of the change and no intent to become involved or be "acquiring information about" or "exploring" the change or "preparing" (p. 160) to use the change. Users may be in one of several categories: "mechanical...day-to-day" (p. 160) implementation, "routine" or "stabilized" use, "refinement" or "varied" (p. 160) use to test the impact, "integration" or collaborative work to create or improve an impact, or "renewal" (p. 160) where use is evaluated with the intent to modify to improve the effect of the innovation.

Hall and Hord (2006) acknowledged, "*all principals are not the same.*" and differentiated between a principal's style, "overall tone and pattern of a leader's approach" and behavior, "individual, moment-to-moment actions" (p. 211). They studied

three “Change Facilitator Styles: the Initiator, the Manager, and the Responder.” (p. 212)

First, initiators were described:

Initiators have clear, decisive long-range policies and goals that include but transcend implementation of the current innovation. They tend to have very strong beliefs about what good schools and teaching should be like and work intensely to attain this vision...Initiators have strong expectations for students, teachers, and themselves. They convey and monitor these expectations through frequent contacts with teachers and voicing clear expectations of how the school is to operate...When they feel it is in the best interest of their school, particularly the students, initiators will seek changes in district programs or policies, or they will reinterpret them to suit the school’s needs. Initiators will be adamant but not unkind; they solicit input from staff and then make decisions in terms of the goals of the school, even if some are ruffled by their directness and high expectations.” (p. 213)

In addition, “Initiators want to hear the facts and reasons about how student success will be affected.” (p. 212) In contrast, managers give “little effort to move beyond the acceptable minimums” and they “focus most on administrative and organizational efficiency,” but under these leaders, “schools...attain implementation success.” (p. 212)

Responders “ask about concerns but are less active in attempting to resolve them and in facilitating change. They just tend to keep checking on how people are feeling about issues in general.” (p. 212)

This information is only a small portion of the work Hall and Hord (2006) have undertaken and is not intended to be an exhaustive discussion. Rather, each of these aspects was chosen based on relation to the current research.

#### Teacher Career Cycle Models

Additional literature that was important to examine in order to inform this research project was information about the different parts of teachers’ careers. One model of the teacher career cycle (Burke, Fessler, & Christensen, 1984; Fessler, 1985) expanded

on existing descriptions of the career cycle of adults. This model illustrated how personal and organizational influences impact this process, which individual teachers do not experience in the same manner or timeframe. The eight career stages Fessler outlined were (a) pre-service, (b) induction, (c) competency building, (d) enthusiastic and growing, (e) career frustration, (f) stable and stagnant, (g) career wind-down, and (h) career exit. Components of the organizational environment that may impact a teacher's career cycle were described as Federal, State or local regulations; management style of administrators; public trust; societal expectations; professional organizations, and union activity. Personal environmental factors were listed as family, positive critical incidents, crises, individual dispositions, avocational outlets, and life stages. Fessler et al. stated that these might operate independently or in combination to positively or negatively impact a teacher; "during periods of intensive importance to individuals, they may become the driving force in influencing job behavior and the career cycle." (p. 183)

Fessler (1985) and Burke et al. (1984) made recommendations related to providing support and professional development opportunities for teachers at various stages in the career cycle. These authors recognized that the types of support and development teachers need differed depending on career stage and personal or organizational factors at a given time.

A second model developed by Huberman, the Teacher Career Cycle Model (TCCM), outlined five themes or phases of a teacher's career (Fessler & Christensen, 1992; University of Minnesota, 2009). The duration of the initial phase, Career Entry: Survival and Discovery, may be between 1 and 3 years. Following the first phase,

teachers may move to the Stabilization, which may occur between years 4 and 6. From this level, teachers may move to the Experimentation/Diversification and then the Serenity phase, or the Shock-taking/Interrogations phase followed by Conservatism. Teachers may then go from either the Serenity or Conservatism phases to the final phase, disengagement, where they may be “serene” or “bitter.”

A third model, the Life Cycle of the Career Teacher (Steffy, Wolfe, Pasch, & Enz, 2000) outlined six phases in the process of teaching. A teacher progresses through these phases and exhibits growth as a result of “reflection and renewal” (p. 4); progress is inhibited by “withdrawal.” (p. 4) The authors distinguish these phases from stages, because this model focused on “content and tasks that flow from one to another along a continuum” (p. 4) whereas a theory based on stages would “focus more on structure and organization and typically are more discrete in their relationships to one another.” (p. 5) This model was in contrast to and appeared to be more rigid than the models described previously.

The six phases listed were (a) novice, (b) apprentice, (c) professional, (d) expert, (e) distinguished, and (f) emeritus. Steffy et al. (2000) stated that distinct starting and ending points to each of the phases do not exist and that knowledge and experience gained in a specific context follow to the next phase. The authors reported, “The strength of this model is its focus on the process of how one continues to grow and become a more competent career teacher along the continuum.” (p. 5)

Burden (1982) also described a developmental model of teachers’ careers; in this model, teachers progressed through the survival, adjustment, and mature stages. Based on

this research, Burden recommended that administrators use different supervisory styles when working with teachers at each of the three stages: directive at the survival stage, collaborative at the adjustment stage, and non-directive during the mature stage. Also listed were suggestions to use the model to better prepare preservice teachers for their upcoming careers, to help inservice teachers recognize their own career stage and future career development needs, and to design differentiated professional development opportunities at each stage.

Lynn (2002) concluded, “Educational leaders should view a teacher’s professional development and provide inservice and professional growth opportunities in light of his or her career cycle phase” (p. 182). In addition, professional development for the first year teacher should vary from what is provided to the veteran teacher. All career learning and employment opportunities should include adjustments based on the individual personal factors being experienced by a teacher at any given time. An ongoing cycle of support should be provided in order to facilitate and maximize each teacher’s development.

While there may be many more models that describe stages or phases of a teachers’ career, these examples provide a framework from which to examine the careers of the four teachers who participated in this research project.

#### Other Contextual Issues

In addition to special education and other changes in education since 1975, there are other issues that were important to consider as I prepared to conduct this study. Among these are immigration and the pursuit of the American dream, social justice and

equality, my personal context, and disability studies in education (DSE). Each of these is addressed below.

### Immigration and the Pursuit of the American Dream

Many residents of the United States believe that in this country anyone who works hard and is diligent can amass a fortune or rise to a position of power (Young, 1961). For decades, those living outside the United States may have been exposed to this concept of the American dream and the opportunity for a better life in this country. The increasingly diverse population in traditionally homogeneously populated areas of the United States (e.g., Iowa's increasingly diverse workforce in areas such as Postville that resulted following the purchase of the local meat packing plant by a group of people who share the Hasidic Jewish faith, etc.) and high numbers of illegal immigrants across the country may be viewed as an indicator of the continuation and expansion of this ideal.

Public education in this country is built on this meritocratic foundation (Marsh & Willis, 2007; Young, 1961). Since the inception of the public educational system in the United States, especially from the middle of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, various initiatives have been undertaken so that underachieving or disadvantaged students could experience increased achievement in school. Theoretically, this increased achievement would in turn allow them to experience upward social mobility and achieve the coveted American dream. Such initiatives would include (but certainly are not limited to) Head Start, free and/or reduced cost breakfast and lunch programs, special education (IDEA, 2004), and (more recently) the *No Child Left Behind Act of 2001* (2002) and differentiated instruction (Tomlinson, 1999).

However, some educators may believe the initiatives that were intended to increase student achievement and reform the failing schools over the years were not implemented to increase disadvantaged students' achievement because society in the United States was one of sponsored mobility. It may be argued that reform initiatives are in conflict with a fundamental role of the school system in our society. Some propose that the purpose of these reforms was to maintain the status quo of the socioeconomic hierarchy: to oppress, disadvantage, and segregate people who were not born as part of the prevailing culture and power structure: wealthy, male, and white (Tyack & Cuban, 1995).

In education, historically the students who are oppressed and segregated include individuals who live in poverty, have minority racial or cultural status, or are labeled with a disability. Over the years, the educational system in the United States has been *tinkered with*; there has been no agreement about what is wrong with schools or a remedy for these downfalls (Tyack & Cuban, 1995). Some policy makers and media suggested that curriculum needed to be adjusted to help assure the United States' continued domination of the world economy. A focus on the official curriculum at the policy level has prevented scrutiny of funding and other educational inequalities that exist across the country. This diverted focus does not address what is included in the *taught* curriculum, and this may be a reason that not all the tinkering has resulted in substantial change in students' achievement, frequently measured by standardized test scores (Cuban, 1993).



### Social Justice and Equality

Whether the educational system in this country is viewed as meritocratic or one of sponsored mobility, justice is an integral part of the foundation upon which the United States was built and must be considered when discussing public education. Despite, or perhaps because of, the American Dream, inequalities continue; competition and justice are at odds. Society may desire to have mechanisms in place that appear to lessen the inequalities and allow every member to start from the same place in the pursuit of the dream.

Justice and equality are complex concepts that may be defined in various ways. One possible definition of *justice* is “righteousness, equitableness, or moral rightness”; *equality* may be defined as “the state or quality of being equal”; and examples of definitions of *equal* are “of the same rank, ability, merit, etc.” or “level, as a plain” (Webster’s Universal College Dictionary, 1997). None of these terms has one definition. For example, to some people, equality may mean that all members of a society should have the same outcome, while others may say equality occurs when all have the same opportunity (Block & Haring, 1992; Veatch, 1986). Veatch’s discussion of equality was based on a medical/deficit model; some in society are viewed as “losers in the natural lottery” who “have been deprived” (p. 140).

Fairness does not mean that each person receives the same treatment and justice is not synonymous with equality (Sapon-Shevin, 1999). When a system is just, it provides for individuals’ needs by holding high expectations while offering high quality experiences and support as needed to all so that positive outcomes are obtained.

Responsibility for social justice lies with every member of a society (Reid & Valle, 2004).

Current legislation, including The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA, 2004) and The No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB, 2002), contains references to equality of opportunity. For example, IDEA declared, “Improving educational results for children with disabilities is an essential element of our national policy of ensuring equality of opportunity.” (20 U. S. C. § 1400 (c)(4)) Based on the discussion presented above, there is no one agreed-upon definition of equality of opportunity as it applies to education. Some members of society may believe that special education and school reforms were enacted in order to provide all students with an equal opportunity to learn and compete with their peers to obtain equal outcomes. Other people may not believe that one student should be treated differently from another.

Factors both inside and outside of the school are related to equality of educational opportunity. Coleman (1968) wrote,

...complete equality of opportunity can be reached only if all the divergent out-of-school influences vanish, a condition that would arise only in the advent of boarding schools; given the existing divergent influences, equality of opportunity can only be approached and never fully reached. (pp. 21-22)

Coleman’s controversial report so many years ago stated that schools must reduce unequal opportunities and this remains applicable with the current era’s focus on increasing educational achievement. In this research project, I explored whether the retired teachers who participated in my study believed students’ opportunities became more equal during their tenure.

### Personal Context

A strong sense of social justice and inclusive practice in education has led me to this point. This journey began as a child in parochial and public schools in three states in the Midwest and one on the East Coast of the United States. My perspective of my peer groups in these schools was reflective of my basically homogeneous world – male and female Caucasians. The students who were seated around me received equal educational opportunities in well-maintained schools in suburban or small city settings. We learned what the teachers told us was important to know and seemed to forget much of what we learned soon after we completed a written test. The competitive atmosphere of the classrooms I sat in was inherent and was never challenged. Diversity was virtually non-existent with the exception of levels of achievement in various curricular areas; and for the most part, students behaved as expected

In the challenging atmosphere of a large Midwestern university, my liberal arts major exposed me to a wide variety of subjects that I had not encountered previously. For the first time in my life, I found that in order to be successful in the courses I registered for at the University, I had to study unfamiliar topics for many hours. I also found that my interpretation of what was important to know and what was covered on the written examinations were not always the same.

I sought relationships with people who were different from me; I included many people from diverse backgrounds in my life and learned much from them. All of the educational experiences of those with whom I formed friendships at the University were vastly different from my own. Most of us did well; we improved in determining what

each professor thought was important to know and we overcame occasional setbacks. We completed various courses of study and we all received degrees in our own timeframes. In hindsight, traditional instructional practices prevailed in the large lecture halls, yet the curriculum was differentiated in that a seemingly endless variety of courses was available to accommodate the large number of students enrolled at the University. I pondered why a wider variety of information from many disciplines and perspectives could not have been offered in our earlier school experiences, and thought about what could be behind the continued use of less-engaging teaching methods.

Years passed between the day the Bachelor of Arts degree was conferred upon me and the day I decided to embark upon the training required to become a school psychologist. My earlier educational experiences, in addition to knowledge gained through parenting and various employment opportunities in the areas of business, non-profit human services organizations, and health care, led me to believe that the educational system met the needs of some students but was flawed because there were many students whose needs were not being met. In particular, my work with adults labeled with disabilities in both residential and employment settings had a great impact. My experiences in working with and becoming well-acquainted with many of these adults who had been institutionalized, segregated from society for various lengths of time, and denied a free and appropriate education, allowed me to see their unrealized potential. I felt compelled to enter the field to attempt to understand the system and facilitate change.

Over the next three years in graduate school, I observed that the circumstances of my undergraduate experience were much the same. However, while working toward my graduate degrees, I encountered several professors who strayed from the lecture format in a few of the courses I took; these courses held the most meaning for me. The process of completing a qualitative research project in partial fulfillment of my Specialist in Education degree was by far the most engaging and valuable undertaking of my educational career. I learned through that experience that even when educators desire a change in practice to better meet the needs of all students in a general education setting, barriers exist that may preclude implementation of different methods of teaching (Kane & Henning, 2004). After I completed that research project, I was perplexed and wanted to further understand the nature of change in the educational system.

Upon completion of my coursework, I obtained a one-year position as an intern that evolved into an assignment as a full-time licensed school psychologist providing services in rural schools. What I observed confirmed my earlier beliefs: the educational system met only some students' needs. In part, I surmised that strict adherence to tradition and the perceived need for efficient and systematic transmission of knowledge and social mores to students were at the root of the matter. Many students were just *doing time* as they moved through the system; some students eventually dropped out of school. The rural settings presented a unique set of challenges for administrators and teachers and the students they served. I noted a gap between the theory and law-like generalizations I had learned in my formal training and the practices I observed in these schools, especially related to special education.

My work since undertaking my internship, both in the employment and academic arenas, had been categorized as being in the field of special education; however, I viewed it as an endeavor to examine and improve school experiences for all students. I entered a doctoral program to further study special education, mainly because I believed the system that supported current local practice (providing special education services to students through traditional, pull-out programs) not only could but also *must* be changed.

My strong interest in inclusive practice and differentiated instruction was expanded in my doctoral coursework and was a basis for my dissertation work. In my studies, I was exposed to new concepts and viewpoints that were vastly different from the traditional educational perspectives under which I had previously been indoctrinated; these fit with my belief system. I began to view education through a new lens. Among the lessons I learned were: (a) in order to understand the current educational context, the past must be examined and what is learned must inform educational theory and practice; (b) the recollections of lived experiences of each individual are unique and much may be learned from these stories; and (c) there is no one correct answer to any one question, no universal truth that may be applied to all situations to predict and guarantee a successful outcome. One of my most important learnings had been about the social construction of commonly used terms in our daily discourse; most relevant to this project is the social construction of disability.

### Disability Studies in Education

The model through which disability is traditionally viewed emphasizes labels given to characteristics that are said to comprise a disability. This model indicates that an

individual is defective and incapable. People who were viewed as disabled were and are discriminated against and marginalized in society. Scholars in the field of Disability Studies in Education (DSE; e.g., Evans, Assadi, & Herriott, 2005; Gallagher, 2001; Gross & Hahn, 2004; Reid & Valle, 2004) discuss the social model of disability as an alternative to the traditional classification/medical model. The social model honors the differences among and capability of all individuals and describes disability as typically resulting from environmental factors rather than diagnosed mental or physical deficits. Laws such as *The Americans with Disabilities Act* were written based on the medical model of disability rather than the social model (Gross & Hahn, 2004). However, the IDEA reauthorization stated, "Disability is a natural part of the human experience." (20 U. S. C. § 1400 601(c)(1))

Bejoian and Reid (2005) wrote from their point of view as female educators who advocate for inclusion of persons marginalized by their disability labels and who encourage society to focus on all peoples' abilities. They discussed that disability labels are used to delineate a so-called "normal self" from a "subnormal or unvalued Other"; the labels are constantly being redefined and are used to perpetuate minority status of individuals who are given the labels. This perspective describes my epistemological beliefs; these ideas form a foundation for my research.

### Summary

Among the many pieces of the puzzle that contribute to the context of this study are educational legislation, primarily related to special education, and educational changes that occurred since 1975. Other factors that relate to the context include

immigration and pursuit of the American Dream, social justice and equity, Disability Studies in Education, and my personal context. All of these topics impact the choice of methodology.

Legislation provided all students living in the United States, regardless of disability label, with access to a free and appropriate public education in the least restrictive environment. Mainstreaming, adaptive education, inclusion, cooperative learning, differentiated instruction, and the rigor were utilized in order for the diverse learners to work together and succeed in the general education setting. The legislation and educational changes such as the relevance framework that have been enacted in the United States during the last quarter of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and the start of the 21<sup>st</sup> century were designed to improve outcomes for students.

However, data gathered at the state and national levels indicated that students who have IEPs achieve lower scores on standardized assessments than their peers. The existence of this gap would indicate that the legislation and changes have not been effective for students who receive special education services, at least when based on standardized measures of achievement. One may also argue that these changes have not had a positive impact on another portion of the student population since not all students who have not been labeled with a disability score at proficient levels or higher on standardized assessments. It is time to examine the experiences of teachers to see what may be learned about these issues; perhaps such inquiry may illuminate additional pieces that may allow us to complete the puzzle of raising academic achievement and improving the school experience for all students.



## CHAPTER 3

### METHODOLOGY

Denzin and Lincoln (2005) offer a definition of qualitative research: “a situated activity that locates the observer in the world” (p. 3). The purpose of qualitative research is not to make law-like generalizations but to deeply understand and describe the context of the situation under study (Gallagher, 2001).

Qualitative researchers are the instruments in their studies. They employ a variety of tools in order to gather data, such as interviews, observations, and review of personal documents. There is no single, highly-structured, and outlined procedure used in conducting qualitative research (Ferguson & Ferguson, 2000). “It has many approaches, each of which with its own convention.” (Coleman, Guo, & Dabbs, 2007, p. 51)

In addition to being categorized as qualitative, this study may be considered ethnographic. Geertz (1973) discussed “understanding what ethnography is, or more exactly *what doing ethnography is*” (p.5) and stated that ethnography

is not a matter of methods. From one point of view, that of the textbook, doing ethnography is establishing rapport, selecting informants, transcribing texts, taking genealogies, mapping fields, keeping a diary, and so on. But it is not these things, techniques and received procedures, that define the enterprise. What defines it is the kind of intellectual effort it is: an elaborate venture in, to borrow a notion from Gilbert Ryle, “thick description.” (p. 6)

The qualitative researcher honestly acknowledges who he or she is and describes the events being studied so that the readers can arrive at their own conclusions about the believability of the study (Gallagher, 1995). Narrative writing is used to describe what was learned while conducting the study. The qualitative researcher interprets events that occur and inductively reasons what might also occur in similar situations. Researchers

conducting qualitative inquiry choose their participants specifically for characteristics they possess that are of interest and are being studied. Participants and their contexts are experienced in depth in order to provide an interpretation of their lived experiences.

Qualitative methodology guided my investigation of the research questions. To gain a clearer understanding of how teachers have experienced implementation of special education and educational reforms over the years, I interviewed four teachers who retired after many years of service in public schools in Iowa. I have described who I am, how I have arrived at this point in my scholarship, and acknowledge that my lived experience is not only an integral part of my research, but also that it is impossible to set this aside in order to scientifically, objectively report about my participants' experiences to arrive at the truth. In conducting this inquiry, I sought to develop meaningful relationships with my participants, spend a great deal of time getting to know them and their characteristics and situations, and deeply understand the contexts in which these retired teachers taught and continue to live. I learned about their experiences with special education, other changes implemented in their schools, their observations of the resulting impact on all students, their beliefs about the roles of the teacher, and their views on the benefits of and challenging issues related to special education and school reforms. The result is my "thick description" (Geertz, 1973, p. 10) and interpretation of their recalled experiences.

One reason that I conducted this study was to learn from the past. In a paper that discussed deaf education, the following quote was meaningful: "Framing the century in the light of these questions lets us recover the understanding and perspective of the participants themselves, men who saw the past as deeply connected to the present and

who were therefore extraordinarily interested in the history of their profession” (Edwards, 2001, p. 60). The questions Edwards discussed, although different from those posed in this study, are similar in that the experiences of retired teachers are likely to provide insight into the lives of students – those who have or have not been labeled with a disability – with whom the teachers interacted and the effects that school reforms had on both the students and their teachers. In many cultures, the stories of elders are of profound importance and value and succeeding generations learn a great deal from them. I have a strong interest in history of education because what has happened in the past is very relevant to contemporary education in the United States, and the stories of elder teachers are opportunities to learn.

The reports of research I have read, particularly by Elbaz (1983), who described the practical knowledge of one teacher, is an indication to me that some researchers in the past have valued the lived experience and knowledge of teachers. My current and past research (Kane & Henning, 2004) recognizes the importance of learning from teachers’ experiences. With this project, I believe there was much to be gained by examining how special education and school reforms have been implemented by teachers throughout their teaching careers: “...many solutions have been tried before. If some “new” ideas have already been tried, and many have, why not see how they fared in the past?” (Tyack & Cuban, p. 6, 1995). Freire (2000) encouraged dialogue and receptivity to the new for reasons beyond mere novelty and the good sense not to reject the old just because it is old. One example is differentiated instruction (Tomlinson, 1999), a term that is becoming more popular in educational circles in the United States; yet some may argue it is not a

new initiative but rather has appeared in various forms over the years (e.g., the one room schoolhouse, cooperative learning, etc.). To continue with this example, since differentiated instruction is a school reform that is viewed as a potential way to increase student achievement and to permit classrooms to be more inclusive for all students, perhaps we may learn much from the experiences of retired teachers that may inform its contemporary implementation.

### Methods

Qualitative methods were employed to investigate the questions that guide this project. As the primary data source for this study, four participants were interviewed. Information was also gathered during one meeting of the participants to explore emerging themes. The two research questions were, “What are teachers’ perceptions and experiences related to special education and other changes that occurred in the educational system in the United States since 1975?” and “What do their perceptions and experiences reveal about the impact of these changes on the teachers, the system, and the students they served?” Interview questions were derived from these two main questions.

### Participants

Four teachers were selected for this study. While the participants will be introduced in detail beginning with the next chapter, I highlight a few characteristics related to the method here. The participants were chosen based on the number of years they taught, primarily in rural schools in Iowa. Each of these women began her career prior to 1975, the year the EAHCA was enacted, and retired in the very recent past after

the enactment of NCLB. All participants were general education teachers for all or most of their careers.

One characteristic of note is that the participants were retired from the teaching profession. My earlier research (Kane & Henning, 2004) and interactions with teachers during the course of my employment as a school psychologist revealed a hesitancy on the part of teachers to openly speak their minds *on the record* despite my assurances that responses would be kept confidential. Teachers with whom I had contact through research and employment activities voiced fear of reprisal such as unspecified administrative consequences on the job or even job loss. I noted less of this tendency as teachers neared retirement. In many conversations I have had with those who have retired from the teaching profession, I have noted that these individuals have freely discussed their experiences, voicing concerns and frustrations as well as joys and triumphs. Thus, the decision to include in this inquiry teachers who have retired was made under the premise that without fear of negative consequences, these participants may have been more candid in their responses to the questions posed.

Another reason for including in this study teachers who have retired is that without the demands of teaching on a daily basis, they may have had more opportunity to reflect on their teaching experiences. Retired teachers may have had more occasion to contemplate the various school change measures they encountered, including special education; how they responded to the changes; and discuss which were implemented in their classrooms and which were not. In addition, they may have thought about the reasoning behind implementation of changes over the course of their careers or the lack

of adoption and the impact of the changes, positive or negative, on them, their students, and others in the building or district.

Three of the participants of this study were teachers who have retired after a career served entirely at the elementary level; one completed her career in secondary education. While the experiences of teachers at the elementary and secondary levels may differ drastically in some aspects, similarities also exist. In addition, secondary teachers have much to learn from the story of elementary teachers and vice versa. I witnessed this exchange of learning first-hand in an Advanced Assessment of Exceptionality course that I taught; members of this class included teachers with varying levels of experience at the preschool through high school levels.

Selection of participants occurred through networking with acquaintances who have retired from the teaching profession. Once I compiled a list of potential participants and their contact information, I made contact in writing via electronic mail or United States mail with details about the proposed study (see Appendix A). In this communication, I indicated that I would follow-up with a telephone call (see Appendix B for script) to determine level of interest and to schedule an initial meeting with interested parties to discuss an overview of the project. I was able to recruit four participants for the study from this pool; I obtained the informed consent of those who agreed to participate (see Appendix C).

#### Data Collection

When presented the options for potential sites for the interviews, each participant chose to have me come to her home. After we developed a level of comfort with each

other in these settings, the retired teachers were asked to share their stories using an empathetic approach (Fontana & Frey, 2005, p. 696). In choosing to conduct semistructured, empathetic interviews, I acted as “an advocate and partner in the study, hoping to be able to use the results to advocate social policy” (p. 696). I “desire to *understand* rather than to *explain*” (p. 706) the experiences of the retired teachers who participated in the study. It is my hope that the relationships formed with the retired teachers will continue well beyond the scope of this study; I may wish to conduct follow-up research projects with them or seek their perspectives on additional topics related to their experiences as educators.

Three audio-recorded interviews were scheduled individually with each participant. Interview sessions allowed sufficient time to thoroughly explore the participants’ beliefs and experiences with special education and educational change. I provided a timeline that related to their experiences as teachers to aid their recall and discussion; this tool was used in a limited manner by the participants. I offered a recording device or notebook to allow the participants to express their thoughts related to the research project between interviews; one of the four, Charli, asked to use a recorder. Near the start of the second interview, she said, “I was going to get the little voice recorder out and just never had time, but I’ve been doing some thinking.” She returned it to me at the end of the second interview and said, “I thought I might as well give it back to you. It sounded wonderful and I would love to try it, but I thought let’s be realistic. I am not going to.” While none utilized the recording device, all four took notes between interviews to share with me at subsequent meetings. This technique allowed the

participants the opportunity to reflect on the topics covered during the interview and provided additional data that may not have otherwise been captured.

Data was collected until meaningful relationships evolved and participants shared their stories; the timeframe for data collection was approximately five months. The in-depth interviews, the participants' notes between interviews, and the participant meeting were the vehicles that were used to collect the rich data that have informed me about the retired teachers' contexts and helped me understand their experiences during their teaching careers.

Recorded interviews were transcribed. After two individual interviews for each retired teacher were transcribed, the participants gathered at my home, a central location, to engage in a group conversation to explore themes that emerged to date. Upon completion of this meeting, which was also recorded and transcribed, I identified additional areas of interest or consequence to explore in the final interviews, which were conducted with each participant individually to conclude the study.

The list of potential interview questions is included in Appendix D; additional follow-up questions were posed as needed. Field notes were taken during the interviews and/or after each interview, and I spent a great deal of time reviewing my notes and the transcriptions. I identified emerging themes and compared participant responses. As this work was completed, I reflected on the experiences, read additional literature as needed, and constructed my understanding of the data that was accumulated.



### Research Questions

Two primary questions were explored in this study. The first was, “What are teachers’ perceptions and experiences related to special education and other changes that occurred in the educational system in the United States since 1975?” The second research question was, “What do their perceptions and experiences reveal about the impact of these changes on the teachers, the system, and the students they served?”

Demographic data was gathered from each of the participants. In addition, topics related to the participants’ perceptions and experiences that were explored included the following: (a) characteristics of the school district(s) in which they taught and the administrator(s) and other teachers in their schools; (b) role and responsibilities of a teacher; (c) important events in their lives as teachers; (d) a list and description of educational changes that occurred during the participants’ tenures as teachers, including special education; (e) the purpose of special education and education changes and how these changes were introduced and received; (f) which level(s) (policy, teacher discourse, classroom implementation) each change attained; and (g) their beliefs, experiences, and dispositions related to special education and educational changes.

Topics related to the second question, the impact of special education and educational changes on the teachers, the system, and the students, included the following: (a) impact on the academic achievement and educational and social outcomes of all students, and (b) impact on the lives of teachers and administrators. Specific interview questions related to both research questions that potentially could have been posed to the teachers are included in Appendix D.

### Data Analysis

After the recordings of the interviews and meeting of participants were transcribed, both print and audio versions were thoroughly analyzed. First, I listed demographic characteristics of the participants and identified comparisons and contrasts. In addition, of a list of changes each participant discussed during the interviews was compiled. I scrutinized the participants' comments about the changes to determine which were mandated, teacher-directed/driven, or related to contextual factors outside of the school. Further, I considered whether each change had been implemented at the classroom level, remained at the discourse level, or had been written into the school districts' policies (Tyack & Cuban, 1995).

I also compared changes that all teachers had discussed to changes mentioned by three or fewer participants. In addition, I considered topics that were not mentioned by the participants or that were minimally addressed in the first two interviews, and prompted the participants to discuss them as well as identified themes during their face-to-face meeting. Questions about the participant meeting and other topics not discussed by individual participants were posed in the final interviews.

Changes that were discussed by the participants were categorized according to the following themes: Preparation and Professional Development, Responsibilities, Curriculum, Technology, Law/Accountability, and Factors Outside School.

### Summary

Qualitative methodology guided this project. Methods used to explore the perceptions and experiences of the four retired teachers and their contexts consisted

primarily of individual, in-depth interviews, and a participant group discussion of the themes identified in the first two interviews provided additional, rich data. The interpretation of the data gathered addressed the research questions, “What are teachers’ perceptions and experiences related to special education and other changes that occurred in the educational system in the United States since 1975? What do their perceptions and experiences reveal about the impact of these changes on the teachers, the system, and the students they served?”

My dissertation research has been a journey, where I used as a roadmap the knowledge I have constructed and continue to expand through ongoing experiences and study. I have sought pieces of the puzzle to determine which changes occurred during the teachers’ careers and what impact the changes had on the teachers, their students, and the schools in which they taught. Among the pieces were special education legislation such as The Education of All Handicapped Children Act, educational practices and changes, differentiated instruction; various models of teacher career cycles, the implementation of educational change model by Hall and Hord (2006), and Disability Studies in Education (DSE) were the vehicles I used to examine the pieces of the puzzle during this research journey. The participants were my tour guides, sharing their knowledge via interviews and one group meeting as I proceeded along the route; they helped me find where I needed to turn and if and when I needed to modify my course in order to find additional pieces. I took time to read additional literature about the various roadside attractions I encountered as the teachers and I explored the landscape of their careers and picked up puzzle pieces along the way. At the start of this journey, the ending destination was not

known, but what I learned along the way will inform not only me, but also the participants and those to whom I relate the stories accumulated during these travels. The many puzzles related to education may not all be solved, but the pictures are bound to be clearer.

## CHAPTER 4

### DATA: FOUR RETIRED TEACHERS AND THEIR CONTEXTS

This chapter contains an introduction to each of the four participants and their contexts, a beginning examination of at least some of the pieces of each puzzle. Included are personal and professional characteristics the teachers shared, as well as descriptions of the communities and districts in which they lived and worked. I also provide an overview of apparent similarities found in their stories as well as differences. I introduce them in the order they were seated during the participant gathering.

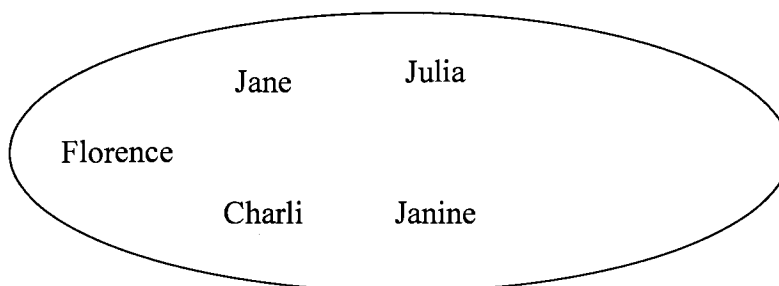
#### Four Teachers

The four retired teachers I recruited for the study had graciously welcomed me into their homes for the interviews, so I invited Charli, Florence, Jane, and Julia to gather at my home for conversation and lunch one cold, sunny winter day. It had been challenging to schedule this meeting; despite their retired status, these four women remained busy. They packed their days with a variety of activities, including household and family duties, serving as substitute teachers and/or volunteers, hobbies (e.g. sewing), travel, sports and fitness endeavors, church groups, etc. The four of them had told me at their second interviews that they each looked forward to meeting the other participants and discussing topics related to their lives as educators.

To prepare for this assembly, I reviewed the transcriptions of the first two interviews that I had conducted with each participant and identified potential discussion topics. With some of the puzzle pieces in place, my purpose was not to mandate topics to be discussed or provide a rigid framework for the participants' conversation. Rather, the

topics were intended to be conversation starters in the event the teachers needed prompts to begin the conversation.

At the meeting of the participants, the five of us chose seats at the long oak table in my dining room; we occupied five of the eight chairs. (See Figure 1.) Charli, Florence, Jane, and Julia had all dressed warmly due to the cold outdoor temperatures; but immediately upon their arrival, my home was filled with their warmth and chatter. Each had eagerly shared their experiences with me individually and quickly became comfortable talking within the group.



*Figure 1.* Participant Meeting Seating Diagram

#### Participant Characteristics – Similarities and Differences

Several characteristics in the four participants' personal and professional lives were a common bond between them – similar pieces in their individual jigsaw puzzles. I scanned their faces as I looked around the table; all four were female. I reviewed what I knew about their lives outside teaching: all four were married; they and their spouses chose to live and raise families in these small, rural communities; each had two children

who were educated by the schools in which they taught; and all remained actively involved in volunteer and other activities after retirement.

More pieces of their puzzles were related to their professional lives. Similarities included having earned Bachelor's Degrees prior to beginning their teaching careers at a time when two-year degrees were commonly earned by beginning teachers. Charli, Florence, Jane, and Julia represented three school districts headquartered in small communities; the four had spent long years of service in rural public school districts in Iowa. The districts in which they served were also similar yet different; details about the districts will follow in the next section.

The four retired teachers' recalled experiences revealed similarities such as these; in addition to the similarities were circumstances that made each of them unique and could be viewed as pieces that could not be found in each of their puzzles. The differences became apparent as their stories unfolded; a few will be presented here while others, including the changes they recalled and reported were implemented in the classroom and their levels of engagement throughout their careers, will be included in their individual data chapters.

Charli was a high school instructor while the other three had spent their careers teaching various grades at the elementary level. Charli and Jane each had spent their entire careers in one district, Charli in South River Falls and Jane in Eagle View; Florence had taught in five school districts and Julia had taught in two. They all had many principals as supervisors over the course of their careers; for Florence, change in administrators was often due to her need to change districts to follow her husband's

career advances more than because the principals moved on to other positions. Julia experienced a change in administration once due to her decision to locate a position in a different district.

### Community and District Information

The communities and districts in which educators teach are essential components of their contexts, important pieces of their jigsaw puzzles. In order to more fully understand these teachers' contexts, the communities and districts in which Charli and Jane had always taught and where Florence and Julia had taught at the end of their careers are described here.

#### South River Falls: Charli and Florence

First, to my left was Charli and next to her, at the end of the oval table, was Florence. Both of these women had taught for the South River Falls School District, attended the same church, and were friends. South River Falls is a community with a population of approximately 1500 (U. S. Census Bureau, 2000) that was established early in the 1800s. It is located in a county in which agriculture continues to be the primary economic activity. The first school was built shortly after the community's founding; a public library was constructed early in the twentieth century. The local school district and the education provided to students has long been a source of pride for the residents of South River Falls.

The certified enrollment for the South River Falls district for the 2008-2009 academic year was approximately 500 students; the enrollment was nearly 6% less than the previous year (Iowa Department of Education, 2009a). Prior to a series of



consolidation processes, there were several elementary buildings in nearby communities and the middle school had been located in a neighboring town. When Charli and Florence retired, the town of South River Hills was home to the remaining school buildings following the most recent consolidation; a rambling brick building that was three stories at the east end and one level at the west side housed grades one through twelve and a separate four-room building that contained three classrooms used by the Kindergarten teachers and students was located on the block immediately south of the main school. The buildings were located a few blocks from the downtown business area.

#### Eagle View: Jane

At the meeting, to Florence's left and across from Charli, was Jane (see Figure 1), who had taught in the Eagle View School District for her entire career. Eagle View shared a boundary with the South River Falls district. As I introduced the women at my home, Jane, Charli, and Florence recalled they had met at various professional development sessions held at the Area Education Agency (AEA) over the years.

Eagle View is a town of less than 800 inhabitants (U. S. Census Bureau, 2000). At the start of the year following Jane's retirement, after participating in a grade sharing agreement for three years, the Eagle View District completed the consolidation process and merged with the River School District.

Under the grade sharing agreement, the students in grades six through eight attended the middle school located in Eagle View, and the students in ninth through twelfth grades attended the high school in River City; both Eagle View and River City retained an elementary school during this period. Jane explained that initially, the Eagle

View community had been assured that the elementary school would remain open after the two districts merged; instead, the final phase of the consolidation was to close Eagle View Elementary and all the students in the district attended the newly named Eagle River Elementary School. The combined Eagle River District's certified enrollment for the 2008-2009 academic year was roughly 650 students. (Iowa Department of Education, 2009a) This figure was approximately 1% less than the previous year's enrollment.

Jane taught in an elementary building that may be viewed as the quintessential Iowa school. It was square in design, with three floors. The lower level contained the cafeteria and rooms that were used for kindergarten, preschool, art, and music. The first floor housed the office, combination computer room and teacher lounge, library, and one classroom each for first and second grades. On the upper level, third, fourth, and fifth grades resided, along with the special education resource room. In addition, above this floor, there was a half flight of stairs that led to a room that may have initially served as the principal's office; at the time of Jane's retirement, it had been used as the Title I reading teacher's room. The building was located two blocks north of the town's small business district.

There was a low cost of living index in Eagle View. Jane reported there were few employers in the area; many students in the district lived on family farms. Many years ago, a factory that employed many residents of Eagle View had burned down; since the fire, the owners had maintained a much smaller operation there. One of the additional Eagle View employers was a small manufacturing plant and another was a company that

ran a few group homes in town. These dwellings were occupied by children and adults with developmental disabilities; school age residents attended classes at Eagle View.

#### Prairie Crossing: Julia

Seated next to Jane, at her left and across from me, was Julia. (See Figure 1). She had worked about an hour's drive from the South River Falls and Eagle View districts in the Prairie Crossing School District and had never met the other participants before the day at my home. Prairie Crossing was a larger community than the towns in which the other three participants taught; the population was approximately 5200 (U. S. Census Bureau, 2000). The Prairie Crossing district's certified enrollment for the 2008-2009 academic year was approximately 1650 students. This figure was well under 1% less than the previous year.

When Julia first came to Prairie Crossing to teach, she was a remedial reading teacher in two schools located in small towns outside of Prairie Crossing. In the first round of consolidation that the district experienced, those two schools were closed and she transferred to the elementary school in Rudolph, another nearby small town, where she taught first grade for twelve years. Then the Rudolph elementary school was closed in a second wave of consolidation.

The school in Prairie Crossing in which Julia taught for the remainder of her career was Chens Elementary. There, Julia and her colleague, Mrs. Lean, shared the responsibility for teaching in one of the five 1<sup>st</sup> grade classrooms. They also shared the responsibilities for the Reading Recovery program; each taught the 1<sup>st</sup> grade class for one-half of the school day and Reading Recovery the opposite half of the day. This

arrangement was in place until the last few years prior to Julia's retirement when she was required to teach 1<sup>st</sup> grade full-time and Mrs. Lean was told she would be in the Reading Recovery program full-time. Chens Elementary was a one-story building that contained three wings and a central area that contained the office, multipurpose room (containing a stage and space for physical education and cafeteria uses), and kitchen. The upper elementary, or north wing, was connected to the middle school; 1<sup>st</sup> grade was located in the east wing at the front of the school along with some of the Kindergarten classrooms. The third wing housed the 2<sup>nd</sup> grade classrooms, along with the reading, computer, art, and music classrooms. The high school was located four blocks southwest of Julia's building.

The main business district in Prairie Crossing was located ten blocks southwest of the elementary and middle schools. Julia described Prairie Crossing as a small, homogeneous, Christian community without much diversity. Prairie Crossing was incorporated after the Civil War, and boasted a long history of agricultural production and service by the railroad that crossed the prairie there.

While Prairie Crossing, South River Falls, and Eagle View would be defined as rural areas with a primarily agricultural base, the characteristics of and economic opportunities available in each community differed. For example, neither of the smaller communities contained stoplights, franchises of a national restaurant chain, or a national discount department store compared to the four stoplights, three restaurants, and department store in Prairie Crossing. All three districts had experienced declining

enrollment over the years, but most recent available data indicated that the decline was occurring more rapidly in South River Falls.

### Organization of Data Presented

The chapters that follow will begin with Charli and will continue in order clockwise as they were seated around the table when the participants met (Florence, Jane, and Julia; see Figure 1) until all their stories have been written. These four data chapters present information primarily from the first two individual interviews with each participant. Data related primarily to the first of the two research questions, “What are teachers’ perceptions and experiences related to special education and other changes that occurred in the educational system in the United States since 1975?” will be presented first in each chapter. Included are data that revealed Charli’s, Florence’s, Jane’s, and Julia’s puzzle pieces, their teaching philosophies and beliefs; other pieces to the individual puzzles, information related to their perceptions and experiences of changes will also be presented.

Also included in each individual’s chapter are data primarily related to the second research question, “What do their perceptions and experiences reveal about the impact of these changes on the teachers, the system, and the students they served?” The changes the participants reported are listed, and specific mandated and teacher directed changes that were indicated to have had a substantial impact on the four retired teachers, their students, and their schools are presented in greater detail. In addition, the levels of implementation of the initiatives, as well as any recommendations made by the participants, will conclude each individual’s chapter.

A fifth data chapter with information from the participant meeting is included after the four participants' individual data chapters. This will also include any final comments the participants made during the last individual interviews specifically about the discussion that took place during the participants' meeting. Information related to both research questions will be presented; a summary of all the data concludes the final data chapter, a recap of each of the participants' puzzle pieces.

In all of the data chapters, direct quotes from the transcriptions are frequently used because these teachers' words are very powerful and full of meaning; I believe if I had paraphrased more often, the messages they conveyed might have been diluted.

## CHAPTER 5

## CHARLI: "I ONLY HAVE THEM FOR 180 DAYS"

Charli's short blonde hair topped her rather tall, thin frame. On her face were glasses that gave her a studious air; her mouth frequently curved into a large, warm smile; and her face was full of expression. Charli had a professional, competent countenance and manner that were readily apparent from the first time I met her. This chapter contains a description of Charli's context, including her education, the school district, and the administrators who served as her supervisors; the innovations she experienced; and the impact some of the changes had for her and her students.

Charli's words included herein describe dozens of changes she experienced over the course of her career; the changes were significant pieces of the education puzzle. Some pieces were fixed into place and remained, while others were interchangeable; in addition, new pieces were added to the puzzle at times. I would also argue that at several points in her career, pieces to the puzzle were lost or missing.

In our first interview, Charli described the context of education at the time she began teaching. Of her preparation to become a teacher, one of the pieces of her puzzle, Charli stated:

I went to a liberal arts college; I did not go to an education school. I did not go to a school where the education department was strong; I picked it on purpose. I wanted a liberal arts college; I also got a teaching degree. I got what I signed up for; in terms of what I see the kids going through now, [it] is better preparation than what I had so that is a big change. I think all the kinds of programs that I went to, those "here is a teaching degree because you took six classes," they are gone.

After completing her training at the out-of-state, private, liberal arts college, she was certified to teach Kindergarten through grade 12 Physical Education and grades 7 through 12 English. “I was a part of that whole group where you went to college and you took your classes and you did your student teaching and you got a job immediately because they were desperate. You signed your contract and they said, ‘Here are the keys to your room.’ That was it. You are on your own. Go be a teacher.”

There were several additional pieces of Charli’s puzzle related to her context. She was the only member of the participant group who had taught at a university prior to moving to the South River Falls School District to teach. Charli was one of the two at the table who had earned a Master’s degree; her university teaching experience occurred while she earned this degree. At South River Falls, she taught primarily at the high school level, but did teach junior high students (several years of “a couple of physical education classes” when the district “was desperate” and one year as a long-term substitute in English). Charli was further distinguished from the other participants because she was among the first group of teachers who attained national board certification and in 1999 had received a prestigious teaching award. She stayed home after her two daughters were born; excluding this break in her career, Charli had served South River Falls for a total of 25 years. While teaching in the South River Falls District, Charli served in various advisory capacities to extracurricular student groups, including debate coach, cheerleading coach, student council advisor, student newspaper advisor, and yearbook sponsor.



School consolidation was another piece in Charlie's jigsaw puzzle. During her career, the district went from three separate elementary buildings to one; there was a time when the junior high was in a separate town eight miles away in one of the former elementary buildings. All grades were also eventually moved to one campus; at the time Charli retired, first through 12<sup>th</sup> grade was located in one building, with the kindergarten located in a building one block away. Each grade had four sections of 25 students when she began teaching at South River Falls; by the time she retired, the enrollment had dwindled to approximately two sections of 25 students.

In discussing the benefits and negative effects of having Kindergarten through grade 12 in the same small city, Charli stated:

...They reorganized to put the junior high and the high school together. Better use of teachers, more efficient use of teacher time, to the detriment of the students...I think the junior high's just been swallowed up...They're just there. There is nothing special about them, there is no identity.

Consolidation forced it and [it was] probably a good use of teacher time. You have everybody there...for across the grade projects. So a lot of things, *good* things have happened because of that. I *hate* it, though. I *hate* having the junior high kids in the hallway with high school [students]; the ninth graders need to be with the junior high and we never had that [before]. So [there were] some problems with consolidation that everybody has.

Charli described the South River Falls community as having "respect for education which in some communities just doesn't exist...everyone here is interested in what the school does and makes sacrifices for the school and for the kids, so I think there's a terrific push for academic excellence...these people that have kids in the school system want good teaching, *know* good teaching, *know* good parent-teacher conferences, know best practices." South River Falls is within an hour's drive to both a community

college and a university; students in the teacher preparation program at the university are placed in the district for practica and student teaching experiences.

She reported that very few teachers left the district until they reached retirement age.

At the beginning when we first came there, that was still the era when you kind of kept moving from town to town; if you were going to move up you went to another town. The idea was you started at a small school and you went to a bigger school as a promotion (chuckle); you went to a bigger school for more money. In fact, I can remember when [one male teacher] built a house. What was a schoolteacher doing building a house? He'll be leaving... You started in a small town, and then you moved on. But then you got into that era where all these people picked; this is where I want to live, I want to raise my kids here. Starting in the mid-'70s and on, I don't know that you saw as much movement.

It could have been, too, that I don't know that the salaries got any better. We were lucky in that our [union] was strong all of those years and we led all of our conference schools in terms of our salaries; they tried very hard to be the number one school in the area for salaries... I don't know where we are now; for a long time we were down to 4th in our conference... You got a good staff, you get paid well, now let's go on to other things. So there have been some interesting decisions that were made at the administrative level that certainly helped.

### Administrators

Administrators were a changing piece of the jigsaw puzzle for Charli. Over the course of her career, seven different men held the position of high school principal. She reported that she had good working relationships with all of these principals, "I was always so comfortable with them or older than they were that none of them really intimidated me. I wanted them to know what was going on in the classroom." Charli discussed their support:

All of them backed me up, though, and I think that's one thing I was very lucky in all the principals, they *all* backed me up; and I had some real run-ins with kids. I didn't give, I didn't give in, and I had lots of meetings with parents and...students. I'd storm into the office and [say] I'm sorry but you're going to

have to arbitrate; I can't talk to him and he can't talk to me. They were there when I needed them.

Two of the administrative changes resulted after one principal committed suicide; one man was appointed principal on an interim basis to finish the school year until a replacement was hired. Of the interim principal, Charli recalled:

He just came in and said, "I'm taking over." He was absolutely what we needed. He didn't have committee meetings. I mean, we were shell-shocked; we couldn't have made a decision if our lives depended on it, and he knew that. He just came in and he said, "Okay, I'm the principal, I'm taking over. I don't care how you did it before, this is how we are doing it," and we all did it.

In her interviews, Charli discussed two of her principals who were instrumental in change at the high school level, Mr. Orange and Mr. Dandy. Mr. Orange was her principal "actually twice, because he went to the junior high and then in an administrator shuffle came back to the high school." He was noteworthy for Charli due to the support he provided, his enthusiasm, and his style of leadership.

The department system at the high school was strong; Mr. Orange was flexible in his support of individual departments.

We, the English department, were lucky. We committed to that. When I first started, and probably before I was there, we met every month. I don't think any other department ever [met monthly] that I heard of at school. We met every month on a formal basis, at a set time, and talked. We talked about test scores, and new textbooks if it was that year. Even if we really didn't have an agenda, we still tried to have a professional dialogue and not a "Can you believe Joe is doing this again?" type of meeting. And I think that probably came [under Mr. Orange's leadership]; he was very encouraging of that. We continued it and just felt that was really important....

If you had a passion for it, so did he. I feel that maybe of all the administrators I had, he didn't shape me as much as some of the others, but I think more things happened because if you wanted to take computer classes and you got all excited then, boy, he was all excited. He got you a new computer and he was asking you about them and wanted to know what you were going to do with the kids and [asked] what do you need? He was the principal when all the technology

started, so in my mind I associate it with him. He had a vision and he saw where we were going and he wanted us to be first...

In whatever direction you were going to go, he was there to support. And his enthusiasm! He just thought we were the best, he thought his kids were the best, he thought South River Falls was the best, and that rubs off. You think you were the best and you tried to live up to that. I think the kids did too, the various groups he was responsible for directly like National Honor Society and student council. Of course back then, he made sure you had the money. Technology was the same way. He was just very supportive.

Charli recalled that Mr. Orange's leadership style was based on consensus rather than being authoritarian.

[His leadership style was] more of a group effort than some of the other principals who are definitely the leader – “We’re going to do it my way.” That’s fine, everybody has his or her own style, but his was more, “Okay what is this group going to do? What does this group need?” At one point, he was really concerned that the reading was still falling on the English teachers; as a staff, he set it up that we took a [graduate] reading class a professor came up here. As a staff, because he wanted reading taught in the [content area] classrooms. And this was *way* before everybody else was doing it. So a professor (she chuckled) came up and we were all taking a graduate level *reading class* and trying all these strategies; that was the kind of stuff that he was doing.

While reading across the curriculum is more common in contemporary secondary schools, Mr. Orange's leadership brought this strategy to South River Falls long before it was a frequently-used method of teaching reading at the secondary level.

Another story depicted his leadership and its impact on students at the junior high level:

When the junior high was at Southtown [approximately 8 miles from South River Falls], there was a big reorganization of where the classes went and they were just going to have 6<sup>th</sup>, 7<sup>th</sup>, and 8<sup>th</sup> grade over there. Mr. Orange wanted to be [principal] there; he felt that was such a pivotal time in kids' lives and that he could make a difference in them. They called it Southtown U., and he just did wonderful things. They would have skating parties if [the students] had done such and such a thing, and had a student council. I think the junior high's just been swallowed up at South River Falls; they're just nothing. Now, they're just there, there's nothing special about them, there's no identity; it's really too bad.

Mr. Orange was not the only principal Charli mentioned when discussing the changes she experienced. She explained that Mr. Dandy was instrumental with change related to discipline and classroom management and a new way to evaluate teachers' performance:

He is absolutely cut and dried. "This is a rule: there will be nobody in the hall and I don't care what you say, or what the extenuating circumstances are. If I said 11:02, I meant 11:02 and I didn't mean 11:01 to let the kids out of the room." I mean it was very hard for me to make the adjustment.... [With the principals before Mr. Dandy] there weren't kids running around; they certainly weren't running amok.

He was the one I saw the most, because that is when the state had gone to, what did they call it when they dropped in for two minutes? Drive by (laughed), that's it. I like that. Oh what's that called, the new way of evaluating? It would drive me insane because I'd be doing something interesting and I'd want him to stay or the kids would even say, let's call Mr. Dandy back to explain why we're doing this and of course he'd be trying to get on to the next place. But of course I saw *him* the most then because of the new way to evaluate. I just felt that as an administrator they loved teaching and they loved kids and they got moved one step away, to be a principal. They got moved away from it, and I was always trying to drag them back in to the classroom to see what the kids are doing to see how [the students] are using the technology, all the decisions that they're making – come *see* what's happening. I loved it when I could get them to come in and sit for a while.

But he was certainly the one I saw the most because it was mandated. I'm sure he wouldn't say this, but because he came in as this big disciplinarian... everybody took a while to get used to that, it was different, I don't think he saw it as a way of intimidating a teacher, because it certainly [did not intimidate] those of us that had been teaching [for a long time], we'd say okay have a seat. Yet I wonder if sometimes he didn't – I don't know why I even want to say that comment – want the kids [to know he knew what was happening]; I know what you're doing, I've been in your room, I've seen you, I visited with the teacher, I've been in your room. Maybe there was just a little bit of that, too. That's just his way. And you've got to deal with the personality, and that was him.

He had all kinds of changes. It was a very tough first couple of months, and he didn't budge an inch. It did make the rest of the year go really nicely because the kids finally gave up. [For example, he said] "You're going to sit at the lunch tables rather than be dismissed at 4 after [the hour] to go out to the playground." I mean, he changed every little thing. And part of it also I think was to say I am the principal now and this is the way it's going to be.

In the bottom line, it was always to try to make it a better place to teach. And sometimes, he'd come up with such obvious [improvements], we'd say, "Duh!" You know, when you've looked at something the same way for so long? He would make another one of those, "This is the way it's going to be" [changes] and we'd all look at each other and say, (higher pitch) "Why didn't we think of that?" (short laugh) We had lunch duty and you know how exhausting that can be, because you have no free time all day then, I mean you just push, push, push. We had it all week, every six weeks or seven weeks or whatever. That week was hell; you never had a chance to call a parent or wrap things up. He just, it was an executive decision; he came in and said we're going to change [lunch duty] and at first everybody said, "Wait, we're changing lunch duty?" We'd done lunch duty the same way for 20 years. Then we did it one day out of six, and we said, "Oh! That's great!" (Laughter) So some things like that you just have to...

Charli associated Mr. Dandy with changes in disciplinary measures, classroom management, and the new evaluation process for teachers; she also viewed him as a persistent enforcer of required procedural changes. He was supportive of the teachers in his building and the acquisition of technological innovations. Charli reported that she and her colleagues did not resent these changes because they perceived their implementation as efforts to improve the operations and climate of the school.

Charli described strong collegial relationships with other educators in the high school, and her friendship with Florence was an example of a positive relationship with an elementary teacher. Charli discussed some of the collegial relationships she had over the years; examples of these will be presented in the when cross-curricular projects are discussed in the next chapter.

Charli was comfortable teaching in a small school district and reported that she did not encounter opposition to changes she wanted to implement over the years:

I always thought that was a *beautiful* thing of working in a small school. I don't *know* how I'd function in a large school; I don't. We had such latitude; if you really believed in something, you knew who to go to and you knew the system and how to get it suggested, whether it was a piece of software, whether it was a

new textbook. I always thought that was a *beauty* of working in a small system. I don't know how [it would work] if I'm one of 10 freshman English teachers and we're all doing this and it's kind of lock step.

Throughout the interviews, Charli provided information about her teaching philosophy and style. For example, she said, "I always taught from Bloom's Taxonomy – I mean I think we all do." Another of Charli's comments about a change mandated by Mr. Dandy, the last high school principal she worked with, revealed part of who she perceived herself to be:

...two years ago, these lesson plans that had to be turned in on the computer and it took the principal a full semester to get everybody [to comply] and I couldn't believe it. Because the first week he said they had to be online in a certain format, I put my lesson plans online in a certain format! I mean I'm just this good little girl that does like I'm told.

Charli viewed herself as complying with requirements related to her job, and was shocked that her colleagues did not immediately comply with changes that were mandated by the principal.

#### The Curriculum Director

In the more recent years prior to Charli's retirement, the curriculum director, Mrs. Guider, led change related to content taught and teaching strategies used. The success of duration of these types of changes within each district was largely dependent upon the knowledge, experience, and skills of the curriculum director. Charli related the following story:

With curriculum, maybe 20 years ago, we had a very poor curriculum director. When the administrators had made a commitment to hire a curriculum director, and that was a state initiative, the first one was so weak that it was real hard for us then to accept change....Anything you did, we just never understood it, we never

understood what was coming from AEA, we never understood how other schools were doing these things because we didn't even know what it was. Some of [the problem] was him, but some of it was all the conflicting stuff from the State. We would have an inservice and we'd leave with a notebook and we were supposed to be doing something and we had *absolutely* no idea what we were supposed to do. *None*. I mean he would have stood up there for an hour to start us on some initiative and we would leave and I bet we would have had thirty different opinions as to what we were supposed to do. And so for *several* years, we all just felt like we were behind, and I think we're still playing catch-up.

And so when Mrs. Guider, the new curriculum director, came and *did* understand it and *did* know what was going on, boy, it was hard for a lot of us to catch up. Then [we] understood what we were supposed to be doing and she could *very clearly* put it out to us, *oh my goodness we had a lot of work to do*. She's very determined and no excuses; this is just the way it has to be done. There was a lot of kicking and screaming, but she just said, you have to do it, sorry. And we needed it at that time. We *were* behind. And then to go to other meetings and hear what other schools were doing, I would almost be *sick*. I thought, well no one forced us to do it, and even if they were forcing us, it wouldn't make any difference because we had *absolutely* no idea what to do. There was no way this other person could have all of a sudden understood it because by then we had had it with him. ... Those of us who realized what was going on outside of our school were really dismayed.

The new curriculum director was the one who could pull us up, whatever the initiatives were – you know, now it's certainly different things than back then. Even to have full curricula on her shelves; he didn't have full curricula for each area, with a certain plan...you know, there were prescribed ways of doing it! (Laughed.) [Before the new curriculum director], why didn't somebody force us to get on the ball with some of the initiatives and some of the research? It just felt like we still were all doing our own stuff and not being research-based.

The curriculum director was instrumental in developing the curriculum mapping process at South River Falls, another important change Charli identified. "The powerful computer generated maps you get of your curriculum now are really strong tools. And again that goes back to computers and technology how it's impacting teaching."

I asked Charli, "Who decided what was important for the students to know?" and her response illustrated the change that had taken place. It also was a detailed example of



attempts by the English Department at curriculum mapping and instruction on basic English skills that students appeared to be lacking prior to the arrival Mrs. Guider:

At our district, before Mrs. Guider, I would have said the individual teachers [decided] a *lot* more and now under Mrs. Guider, it's the departments, because you are deciding on standards and benchmarks as a department. The curriculum, though, I don't talk with [the 11<sup>th</sup> grade English teacher] about what she does junior year. And I don't influence her, we don't discuss, are you teaching allegory junior year, and we should, we should be having *way* more discussions, and with the curriculum mapping, that's taking place. That is definitely taking place now but that's in the last five years under Mrs. Guider, where the English Department meets and we are seeing the ellipsis rule for three periods in a row, who's teaching it and where? We didn't have that before Mrs. Guider and curriculum mapping.

That's why we had English Department meetings, trying to fill in that hole, but we weren't doing it at the level they're doing now, not enough. At one point as a department, we went back and we had every elementary teacher – and they were wonderful about doing this and we tried to make it as simple as possible, but it was all [about asking] do you teach punctuation. We were trying to see *where* pronouns are introduced and who covers them, where subjects are introduced and who covers them and we still felt in high school they could not tell you so how in advanced comp and at even sophomore level – where writing [is emphasized] at sophomore level and senior year. We felt that we could not have the discussions with kids individually about their writing because they couldn't speak about it. We couldn't say, "There are no subordinate clauses in any of your sentences. For some variety, how about [adding] subordinate clauses." They didn't know what that [meant]. And so we were trying to go back and see [when it was taught]; well, they had had it year after year after year after year. Everybody. I [asked], are we teaching it too soon, are they not ready for it? But by the time they got to junior high, Ms. Beach initiated it, compiled it, because that's where the daily oral language kind of quit, 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup>, and then up to that point, the 9<sup>th</sup>, 10<sup>th</sup>, 11<sup>th</sup>, 12<sup>th</sup>, you should know that, that's basic. And we were going back because we couldn't teach passive sentences, this is passive can we get it into active? And I can't explain passive to them because they can't have the discussion with me, you know you're still using run on sentences, and if they can't underline a subject and a verb, it's awful hard for me to say, "You've got three run on sentences in this paragraph; can you find them for me? Let's see if we can clean that up, let's edit it." So we're doing a lot more of that kind of [work].

One year I remember, out of complete frustration, we decided [to go] back to diagramming sentences in an effort to *see* if we followed those kids then through sophomore level and senior year if they had a better understanding. It just seems like 50 years ago people had a better understanding; people all knew that. And because we came up 25 years and 30 years ago, we know that stuff and we

can't make the improvements in writing that we think we should with most of the kids. My top kids that's no problem; never is a problem with them. We had some pretty interesting research [projects] that we were doing as a department trying to have an impact on that.

I said, Okay, it's very logical. Every single word in a sentence has to go somewhere, it is 'a something,' there is an answer. For those of you who like math, 2 and 2 is 4. There is a subject in the sentence. There is a noun in here, there is a verb. Show me you know where it is. If you can show me by doing it..." The kids that were very practical, very linear, they loved it. They wanted more and I got everybody, I got past the first seven or eight lessons enough so that I could discuss their writing with them. And that's where we were headed to try to get better writing.

### Teachers' Role and Responsibilities

When asked about the role and responsibilities of teachers, Charli stated,

Early in my career I would have said my role and responsibilities were to take the child where he is, the whole class where they are and make some improvement over the year; reading, writing, spelling, technology, whatever. Now with mandatory curriculum, this is going to be taught at the sophomore level; some of these kids don't have the skills beneath them to let me introduce what's required at the sophomore level and that doesn't really make any difference. I've got to catch them up *and* do what the sophomore level skills are...we've got kids who are ready for allegory and have heard it and know what it is when you get them, but for everybody...Irony is big in the sophomore year. You've got kids [for whom] that is going to go right over their heads. There's a lot of pressure now that your role and responsibilities are just to teach the subject matter at the high school level, and we'll see more of it.

Further, she explained, "In earlier times I would have said my roles and responsibilities are to teach to the student, and I hope we're all still doing that."

On four occasions during the interviews, Charli discussed the limited amount of time a teacher has with a student, 180 days; she remarked how much needed to be accomplished in that period of time. This was not solely due to increased curricular demands; she gave an example of an additional contemporary role that secondary educators had not been required to do earlier in her career, "teaching character counts."

### Characteristics of a Good Teacher

When I asked about the characteristics of a good teacher, Charli gave me the name of another teacher at the high school, Mrs. Granite, who she believed was a very good teacher. Mrs. Granite came to South River Falls right after completing her teacher preparation program in 1993. Charli listed following characteristics that Mrs. Granite possessed: well prepared in content area; use of hands-on teaching methods, technology, and student-centered projects; teaching more than just the content area (also communication skills); and an interest in good teaching. According to Charli, good teachers are caring, enthusiastic, and concerned for and interested in their students.

One other characteristic was that good teachers did not give up on their students.

Charli referred to this characteristic in herself in a later interview:

I just wouldn't give up on kids and they'd give up on themselves. That would make me so mad...when I went back to sub that first year, Joe dropped out of school. He had hair spiked up to here and nose rings. Joe was an absolutely brilliant kid. Nobody could *stand* him. He and I would go round and round. I would say, "*What* do you want out of this?" Joe would say, "Why do you care so much? I don't care." I said, "That's why I care."

She referred to other students like Joe, "late bloomers," who she taught earlier in her career:

Some of the kids that made me the maddest and I would lose sleep over went on to graduate school...One comes back to see me all the time, he is a principal. Another is a very successful architect. I could have killed him; I'm surprised some teacher didn't. I saw that in [the young man who didn't care], hang in there....I think he was bored to tears but he would never say that and he wouldn't do any of the work....Maybe in four or five years...those are the kids you just can't give up on...

Good teachers knew the content, used active learning and technology in the classroom, were caring, and did not give up on students.

### Important Events in Charli's Teaching Career

Charli referred to the national board certification process as one of two important events in her teaching career; the other was winning a prestigious national award for teaching excellence. She described her national board certification experience:

I got the original information [about certification]. We did the pilot project for the national board certification as a department. Our goal that year was to come together as a professional community rather than just getting together once a month and complaining about kids or asking, "Do you have your tests ready?" We all wanted something that forced us, and that's what the national board certification is, a professional dialogue from the minute you say I'm interested until you take your tests....The whole thing is the process, the process of the professional dialogues and the meetings with others. People are still doing that all over the United States, stepping back from the classroom and saying, "What works and what doesn't and why?" The purpose of the certification is to get enough [board certified teachers] out in the education world that they have an impact. They have been through the process and can mentor other teachers and can be the lead person in department meetings. We were the first group. When my certification was going to lapse, I was getting out of teaching, but I did the recertifying because I believed in it so strongly.

Charli spoke little of the national teaching award she received in 1999. She stated that it was a complete surprise, and that the award was presented to her during an assembly at the end of the day. Charli also explained that she never knew who nominated her for this award. She did show me the plaque and informed me that the certification and the award gave her "about 15 years of very intense professional satisfaction."

At one point in her career, Charli reported wanting to leave the teaching profession:

The national board certification opened up so *many* doors for me, and I was so ready for it. I was going to leave teaching. I'd had it. I was a good classroom teacher, supposedly, and I'd been teaching for however many years. It was the same thing every year and luckily that whole national board certification opened up for me because I was ready for a challenge...something that was more than just the classroom.

The certification resulted in many professional opportunities for Charli. For example, she was involved for six years as a member of a board that was appointed to assist schools in the region with the implementation of research-based teaching strategies. She explained:

...it did mean that I was bringing back cutting edge [strategies] every time I would come back [from board meetings]. I would be meeting with other teachers and talk with the principals about the research they were doing at the state level and the collaboratives that were forming. We would be in on some of the pilot projects because I would volunteer.

Another challenging professional activity in which Charli participated was a university project where master teachers were videotaped using research-based teaching strategies; she and three colleagues were recorded in nine clips that were at one time available on the project's Internet website to serve as models for educators. She also wrote grants that provided her district with tens of thousands of dollars of funding for various projects. Charli reflected on this period of her career and commented, "Pretty heady stuff for just a plain old classroom teacher. I needed that or I would have been doing something else." When I inquired what she would have chosen to do, she responded without hesitation, "Anything. Anything that was a bigger challenge. I could still do what I was doing in the classroom and didn't feel that was enough anymore. I wanted to have a bigger impact."

### Retirement

One year before retirement, Charli taught a particularly challenging group of students. She delayed her decision to retire until the next year:

I wanted to retire so badly after that freshman year because they were so awful...just worked so hard and I didn't see [results] and thank goodness I didn't because they grow up so much between 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> grade and they made so much progress in 10<sup>th</sup> grade. When I had them for the second year, they were ready to

work and they had matured. Luckily I didn't retire because I had left them with good feelings and they left feeling better about themselves.

Overall, Charli described teaching as "rewarding" and said, "you don't stay that long if you don't think it's rewarding." Of her decision to retire, she said:

I have had the luxury – I've never had to teach. I love teaching. I loved everything about it. I loved the camaraderie, I liked the colleagues. I like the people who pick teaching. I mean, I like the people who say that this is important. They are involved. They are people who get things done; they are people who make things happen. I *love* that. But we had been through, my husband's folks both died, my dad died, our kids were getting married and having children, my mom needs more help, my brother – I spent almost a whole year in Phoenix. And we just looked at each other and said, okay, we're older and we're tired, too. And what can I do to help the two of us? Can I run the errands during the day, to help the two of us, where we are in our life right now, with the rest of the family?

Charli described the year before she retired, "I missed 18 days of school. It was just one of those godawful years and you just think, 'How did the students make it through that year?' It's almost like it's just not fair to them either."

Since retirement, Charli has kept a full calendar by frequently accepting substitute teaching assignments and contracting with a testing company to read and score written essays, in addition to handling daily family matters, visiting grandchildren, participating in church activities, and assisting her State Representative with tasks related to his political duties and campaigns.

#### Changes Charli Experienced

Charli, like each of the participants, discussed changes that had been mandated by their administrators or curriculum directors and others that were required by the educational system in the United States. Some of the changes that occurred during

Charli's teaching career were not mandated. Several changes were due to other issues that took place in the context of South River Falls School District.

During the first interview I conducted with Charli, I asked the question, "Has education changed since you began teaching? If so, how?" Her immediate response to this question was, "It has changed tremendously." While her responses to this and my other questions resulted in a list of many changes she recalled from her time at South River Falls High School, she also spontaneously discussed other changes throughout our interviews. (See Table 3.)

As previously mentioned, Charli indicated that the leadership by one of the principals, Mr. Orange, was significant related to technology and collegiality, while another principal, Mr. Dandy, led significant change related to student behavior and discipline. Mrs. Guider, the curriculum director, was also a person that Charli associated with mandatory changes:

I think some of these changes do have to be top-down, and maybe that's why I was ready for Mrs. Guider to be there. Because nobody is going to say on their own, "I'm going to completely change the way I turn in my lesson plans;" If it doesn't come from the top and [the curriculum director or an administrator] says, you are now going to put benchmarks and standards on your lesson plans...

These mandated changes impacted the students, Charli and her colleagues, and the school district.

### Teaching Strategies

Charli explained that certain strategies were taught during professional development offerings, and they were mandatory; however, teachers were able to choose

Table 3

*Changes Charli Discussed*


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Preparation and Professional Development	Responsibilities
Teacher Preparation Programs	Role of High School Teachers
Level of Support for New Teachers	Duties Contained in Teaching Contracts
Formal Teacher Mentoring Program	More Demands on Teachers' Time
Teacher Relocation/Choice to Stay	Grant Writing
Professional Development Pay	Number of Courses Taught
Teacher Evaluation	Advising Students' Extra Curricular
National Board Certified Teachers	Activities
Administrators	Curriculum
Area Education Agencies	Alternative High School Program
Looping	Who Determined the Curriculum Taught
Enrollment/School Consolidation	Textbooks
Technology	Curriculum Directors
Internet	Curriculum Mapping
Instructional Software	Reading Across the Curriculum
Data Management	Rigor and Relevance Framework
Teaching Strategies Videos for	Critical Thinking
University Website	Homework
Testing	(table continues)

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Online Gradebook	Grading
Law/Accountability	Cross-Curricular Projects
No Child Left Behind	State Standards and Benchmarks
Standardized Tests	

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from a variety of strategies that were presented and document the chosen strategy's use in their classrooms.

There have been a lot of [inservices on specific teaching strategies] since Mrs. Guider came. And I don't know whether it's just because she believes in [the strategies presented] so much or because the State [requires them]. For example, she said, "Every teacher is going to teach a vocabulary lesson and it's going to be one of these three. And we'll all pick, I don't care what it is, but we're going to, as a staff, we're going to look at a whole bunch and we're going to pick them and you're going to turn in a copy of this vocabulary lesson. So for the biology sophomores on Tuesday, you're going to have some little [strategy] that's focusing on vocabulary, and US History, etc. Then you're going to staple it to your lesson plan to show that you did a vocabulary lesson." We haven't had that kind of *absolutely specific* and mostly good [instruction on strategies]. Whatever Mrs. Guider had instigated over the last 5 to 10 years, at first you'd think it was one more thing, because I already teach vocabulary from the books and the textbook and the way that that's laid out. However, what she wanted was that the kids would fall into a pattern and say, "Oh yeah, that's a such and such, we're doing it now in science, now we're doing it in health, etc., that they get [in the habit of using the strategy]...

Mrs. Guider had very specific [timelines for professional development]; "Let's take a year and do this, let's take three months and do that. This committee's going to meet for this [timeframe]." Then the professional development made sense. You knew what you were doing and you knew why you were doing it. She made a terrific effort to teach us if we didn't understand it.

Charli stated that accountability for implementation was an important part of the process, "You would have to turn in proof that you had done that kind of a strategy at some point in the next six weeks."

When asked about teaching strategies that had an impact on her teaching, Charli responded:

I used the jigsaw puzzle quite a bit. And the jigsaw was that [students were divided into groups], ones, twos, threes, and fours. Ones are all over here, they *learned* something, and the twos learn something else, and the threes are [et cetera] – and they become experts. Then you put them back together [in different groups;] this time you have a one, a two, a three, and a four and they've got to teach each other. I like that because then every kid was responsible for knowing something well and when he couldn't tell the others, it was the other kids saying "Well, you didn't explain that every well," and then he'd have to go back to his other group, the threes. I'd say, "Let's have another meeting of all the threes and go back over this" and they'd make sure that everybody really understood it and they'd have to go back and teach the others. [Jigsaw was] just a nice way of putting some more responsibility on the kids' shoulders. Boy, there were a lot more [strategies] than *that*. I can't think of anything right now.

The jigsaw was a cooperative learning strategy that was another piece of Charli's puzzle. This strategy allowed learners to be more responsible for their learning and helped her to determine the level of all students' comprehension of the material.

Some of the changes Charlie included in her interview responses were not mandated. These were mentoring, declining enrollment/school consolidation, and looping.

### Mentoring

When Charli began teaching in 1972, a mentoring program for new teachers did not exist. As was presented in the previous chapter, Charli said new teachers were given keys and told to "go teach." When I asked her what she did when she did not know how to do something or if she had a question, she replied:

that was so long ago, I don't remember. I'm sure there were teachers there that helped me. I think back; there was some support, but I can also remember a woman who I don't think even spoke to me and she was the lead English teacher until she finally retired. She was [focused on] her classroom, and her kids, and all

of the work she did for her classes and she certainly didn't have time to talk to you about what you were [doing]. I suppose [I asked] principals.

She also stated that it was not the case that collegiality wasn't encouraged back then, rather that "the situations didn't develop."

While South River Falls did not have a formal mentoring program for many years, "we never let a first-year teacher flounder like we used to have to flounder. We didn't really have any new teachers for so long; we had a long period in there. Everybody seemed to be...about the same age. Maybe that helped our faculty. For the kids it was nice to all of a sudden get some new teachers when some people started to retire." The mentoring that "was done on a casual basis" evolved into a more formal arrangement a year before the "State got into it" as a result of Charli's state and regional committee work. The district then joined the State program when it began.

#### Declining Enrollment/School Consolidation

Charli openly shared her perspective on declining enrollment, an issue that is common in Iowa and other rural states. "I think we are in a real crisis in our rural schools in Iowa, because of the size."

One consequence of declining enrollment was included in Chapter 4; that the junior high was merged into the main South River Falls building and that the students were "swallowed up" by the high school and lost their identity. The smaller number of students enrolled in the district also impacted the teachers:

In terms of changes, that was another thing I thought of. In the school getting really small, maybe the hardest thing for teachers is I never had more than two preps in the first ten or 15 years of my teaching. *Every* teacher now has at least four preps. *Every* night, getting prepared for four classes. I just, that just wears you down, I mean, that's astounding. And then the teachers who have more, I

don't know how they do it. I don't know how physically you come to school every single day and see 20 kids [in a class] and keep them all busy and you've got to prepare four different, or I think I subbed Ms. Smith and she had three classes of Junior English, Drama, Journalism, and two classes of advanced comp. She had seven classes a day and a prep period. Four preps.

Every day. Every day. Get something meaningful and keep those kids busy and on task, whatever it is, whether [the preparation] is running off tests or making a poster. I just think that the biggest disservice we're doing to teachers when [the schools] get so small is having too many preps. You can't do it. Something has to give. You either give too many study halls – I never ever gave a study hall. Ever. We never ever had a day when the kids would say, "Well let's just have a free period." No. We had periods when they were doing a worksheet under my supervision but I never ever said [this will be a free period]. I said, "No, I have you for 180 days, and I have a lot to do in that 180 days." I don't know that I could have kept that up; at some point you have to say grades are due tomorrow and I have to work on them, you read your story. If I made the decision that you were to read the story so that everyone would be quiet it was because of the homework situation, I tried never to make the decision on "I just can't see my way to tomorrow."

It's getting worse. I had three preps the last couple of years, freshman English, sophomore English, and then something else. If you start getting to four, sheesh, that's more than reading the essays and the papers. I think [the preparation] is harder than correcting homework and reading essays. The everydayness of it. Wow.

### Looping

A practice that impacted both students and teachers was looping, where students would have the same teacher two years in a row. At the end of her teaching career, Charli's students were in her freshman and sophomore English classes; Charli saw both positive and negative aspects to this arrangement:

Maybe one of the most interesting things that I just had a taste of the last couple of years is looping. I think I would *really* be a proponent of that. I was, I did have, for I think the last three years of teaching, the same kids two years and I could not *believe* the difference of what I could get done that second year. I was *astounded* at the, at what I saw as the progress and what I thought I could get done in that year. And I just would be interested in more research on that, more information, because I thought it had, at the high school level, which when it usually doesn't happen, we switched our schedules around as teachers, as a department, so it would happen, we were getting so small that we wanted it that way. Before, we

had a ninth grade, a tenth grade, and an eleventh grade English teacher, and we each picked up other electives. As we got smaller and we were forced to cover more classes we set it up that way on purpose.

Looping could be viewed as beneficial for both teacher and student: “You’re a step ahead; it saves you, it’s less wear and tear on the teacher. And the kids hit the ground running, too. They know your expectations...”

Among the negative aspects to looping were two described by Charli, potential personality conflicts and limited exposure to different perspectives:

And that’s one of the real problems as we get too small, because one of their considerations a month ago was to go to two English teachers, junior high, high school. I was almost sick to my stomach. So if you don’t get along with a kid, and the kid doesn’t get along with you, they’re going to have you three out of six years if they take senior English. That’s awful. That is just awful. Now I said something about looping, but I’m not sure what service we’re giving the kids if I would have them three out of six years. It’s not as if we can say, okay, we’re going to move you over to the other section and see how you get along.

We’re at the point, they should not have me two years, not as an English teacher. There’s too many things that people have to offer, and they’ve had what I have to offer. Even though I am pushing them differently at the sophomore level and we have different expectations from them, we’ve reached the point of not being able to offer enough advanced classes to our high school kids in way too many small schools.

### Standardized Assessments

While some changes were mandated by the administration of the South River Falls district, other change was mandated by the State and/or Federal Governments. Since Charli began teaching, the district had required students to take standardized assessments. Charli spoke at length about the standardized assessments that were given during her years of teaching and explained why the Iowa Tests of Educational Development (ITED) were given by the district over the years,

Before we still wanted to give those because teachers were using it and you were seeing trend lines and you were seeing whether the department was improving or where the gaps were in the department. But you really couldn't do that, you could not get that kind of information from it. That's what they wanted. But that's not, the test wasn't devised for that. If you go back and talk to the ITED people, that's not what the test was devised for. People were trying to use the test for the wrong reason, or trying to get information out of it that it wasn't devised to [provide].

However, change came with the mandatory reporting of student achievement scores for NCLB; students were given additional standardized tests. When I asked Charli why so much rides on the Iowa Tests now, she replied:

Well now they compare them [test scores]. It's not just ITEDs anymore. We only give half of the tests that we used to give on ITEDs, three or four tests, because nobody's using them and nobody's paying any attention so all we give now are the required ones. I thought that was *really* interesting to hear they [the district administrators] made that decision.

I'm trying to remember what year that was. Because it didn't affect me; they were still giving vocabulary, still giving reading. We [stopped] giving sources of information, we didn't give social studies, we didn't give I can't even remember all the others, we only gave three or four. Math, science, reading, vocabulary. That was it.

With ITED, you get this big general category of commas [for example], and you really don't know what it is that [students] know.

In addition to the Iowa Tests of Basic Skills at the elementary level and the ITED that had been taken by students each year, additional assessments were required toward the end of Charli's career. The information she gathered from assessments not available or required earlier in her career helped Charli make instructional decisions:

One of the biggest things that has happened in teaching is this whole idea of the test not just being a tool for administrators to use, or the State to use, but for the teacher to actually have...that's why I was an early advocate of the MAP [Measures of Academic Progress, Northwest Evaluation Association, 2009] testing when I could see, okay it's not always 100% correct but it's going to give us something to work with...this is everything they don't know...the next thing they need to know is this.

The whole reason for MAP or other tests like that – I don't know the other ones, that's the one we bought in to, the AEAs bought in to – coming is because

you could get that information, and I think people were so tired of trying to explain ITED tests to parents (chuckled) when there wasn't [information on individual student learning needs] there. I would spend a lot of time with the kids on those [percentile ranks]. And I'd highlight with them and we'd talk about them in an effort for them to go home and explain to parents. I spent a lot of time on test scores.

It was also a couple of years when I had the [most academically challenged] students I've ever had. MAP testing really helped on that. I'm not sure I could have gotten through 20 years ago with a skill level that low, and no one knew what to do. Every time I would back up to think I'm teaching at their level, I thought, I'm not a sixth grade teacher, I'm not a third grade teacher. I could not back up enough to their skill level.

And the kids could buy into [the MAP test]. I would say, well you already know this, this, and this, that's great. And then I can also say to the really good kids – I *loved* it for the really good kids, too; they hadn't been pushed in years. - to have them miss half, (gasps) some of them just died. But then they got up so high, and then I could praise them. I said, "Oh my goodness, gerunds aren't until junior year; you're working with dangling participles, that's not until then." You could really do the spin on it.

What happened is that the good kids sometimes were taking an hour, an hour and a half on that 45-minute test. And we let them, because they hadn't ever been pushed like that. That was another reason why I liked MAP. Every single kid, the next thing you have to learn; and it was always we're going to keep right on going until the day you graduate and then it's your own responsibility, but up until then there's something you need to learn next (she chuckled)...I explained it all. My kids could have written an essay and explained MAP testing and why I bought it.

This story also illustrated that Charli encouraged her students to be lifelong learners.

Charli discussed another reason that she preferred the MAP test, which was taken on the computer, over written tests like the ITED was the shorter time involved in the testing process overall, and especially the amount of time until the results were available to teachers and students. "All I could think of is that you still have to write a test and print it, mail it to somebody and they have to mail it back and score it and then you get results however much later, and this MAP test you have the results that night. I just think the whole thing is changing, testing is changing."

Charli specifically discussed efforts to tie student achievement to teacher pay:

Which is really what the forced federal testing is making us do now, and that is really zero in on [individual student achievement]. I know as a good teacher you always think you are [positively impacting student achievement], but I really think the increased attention has [made] it much more pervasive across the curriculum now. I'm still really concerned – you and I are just old enough educators, and we're moving faster and faster toward it – that salaries will be tied to that. Well how is the home ec teacher's salary tied to that? Or how is the art teacher's salary tied to it, or the music [teacher's]? There are so many other ramifications for it when I know how *hard* I worked those two years with that really low class. Thank *goodness* they showed some improvement! I just can't imagine if I'd worked that hard and done everything *I* could think of and that the AEA could help me with and then [they would] not have improved. And then to say I was a failure and not pay me, and I worked twice as hard as I did the year before.

The mandate for students to achieve at high levels made Charli question her teaching, despite her efforts and the number of changes she had made over the years:

I know they want to weed out poor teachers, and it could be that if I can't make those kids improve – and I mean *make* them improve, besides encourage them and whatever else – then maybe I shouldn't be teaching high school English. If they're going to say you're a good teacher because these kids improved, it's just wild, (pause) and so maybe it was a good time for me to retire. Maybe I just can't change, maybe there are new things. How do we keep up with the professional development? How do I change enough to affect the kids? I think the point is, does it make any difference that I'm trying, if I can't produce [high levels of achievement] in the kids?

She grudgingly stated that there were some benefits that could be associated with NCLB:

The specificity of it, the not looking at ITED scores for a whole class and saying the district is on track. To use it as a tool to say okay, whatever you decide on for this group of kids, they're doing it out to 2014, and how are you going to hit those marks and what kid can you help the most. As much as I drug my heels and kicked and screamed...

### Standards and Benchmarks

Charli shared her opinion on a State curriculum or mandatory State standards and benchmarks:



The state curriculum, it would be really interesting for me if I was still teaching how I would buy into that. Except I'm kind of also at the point where there's no reason for 400 districts to be doing the exact same work all the time; we're just reinventing the wheel. It would be nice every so often to just say this is it, this committee has decided (laughs), and say okay, I can work within that framework.

I was an exchange student in Finland years and years and years ago so I've always followed the Finnish system. At 10 o'clock, in an English classroom at the 10<sup>th</sup> grade level on Tuesday, they're always doing the same thing. I was always *appalled* at that, just *appalled* at that. Well, [recently] the Des Moines Register had this huge 8-page pull out [section] on the Finnish system and why they're so successful. I certainly don't think that's it but maybe more of my energy could have been spent doing other things then. I just think of all the time you spend on [developing standards and benchmarks] and to say that that system is doing it at District S and that system is doing it at District C (chuckling). Oh, we have way too many people spending way too much time on standards and benchmarks and curriculum, when we're all saying, teach them to read and to write and to think and speak. I'm giving up on [local control] now. There are so many things you should be doing with your professional time, when basically we're all doing about the same. It's not that different. I may teach you to think creatively one way but I'm going to meet that standard and benchmark that says I have a creative outlook [on a given topic].

I wonder if we're headed [to mandated State standards and benchmarks] and I don't know how I'd be on that, *because* I change my lesson plans in the car going [from home to school]. I have them written out, they're turned in, but if something came up on the news that absolutely fit in perfectly, I would in a minute be down there doing a new worksheet and teaching that same thing but using what was in the news that morning.

I was so *appalled* at Finland. Also I can remember the first time that I heard, years and years and years ago, that the entire state of Texas had five science textbooks and then you picked from those and that because of the California and Texas textbook selection, then that determined [textbook options] for the rest of the United States. They were so big that the publishers went with those. I can remember the first time I heard that, I was *appalled*. I just thought that was *terrible*. And that they're determining content. I'm not so sure about that anymore.

When thinking of mandated curriculum with predetermined standards and benchmarks and the role of textbooks in the process, Charli expressed concern. However, she also indicated a possible change from her earlier-stated belief that districts had local control of these issues. Here, Charli seemed to question whether there really was local

control given what she had learned about textbook publishers' practices. Her discussion of the issues indicated they were complex and not easily or definitively decided.

### Textbooks

Charli discussed textbook adoption. Departments were on a seven-year cycle to review and adopt new textbooks, on a scheduled rotation so that all departments did not adopt new textbooks during the same year. The process to reexamine the current textbook used and available alternatives began two years prior to the scheduled purchase of new textbooks.

Despite budget cuts at the South River Falls District over the years, administration adhered to the seven-year cycle of textbook adoption. She recalled one time when she and her colleagues offered to skip the acquisition of new English textbooks:

They fought really hard to stick to [the textbook revision schedule], of all the cuts that we made, I mean, things are really bad now and so that may certainly have changed. We even went in one year as an English department— because we're a really expensive year – and said physically our books are fine and Poe is still Poe. We even went in and asked, "Are there major purchases that need to be made, is there other technology that we should be looking at instead? Should [we spend] all those thousands of dollars on technology tools or testing tools [instead]?" and [the principal] said, "No, we've made our commitment to this, we're going to stick to it as long as we can. Go ahead and do your year of textbook selection, so we did." Because sciences and social studies, they change. Commas still go in the same place for English, it's not as if (laughs) Poe has changed. So I'd be interested now to see if that's one thing that [has changed given the current difficult financial situation].

While Charli indicated that the content of English textbooks had not changed, she also said that textbooks had changed: "The textbooks have changed so much now. The materials you get from the textbooks are just *unreal*. The box of stuff you get, and so much of that now has fabulous help for the less proficient reader." Apparently, the

subject matter of the English textbooks had not changed a great deal, but the format and support for readers at different proficiency levels had.

### Rigor and Relevance

Another change that was related to improving students' standardized test scores that Charli stated was important from her perspective was the rigor and relevance framework (Daggett, 2000, 2005). Charli reported, "That completely changed my teaching. It changed my whole focus." She indicated she had always used Bloom's Taxonomy when planning lessons, and described the rigor and relevance framework as "just another way of looking at Bloom's Taxonomy." Regarding her early adoption of the framework, Charli stated:

I could see that instantly and just knew that I needed to go through and identify [how the lessons fit with the framework]; so I spent a summer doing that with my classes. I identified [Quadrant] A, B, C, D, on assignments, on quizzes. I changed tests, I rewrote essay questions, realizing, okay, I expect the [Quadrant] A, that's just everyday stuff; I'm not testing on that.

When I got my masters, I could still take classes for free because I was a full-time instructor, and I went ahead and took a statistics class. It was the best testing I had ever been through. I was so intrigued; you have 700 kids in this lecture and the quizzes, you had to pass them. The first ten questions, that was just basic, you had to pass those. You didn't even get your test until you'd passed the quiz, the first part. The testing was multiple choice, the best tests I have ever taken. And if anyone ever questions, "Can you get the higher-order thinking and can you push them into other quadrants and can you be higher on Bloom's Taxonomy with a multiple choice test?" – *absolutely* you could. I was so intrigued that your grade was not on knowing the basics, it was the application, whatever – well it wasn't synthesis because you're not making new things. Maybe that shaped me as a teacher, too, the whole rest of my teaching career, that you just have to know this stuff, you just have to know the basics. I'm not even testing on it. You have to know it. And now I'll test you on do you really *know* it, can you prove it to me. That's right with the rigor and relevance. You can see from years and years ago why I was primed for adopting that.

Charli used the rigor and relevance framework (Daggett, 2000, 2005) extensively in her classroom.

My kids could explain that graph; I laminated it. I had pinholes in the corners of that [poster], I must have taken it down and talked about it with the kids and put it back up so much. They could explain it to you because they knew in every assignment that we were doing where it was [what quadrant] and why we were doing it and what I expected. I'd say this is just memorization, you just have to put your time in and do it. It's not higher order thinking, this isn't hard; you just have to spend time on it. Then when I would get them up into here [pointed to the fourth quadrant], they knew it and they knew why it was hard. I bet in most instances my kids could even tell you on my multiple choice test questions which quadrant they were from, they knew it so well. I spent a lot of time teaching that because I was going to use it so hard during the year.

They knew what we were doing and why. And I always thought that helped. I never had anything that was busy work, I didn't believe in that. I thought I am going to fight the kids on so many things, I am *not* fighting over stuff like that. I said, you prove to me that you already know it, we're not spending any time on it. In terms of basic understanding down here [Quadrant A], you've got to show it to me; you can't use it if you don't understand it. They could also do this on Bloom's Taxonomy; they knew the six levels of Bloom's Taxonomy and how it fit [assignments].

In all of our cross curricular [projects], all of those were Bloom's or rigor and relevance and we could say what part of the project health was doing and why, we are going to do this in this quadrant and why, we're aiming toward this end product that forces everybody up into the fourth [quadrant].

I think that the rigor and relevance might have put even more on those good kids too, that they could say that you have to know the literal before you can even get to the inference. [I said] you're good kids, I expect everything you do to be up here in the D quadrant. And then I'll design units and I'll design assignments to push you into those other quadrants as much as possible.

In fact, the rigor and relevance chart in my room made the carnival skits one year and they all went "Oh no!" and laughed. The parents didn't get it at all but the kids got it, they made a joke about it.

Charli's implementation of the rigor and relevance framework was not matched by all of her colleagues, but to Charli, the framework was an important piece of the puzzle.

### Special Education

Charli defined special education:

I always say special needs... kids who are not performing – whether it's physical or mental – what a *normal* tenth grader is, or an *average*, whatever the word. Below expectations for the middle-of-the-road at whatever level, sixth grade P.E., or twelfth grade math, or history 9<sup>th</sup> grade, if for some reason they are not able to be within how I could plan my lesson to fit the most of the kids. So maybe even the high and the low would fit into my definition of special education, even though special education has been the low. Essentially, even though I'm making all these individual changes and you're trying to get everybody, I still am saying that for the majority of the kids, we're going to read this story and you're going to understand inner dialog and external conflict. I have to come up with what my standard and benchmark lesson is that day, [for example] this is going to be a discussion of symbolism in *Gatsby*. Then I can deal with the kids that really get it, and what are they going to do, and the kids that have trouble, and I would put special ed as the kids who would have trouble.

The purpose of special education, according to Charli, was:

Extra help. And maybe different help. The general way, the one I plan, that the focus of this lesson is going to be such and such, and I have come up with two ways that have worked for me before and so I'm going to try these, and it doesn't work for this kid. It would be another way of learning, a different way of learning, or individual help, or some change in the amount of time or the amount that's covered. I still want them to know sarcasm or whatever, but what do I have to do to get sarcasm across at that level?

During the final interview, when asked about the impact of special education for the students who received services, Charli replied:

I was always surprised how much the kids fought it, and I know that that's probably more of a high school thing, but when they could take their test and go down and get help, you know, that was kind of an accepted procedure for four or five years, that certain kids would, sometimes they'd be gone, and do the assignment in their room, and sometimes they'd do the assignment in my room. But for tests, it was always, just take your test and disappear. The kids would sit there and not go do it, not take advantage of it. And of course, I ached for them because they didn't want to be different, and at the same I was thinking, oh, maybe if someone had read the test for them, or, someone had said, let's go back over page 3, or... so the resistance to it. But the parents would have said, "you don't know how to read, we're going to get you into this program," but then to have to come and do extra work, that was hard for some of the kids.

When I asked if the students who received special education services were given “extra work,” Charli replied, “Sometimes. The little girl I worked with before school every day, she had to be there before eight twice a week or whatever it was. So sometimes, or to come in during a study hall, they would have thought that was ‘extra work.’”

In an earlier passage, Charli discussed the inclusion of all students in the general education classroom, with either a special education teacher or paraeducator providing support. However, this was not always the case at South River Falls:

[For a half-day, long-term substitute teaching assignment this year] I had a little girl in advanced lit class, that when I first said I would teach and I stopped by to get the class list, I thought oh my goodness, what is she doing in this class? How can she read *Great Gatsby* and *Doll House* and *Animal Farm*? She signed up for the class; you have got to grade her along with everybody else. Well, she got a D on the last test and I was thrilled. I don’t know [if she can pass the course], because I only have them for two units. I think she’s still special ed. I can’t think what services she’s getting as a senior. ‘Cause I haven’t been affected by it at all. I mean I have absolutely no idea. She’s in the class [without support from special education].

Charli shared a story where special education services were provided in the general education setting at the junior high level. Mike was a young man who is included in the classroom for Language Arts, whom she encountered when serving as a substitute paraprofessional:

I told you about the little junior high boy who absolutely cannot read. [Mike] didn’t want me anywhere near him. How can I have him in a room with 22 others and not have him influence the atmosphere of the room, the attitude of the room? (Sighing.) When you worked so hard to get them to buy into something, you have to work so hard to get them settled down and working on something, and to know how hard this poor kid is struggling and *what his life must be like*. No wonder he doesn’t want me to even be near him. “Don’t look at me, don’t look at my writing!” But he can’t print; he can’t take that and then print it.

And it depends on what your end goal is, because if your end goal is can they write, then...if the end goal is do they know something about cell biology and it's an essay question, well, yeah, he could do something orally. Thinking, can he think, is he thinking?

While serving as a substitute at an alternative high school setting, Charli encountered one of the students she had taught in the high school classroom and shared the following:

One of the little boys out at the alternative school, I had two years. And [Bill] never said, in two years, even when I made an effort to speak to him, when you came in the room and said good morning, I bet he spoke six words to me. He's a very poor reader. So he's out there now. They have big long tables; he came in about 9:30, quarter to ten. He sat down in the middle of the table, here's his stack of textbooks, he started to work. He never said one word to anybody. I said hi to him on the way in, he didn't say good morning to me or anything, worked the whole time. But I watched him for three hours, and out of that he might have been trying to read for 20 minutes. He *sat there*, at that table, for three hours. I don't know that the special education helped him, and I don't know that the alternative school is helping him. Now, he might get a diploma, at some point, because he will have gotten through the material – and yet you forget sometimes how low you can be and still get a high school diploma. It's not saying that you're the most fabulous, it's saying that you have this basic set of skills. I don't know about him.

When I asked Charli about change she did not support, she replied with only one item, "I am still having a really hard time with the full inclusion." Yet, her experience as a substitute teacher since retiring had allowed her to see some benefit: "I had an extra adult every hour, and the classes weren't big, and I never knew who that person was there for, so I see how it's working. I don't know."

#### No Child Left Behind (NCLB)

Charli described the impact of NCLB and the required testing had on students:

Our problem, sophomore year – and finally they addressed it, but – for a three year period, we gave the PLAN test, which is the pre-ACT test for sophomores; we gave the *full* ITEDs, we don't do that anymore, we only give the requireds in that; we gave the MAP starting that year; and we had a few had a few kids that

would go ahead and take the ASFAB (Armed Services Vocational Aptitude Battery) early. The MAP was four days. The ITED was four days, the PLAN was just one day. I mean it just got to be *ridiculous*. What happened is the kids just [think] “Oh, that’s another test, blah,” instead of [putting effort into the test]. So I’m concerned, and we’ve cut it back, we’ve really cut it back. We’ve eliminated the PLAN or moved it,,,

To encourage students to do well on the standardized assessments, Charli said the district has

...given incentives for years, 10, 15 years. Every year they try something different. Sometimes it’s pizza parties, [one teacher’s students] vocabulary scores just shot up...they’re going to do their incentive day, and they picked games in the room and cookies – a free day. We’ve done movies...I don’t think anybody sits down and takes a test any differently because they’re going to get cookies. Some people must think it works.

When I asked Charli what is required to motivate secondary students to perform to the best of their abilities on the standardized testing, she replied,

That’s all showing that you care. We talked about that the first time regarding the qualifications of a good teacher. It’s got to be that one to one. They – the administrators the profession, the literature – expect you to know what every kid is doing every minute in the room. Like eyes in the back of your head – Johnny quit that – even though you’re doing something else. Miracle workers that we’re supposed to be. And you’re supposed to know that they play football, and say, “Oh you caught a good pass on Friday night,” and “Oh too bad about your little sister doing such and such.” I think that’s teaching, though. I don’t know how they do it in the big schools when they have 200 kids. I usually had 120 a day.

Charli commented about flaws in the NCLB legislation:

This is not Garrison Keillor’s “all the children are above average.” I’m just saying and I’m sure you’ve heard [other teachers] say this, we’re setting them up for failure. We just say okay we’re going to have a whole day and we’re going to test you and we know you’re not going to do very well but do the best you can. [Then afterward] yes, you didn’t do very well (chuckles). I just got so tired of that. And aching for some of these kids, just aching for them.

I had the lowest rating class, the last year, that sophomore class that I had such trouble with freshman year. We targeted 15 of those kids and that was going to be the class that we reported as the district’s target to the state so a lot of effort went into those kids. I kept statistics on those and I tested and for the amount of



effort that went into it, they made about the same amount of progress as everybody else, on paper. Emotionally and psychologically and self-worth and blah-blah blah, they had a better year than they ever would have if we hadn't been pushed by No Child Left Behind forcing us. Because a lot of it, the kids have to buy in; because if they don't buy in to it, first of all they're not going to take the test and just they won't open the door and let you help them, they won't give in and say I can learn to do this or I can improve, or I can...or they're still trying to cheat.

As previous quotes illustrated, Charli felt pressure to teach the content so students could demonstrate increased achievement. She discussed the work involved for her as a teacher resulted in typical progress documented "on paper" for students who struggled academically; what was not tangible were the emotional and psychological benefits that the extra attention and assistance from the teacher provided.

### Technology

One of the changes that Charli spoke about at repeatedly and at greatest length was technology. At times, the use of technology was mandated, as in the enforced requirement for all teachers at South River Falls to post lesson plans on the Internet to provide parents and students with access. Other times, Charli sought to implement new technology in her classroom. She spoke at great length about the Internet, computer software, and other types of technology and how she used it in her classroom. Regarding the Internet, Charli recalled:

Well, it has just changed teaching so. When we were first getting a glimmer of what it was going to be, I bought a Rolodex with all those little flip cards, because how was I going to remember those sites? Just the search engines!

We have to teach now to be skeptical of the Internet. How and what we are teaching is so different. "Found it on the Internet, it must be true." We were all evaluating websites and then giving them [the students] fake ones that looked real. We were always trying to make them skeptical. The one I had, Lasik eye surgery home kit package...was fabulous...testimonials and it was just beautifully done. The kids would be doing their evaluations and pretty soon somebody would

start to laugh and somebody else would laugh...the next one would be electrified baby cages... Well then by that time, the kids had finally gotten onto what I was having them do...*why* did you believe that one or not? So fun, we had good times with that, too.... We had the kids doing so many web pages for projects. See how easy it is? Anybody can put anything they want on the Internet.

Charli saw the Internet as not only a fabulous teaching tool; it was another way to get her students to think.

The Internet was not the only change in technology that Charli experienced. She wrote a grant to purchase technology that increased student engagement:

I used technology so hard that a lot of my strategies would wrap around technology in some way because the last couple of years I used the handheld clickers [often]. [They were called] classroom performance system, I always called them clickers because kids liked to call them clickers. But in terms of strategies, I would throw a question up [on the screen], they all would have to answer, but then they could talk it over with their partner and then if they wanted to change their answer, they could.

Then I would go right to the graph to show how many got it right and I could tell if we needed to go on or not. In terms of immediate feedback from me, I really liked using the clickers, even though I ran into all kinds of problems and every teacher would – kids looking over [at their neighbors' responses], everything to get around what you're doing, but in general, that was nice. I really enjoyed the discussions.

This story related to the rigor and relevance framework that was described earlier.

Charli gave an example of an assignment she used to differentiate learning for students who had already mastered the content being taught. Different groups of students were asked to design an upcoming quiz using the clickers:

When I was working with those kids that had tested so high on MAP, sometimes so I could work with others, their assignment was to write the next clicker quiz for [an upcoming topic]. Talk about higher order thinking. The discussion was [at a higher level] than I would ever have gotten out of them. They tried to come up with good questions because they got to type them in and then they got to give the quiz. But I would do that with the lower kids, too; I would say, "You understand this well enough, you get to do this with the clickers."

Particularly at the end of Charli's career, the physical space in which she taught worked well for these different activities:

I was just so lucky, every time I got moved it was better. [My last years of teaching] in the great big room I had, and I [also] had the room upstairs; I could send three kids up there to work. I could send five kids to work on the computer [within the main room] and I could sit with five. I just had a fabulous physical teaching situation. That makes a difference.

The set of clickers was an example of what was purchased with grant money that Charli had been awarded:

Mr. Orange, there was always that little cushion that he always kept for the end of the year, and he'd say, "Who's got something they really want?" He would just kind of let it be known that he had [some funds, for example] six thousand dollars.

There was a lot of grant money available and I always went after that. I got a Best Buy grant, they gave me a gift card with \$2500 on it to spend on anything I wanted; no project, just go buy [what you wanted]. There is [grant money] out there but where do you fit [applying for grants] into your day when you're already analyzing test scores, and [everything]. I'm not sure there are funds [like there was then], but grants like the McElroy are still there. I read McElroys this year, they were fabulous. There are some wonderful things happening in classrooms.

In the first interview, Charli mentioned a computerized reading program that South River Falls had used, "particularly for special education." She discussed the impact of this at length in the final interview:

[We bought licenses for the computer reading program for] 16 of the kids, and had depending on the day of the week when they did [the program], and I'd work with other kids on other things. And they could see improvement. I would do the MAP testing, if you didn't upload, you could do the MAP test as many times as you wanted, just upload four times a year. Well, I didn't want to upload, I just wanted a test score because then I could say to the kids, do you realize I only expected .4 growth out of you and you've raised it 4 points since October? I was really big on stuff like that and I would send it home to their parents.

[It was motivating] for that group, they were so low. I've never seen scores that low. So that was another change; all right, I've got to make this rigorous and relevant for them, at their level...

I had never, ever had scores that low, I never had kids that just couldn't read at all, and I think they bought into it because it was so individualized. Getting them to keep at it was... just like anything else. They're not readers, they don't want to read, they don't want to have a special day where they are working on their reading skills. They didn't like it the last twelve years, why are they going to like it now? But their scores improved *unbelievably*. And I kept all kinds of charts and highlighted [information] in yellow and presented to the principal at the end, the impact of it, and had statistics to back it up.

Charli also spoke of the technological changes that had occurred at South River Falls since her retirement. She shared some of the challenges related to new technology she encountered when serving as a substitute teacher:

How fast [technology changes]. I've been away two years and first of all, as ridiculous as it is, I can't copy because now you have to have your little code to put into the copy machine. Before, you just went down to copy, and there was a clipboard when you went down and signed up for computer lab. Now it's on Google Calendar and everybody just accesses Google Calendar, and you can click on different labs and see when one is in use and put your [reservation on the calendar]. I mean it is so *neat*! Also, I can't send attendance. Years ago, [attendance was taken] with the little slip that was on a little clip outside your door; now I can't send attendance because I don't have the teacher's code word. I can't run a Smartboard, either. There are a whole bunch of classrooms down at South River Falls that have Smartboards; I can't run them! I've only been gone two years! At some point I'm going to have to quit subbing, because I'm not going to go to the inservices to learn how to use a Smartboard.

Charli described both mandated and teacher-directed implementation of technology during the course of her career, and indicated that technology continued to change at a rapid pace since she had retired.

### Alternative High School

Several times during Charli's interviews, the topic of the alternative high school was interjected into the conversation, as in the example given about the young man who had difficulty reading and had received special education services when he was enrolled in the traditional high school. This did not occur with the other teachers, most likely due

to their work at the elementary level. The alternative high school was a cooperative arrangement between five school districts; each of the schools had seven spaces for students who chose to finish their high school requirements away from the community's traditional high school. Charli said, it was an effort to "try to reach out to those kids that we would have lost, that the graduation rate then would have reflected." Charli described the alternative high school setting based on her experience serving as a substitute teacher there one morning:

The program is so self-run that the two teachers are making the decisions as to what the kids do, they're doing the grading, they're working with kids. the aide is there. She knows all the kids. All I did was answer a few questions.

I talked to the aide who was at the alternative school yesterday. I was asking her how many kids are there and what their numbers were, and she said, "We get both ends, we don't get the middle. We get the kids that are troublemakers because they're bored and they're so smart, and then they can come out here and do these packets and graduate and they're done. Or do 10<sup>th</sup> grade English or whatever and they're done. And then we get the kids who are at the other end, who are really struggling." But I didn't see anything in this little guy's [program] that was helping anybody be a better reader. I didn't see it on his table. Now maybe they work individually with him, but he was doing the 11<sup>th</sup> grade English and the whatever packets that he had to do. I was a little concerned – but I've had four hours experience at the alternative school, that's it.

The alternative school has to be, the language is horrible, just horrible. I mean you have to say, we gotta save these kids, we gotta get them through, we've gotta push, and then you have to be the kind of person who can put up with that they all leave to go out and have a smoke, and, you know, some come in at ten, some come in at eleven, and-

There were sixteen of them there at one time, when the kids were leaving. For about two and a half hours. That's a lot of kids.

They've got a system. They've got a really good system. Sandi was signing 'em in, and I saw her keeping track of- some kid came over and said, have I turned in such-and-such? And she went right to his folder, yup, that's in. So they've got a whole-

Regarding the class that received extra support for reading during the two years

Charli taught them,

Those kids that I was so worried about are seniors, and when I went to look at the paper last night, 39 in the graduating class. It's a tiny class. I looked at the 39 graduates and I thought, "What happened to all the other kids? They couldn't have all moved away." But a whole bunch of them are [gone]. I subbed at the alternative school yesterday – there are a lot at the alternative school. I was just floored at the kids who were, at the number of kids who were out there. And maybe that's what they needed, maybe that's where they could flourish. They've had eight graduate sometime during the year. Now they graduate with their high school class; their names are on the cap and gown [cutout] on the bulletin board, because when they finish their packets, then they're done.

### Cross-Curricular Projects

Another teacher-directed change Charli mentioned several times during the interviews was cross-curricular projects. "I went back through some of our projects; the four of us had many projects that were cross-curricular. The media center, health, science, and English, we had six or seven major projects.... We were doing some interesting things, but Mrs. Granite [her science colleague] and I were still the heart of it." For example, "We filmed lessons, collaborative projects. We were at such a different level than I'd ever been [with a colleague]. Talk about an intense professional experience for both of us. I certainly wouldn't have been doing that without Mrs. Granite."

In another collaborative opportunity, Charli conducted a persuasive writing unit prior to a unit on blood taught by Mrs. Granite. At the end of the blood unit, the students wrote argumentative papers:

...they all get a partner and get a controversial blood issue... we graded together. We had rubrics so the kids would always know but we told them at the beginning that we might not grade the same because she was grading on the content and I was grading on the process of working together and problem solving and the final product... their little grade sheets, we wrote all over them.. you will be able to tell by our comments if I gave you an A- and she gave you a B+ what the difference was... we graded after school together on all of those.

The impact of their collaboration for both of them was to become “better teachers because we fed off of each other and challenged each other as to how can we make this better, and what are we going to change?”

### Homework

Charli reported a change in a longstanding practice in education, homework:

Over all the years, I think homework has been one of the biggest changes. When I finished teaching, I probably covered about half of what I covered twenty years ago. You couldn't assign the homework, you couldn't assign the homework. It would not be done. And then what do you do the next day? Before, 20 years ago, you got an F on your homework and I went on. I didn't do that the last five years. I don't know if you say [that was] giving in, but I would say most of my work was done in class, the last five years, the last eight years.

Charli explained that she did not make the choice to discontinue assigning homework lightly. “You can tell that I made the decision that it wasn't [important] and [the decision] was very hard to come by because it meant I couldn't cover as much. In my mind, this is the sophomore curriculum, and we do this, this, this, this, this, this, and this and I couldn't do that [if I didn't assign homework]. So that was really hard.”

When I asked Charli why the homework assignments she gave would not be completed by the students, she replied:

Jobs, forgot my book; you heard everything. I just got to the point where I couldn't stand it. I wanted this class to be just as important...I wanted 45 minutes out of this class, and if half the kids hadn't done the work, I wasn't going to get 45 minutes of work out of those kids. I tried everything. If you hadn't done the homework then you couldn't be in the group discussion. The group discussion helped you with the test, because you have to sit and do your homework. So then I'd have a group over here doing the homework. These were already the brighter kids; it did give me a chance to talk and teach at their level. Oh, I just went round and round for five or six years. I say 'gave in,' I'm not sure the kids really realized [that]; they didn't know that this was a lot less homework than I was ever giving before but this whole rigor and relevance. I could not teach the way I thought I should be teaching those last six or seven years and pushing every kid to

the most that they could do when they come in not having done their homework. How could you discuss the story? How can you lead a discussion on satire or irony, if they haven't? There has got to be a "get it" level; they can't even do the "get it" level if they haven't done the story.

To assure the students had read the story, Charli would schedule class time to read.

Absolutely. And for the lower kids – the textbook gave easy, medium, and difficult reading levels – or I would have them listen to it, and they would have to decide. If it was a reading lesson today, then they have to read it and do the questions in the text. *OR* was it a literary technique day, a character study day, *then* I want them to know the story so they can at least say, "The guy was a jerk." I'd say, "Okay, how come he's a jerk, how did you know that?" And they could be a part of the discussion. So some of it was changing what I wanted out of this lesson today.

Other reasons for Charli's change to her homework policy was to better monitor student understanding and avoid cheating or having a well-meaning but perhaps uninformed person provide incorrect information and support.

I just saw too many kids in study hall and sitting in the hall copying each other's [homework] and I thought I would rather be in the room and see them do their own work and find out where they're having trouble. They copied it from [someone] but I don't know if they know where the dash goes or whether they just saw somebody else put a dash in that sentence and they have no idea why that dash goes in there.

Part of it, I think, with the kids that are so low, I don't think they know how to do [homework], they don't know how to study for a test. Some of these low kids when I talked to them individually, I'd say okay you've got a test in two days. What are you going to do? I'd start out with when are you going to study? I said, let's set in your mind now. Is it going to be on the bus on the way to school, is it going to be at the lunch table, is it going to be tomorrow after basketball? You, in your mind, tell me when you are going to study for this test. Then I'd say, "What are you going to do? I want to know specifically." They didn't know *how* to study for a test, they didn't know *how* to do the homework. They'd come in and it would be half done and say, "I didn't understand it. I didn't get it." And so I thought okay, they're doing it here and they're asking me questions as they go and when I see that there's nothing happening, then I could say, "What's the problem here?" I think that's a major problem. It should be practice, I think homework should be practice. You've learned it in class, you've worked on it in class, now go practice. And they had their parents, and the parents in an effort to help may not have understood it.



Charli summarized the major changes she believed she had identified, “Well, I am coming up with some major things. I think No Child Left Behind had a major impact on education, I think this rigor and relevance did, for me this homework change, the strategies, and technology; for me, technology was huge.” Clearly, these changes were important pieces of Charli’s puzzle.

### Impact of Changes

Charli described the positive consequences the changes implemented over the years had on her the students in general. A few examples are included here.

I think the individual student’s getting a lot better education than 30 years ago. I think the classes were big back then, (chuckled) so we typically taught to the middle and we gave our tests and you did the best job you could and they went out and became successful citizens. I still think that that’s true, but I think the *amount* of information that the kids have to have access to is *so* much more that we’re not teaching specific content. That’s not the big thing anymore. It’s how to access information, it’s how to read, it’s how to research, it’s how to. Because there’s no way that you can say, “I can cover all the material in four years with these kids.” *No way*. Where before you kind of had that feeling. It’s all in this textbook and that’s all you need to know for American Lit or that’s all you need to know for Math 3 or whatever. You get through that textbook and, here, you know Math 3! Go out, be successful!

From 30 years ago – you still had lots of good kids back then, I’m not saying that they didn’t go out well-prepared – but I think our kids are better speakers. Now that’s something we haven’t talked about at all. I think they speak better. Their technology skills are just unbelievable. They just casually say, “I’ll make that PowerPoint” or “I’ll make those posters for you” or “I’ll do a webpage on that.” And maybe that’s what we were looking for is the casualness of it, that they were so skilled that it wasn’t any big deal. And the same thing with speaking. They have done so much speaking that by senior year, [they say] “Oh yeah, I’ll get up in front of my church youth group and talk,” where back in junior high and ninth grade, we’re priming for that. I think, from 30 years ago, their higher-order thinking skills are better.

She also told of specific changes that had a positive impact. For example:

Some years because of the strong push of administration and probably because of No Child Left Behind there have been several instances in the last ten years where even though it's a really small class, they divided it in three... we never tell the kids this but their reading scores are so low, and we were pushing so hard with those kids that they, the administrators, changed the whole schedule around and divided the class into three even though from a numbers standpoint, it should have been two. [It was] an effort to give those kids [extra support], and those were the kids that I looped with. We saw astounding improvement in their reading scores, and their ability to handle reading assignments in other classes, their self-esteem and thinking of themselves as a reader. I notice this year when I have been [to the high school] to sub, there are three sections in junior English also. They held to it, which in the face of all these money problems at small schools [shows] that they've made the commitment to that class.

While some of the changes had been beneficial, the classroom experience remained negative for some students:

I think the Internet and AP classes have made a big difference. If Joe could have hung in there and if I'd have had him another [year], if I'd stayed, I think we could have gotten him into some AP classes where he would have been on his own, working at a computer, not with other kids, challenged. He just couldn't function in a classroom with 20 other kids going at such a slow pace. You take attendance, and then you hand in the homework, and then you have announcements; I just look at some of those bright kids and I think, "Oh my God, what a waste of their time. What a *waste* of their time."

Charli didn't know if the system could be adapted to include an option for students who were advanced to "test out" of specific courses. However, she pointed out that "It's certainly done at other levels; certainly done at college." While the MAP testing results were not used to advance students who had already mastered material, Charli did use it to form instructional groups. She explained the impact of these groups:

I had a lot of trouble with it, and do you know where it came from? It came from the best kids. And I was so mad at them. They would come in and say, "Is the P group going to meet today?" And the P was some project that they were working on. [They acted] like, oh well, we're so good. Snooty. I couldn't get them toned down. To give me time to work with others then I had these challenging opportunities for some other kids, not every day, then they'd come in and say, do we get to do [project work] today so I had a hard time organizing that.

She explained that while the advanced students in this one class were the worst with this type of behavior, similar instances occurred in other classes as well.

Charli briefly discussed the impact of changes for her personally:

A lot of the times, it kept me more interested...I was just teaching from the textbook and working hard. I mean I loved that, but I wasn't challenged. And maybe that's why I'm interested in the research, why I'm interested in the technology, why I had clickers right away. I just had to feel like I was challenged. I like to write grants. I like to be current with what's coming from the state Department of Education; I like to know what [the Director of the Department of Education] is thinking and where we're headed... The testing, the rigor and relevance, the technology, kept me sharp, because Shakespeare's still Shakespeare.

The impact of changes on colleagues was mixed:

Oh, it's just like any other business. We had some people who are still doing today what they did 30 years ago, literally standing up in front and lecturing for 45 minutes. No technology, no change. Showing films, now they may be downloaded but...

Charli specifically discussed her perception of the impact of one change, national board certification program; she believed it would have a long-lasting impact on teachers:

It had such financial backing to begin with that a lot of states jumped on board and there are states that continued with that. Iowa is still struggling to continue the [financial] support that they were able to generate the first ten years, but it has been difficult. Now a lot of teachers have done it anyway but I think the impact of national board certification is going to have some long, far-reaching, very positive impact on what a teacher does in the classroom every day and that's the most important thing.

## CHAPTER 6

## FLORENCE: “CAN’T YOU JUST GIVE THEM A CHANCE?”

Thinking back to the participant meeting, I picture Florence, who was seated to Charli’s right at the end of the table. Florence’s dark hair framed her face, which contained little evidence of her 62 years of life. At my first interview with Florence, she served tea and cinnamon rolls she had purchased from a local coffee shop; she said she had been cleaning the day before and had not had time to bake anything for me. Her hospitality and manner reminded me of the stereotype of a genteel lady of days gone by. She was very soft-spoken, and appeared to be organized, quiet, and serious. As I spent more time with Florence, I became more aware of her hearty laughter and passion for many aspects of life, especially teaching. Her home contained artifacts of her teaching career, including a small, oak child’s desk chair upon which a plant was perched in one corner of her living room.

Early in the first interview, Florence realized that I had not been a classroom teacher, so I explained my background. I included information about my work with adults labeled with disabilities in residential and employment settings, how that work made me aware of the importance of education for all people, the impact of these experiences on my decision to become a school psychologist, and my transition to teaching in higher education. As a result of this conversation, Florence stated, “Potential for a person is pretty hard to measure, isn’t it? Unless you work with them, you don’t know how far they really can go.” As our time together continued, I saw that Florence was very invested in maximally developing her students’ potential.

### Florence's Context

Florence's post-secondary education began at an in-state community college. After she earned an Associate of Arts Degree, she attended at an out-of-state four-year university and completed the requirements for a Bachelor of Arts Degree in elementary education, with a minor in social studies.

Recalling her student teaching experience, Florence said:

[My cooperating teacher] was working on her Master's [degree] and she needed some time to do some writing (laughed) so she had a student teacher, and that happened to be me. And there were 33 students in a room that might have been this size [approximately 15 feet by 15 feet]. [It was not big enough] for 33 desks. In fact, I didn't even have [a desk], I sat just in a chair; I didn't have a table or anything to do any work on in the room. There was no table for anything to be displayed in the room. It was just filled with desks and you could hardly get through down the aisle between the desks. It was an old building.

I thought she was a very good teacher; I think I learned some things from her. I just have to smile afterwards; I know she wanted a student teacher so she could finish up and get her degree in May (laughed).

Later in her career, she took courses to add an early childhood endorsement to her teaching license.

Throughout her years in education, Florence taught in five districts; Happy Springs, Twotown, Old English, Blue Hills, and South River Falls. She had changed districts each time due to her husband's advancement in school administration positions. During Florence's first year after college, she served as a substitute teacher at Happy Springs. Throughout the remainder of her career, Florence taught kindergarten, second, fourth, and fifth grades. She also taught one year of preschool and one year of a mixture of responsibilities: two-fifths time as a Chapter One Reading and Math teacher for grades

one through six, and one physical education class for fifth grade was also included in this portion; she spent the other three-fifths of her time teaching Kindergarten).

All of the elementary schools at which Florence taught were located in rural districts; Happy Springs, Twotown, Blue Hills, and South River Falls had experienced consolidation with neighboring schools in recent years. For Florence, class size ranged from a high of 27 students in her Kindergarten classroom one year to eight students during a fifth-grade year. She stated that an ideal class would consist of “18 to 20 students for primary grades; for middle school grades, that’s probably a good size, too.”

When she first began teaching and had questions, Florence

would generally talk to another teacher. I used the older teachers as a source of information. I could talk to my principal also, he was very nice. The secretaries are a wealth of information also if you don’t know where things are or how to do something. So I guess I just [asked] the people around me [for assistance]. I think you’re just too far away from your college to go back to your professors and I guess there’s not a tendency to call one of them with a question. When I first started out, I was the youngest on staff so everybody else had been around and had a lot of experience, so you just rely on them for answers to whatever you’re wondering about.

Florence took a six-year break from teaching after she gave birth to her second child; this meant she taught for a total of 31 years – currently, half of her lifetime. She experienced a great number of changes during her career; those she recalled and reported during the interviews are listed in Table 4.

South River Falls (for information about this district, please see description under the *Charli* section) was the district where Florence concluded her teaching career; the first year was her year of teaching preschool and she served the remaining 16 years of her time there at the Kindergarten level. “In fact, my last couple of years of teaching, I

Table 4

*Changes Florence Discussed*


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Preparation and Professional Development	Curriculum
Teacher Portfolios	Expectations for Students to Pass from
Area Education Agencies (AEAs)	Kindergarten to First Grade
Annual State Professional Development	What Students Were Expected To
Teacher Unions	Know/Textbooks
Teacher Evaluation	Grade Retention
Merit Pay for Teachers	Length of Kindergarten Day
Physical Discipline	Scheduling/Time Allotted for Lunch
Levels of Supervision and Teacher	Amount of Writing Students Were
Autonomy	Required to Do
School Consolidation	Standards and Benchmarks
Technology	Content versus Student Orientation
Office Machines	Different Ways of Learning –
Chalk Boards/White Boards	“Learning Channels”
Responsibilities	Interest Units
Expectations for Duties and Salary	Guidance Counselors
Aides/Paraeducators	School Nurses
Law/Accountability	
No Child Left Behind	(table continues)

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Testing	Factors Outside School
Strategies to Avoid Becoming a School in Need of Assistance Status	County Superintendents Societal Attitude Toward Primary Education
Special Education Identification Process Continuum of Services	

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thought, if anybody wanted to trade a grade, I would take anything just for a change. I loved Kindergarten but I thought, just maybe a change.” During the years that Florence taught at South River Falls, there were two sections of Kindergarten. Florence worked with the same teaching partner during all of her Kindergarten years.

A one-story brick building served as home base for the two teachers and their students; it contained three classrooms, a set of student restrooms, an area that served many purposes (kitchen, staff lounge, staff restroom, laundry, and conference room), and a common area that included the lockers for all of the children.

When discussing the eight principals who had been her supervisors in the five districts, Florence shared the following: “I probably didn’t see as much of my principal in the first years; the principals were more at their desks and I didn’t see them very much. I think principals became more visible; a lot more out and about. I think they all were nice people, I got along with them.” She described her first administrator as “a very quiet, understanding, supportive kind of guy. I think he only came in my classroom [occasionally], just walked through.”



When recalling the administrators she had worked with over the years, Florence spoke of being evaluated and merit pay.

You know I don't ever remember being evaluated. I don't think I was. I was trying to think whenever I was formally evaluated by an administrator, probably not until (paused) they were talking about merit pay. That was a phase that kind of went through education for a while, merit pay for teachers. That would have been in the 1980s and they asked teachers what you thought about merit pay.

The Old English district did not have an elementary principal when Florence taught there, only a superintendent. When discussing the two principals, one male and one female, she worked with in the Blue Hills district, Florence related a story about the female principal in her first year there, when she taught Kindergarten and Chapter One:

[In that school,] if they ever had anyone ill, I was the substitute. They would pull me out of Chapter One and then I would sub wherever I was needed. I remember that we would have someone from the State Department [of Education] that would come out and they would talk to everyone on staff, if you were Chapter One [or other ancillary teachers], and see how things were going. And I recall that this principal said to me, preparing me for the interview, "Now she's going to ask you if you think this is too much for you to be doing. How do you feel about that?" Well of course, I'm just hired one year and I'm not going to say, "You know, I really think I'm overworked!" (laughed)

During her tenure at South River Falls, Florence worked with three elementary principals. The first one retired after a long career and the second one left when he was hired by a larger district. The third remained after she retired. Florence indicated that a change in administrators could precipitate a change in policies or practices at the school.

### Teachers' Role and Responsibilities

The role of a teacher, according to Florence:

would be to support and guide the students through their learning experiences. To support them subject-wise as well as emotionally, I think. To be understanding, patient, and to allow for more than one answer at times, because I think children have grown up with the thought that there is only one answer to most questions so

they need to know there is some room for creative thought, maybe more than one solution to a problem. To be prepared, make sure that everything is ready, to try to plan thoughtfully for the different ways children learn, so maybe to present things in more than one way, and to try to provide for individual differences and to extend learning while also providing for review for children that need more review. Try and get along with everyone on staff (laughed), make sure that working conditions remain healthy.

I asked for elaboration on the latter point of maintaining good working relations;

Florence explained:

I think you need to consciously work at good relations with the people you work with, be understanding. Maybe they're having a bad day and something that happens might not seem right to you but maybe there's a reason why words have been said or actions have happened. And we don't always have time in the day to talk about that with anyone. In my earlier years of teaching, I had more time in the day for networking with others on staff.

Near the end of the first interview, I asked Florence what the characteristics of a good teacher were. She asked if she could answer that question in the next interview; when we met again, she began by telling me, "I just kind of struggled with that because I thought, gee, what do people look for in a good teacher? So I dug out this evaluation."

She continued:

So I just picked out a few things in there that I think are important. I have that [good teachers] put children first and show enthusiasm through their teaching and their behavior. They respond positively to students and promote active student participation. They are devoted to their teaching and they are prepared.

I had times when I would dream of things; my teaching was even in my dreams. I'd wake up and think, "Yes, maybe that will work." So it was constantly on my [mind.] I mean, I don't think I was obsessed with it, but it was constantly in my awareness.

Florence used an example to illustrate her expectations for putting children first and being dedicated:

I had an aide that would – it was more important for her to talk to other aides or a parent would stop and she would be on recess duty, [and was] supposed to be

making sure the children are safe, to be out on duty, supervising. She wouldn't even be watching the children. That really made me upset, that the children were not her priority.

Although the anecdote did not describe a teacher, Florence's expectations for what made an employee "good" were clear; in addition, she had high expectations not only for teachers, but for all of her colleagues on the elementary staff. In the situation with a paraeducator who was not fulfilling her duties, I asked what the teacher's role was and how she handled it. Florence replied, "Well it's kind of a difficult thing because I think a principal, it is probably more his role. I generally would go over to her and divert her attention to the children. But, I don't think she ever really got the message. I guess I wasn't that blunt. It was just sort of an internal slow burn."

To illustrate the point that she was always thinking about her teaching, Florence shared a recollection of one time when she accompanied her husband to a conference for school administrators:

He had professional meetings that we went to and there was an artist who was having a session for people that weren't involved in the meetings. She was a local artist using watercolor; I signed up for it thinking it was something I could use with my students. Of course, it involved very expensive paper, so it was more her craft as a professional artist, rather than what you could do with children. I talked with her after and she said, "Oh, you are a master teacher!" And I said, "Well, no, no." "Well, yes you are!" she said, "Because you are constantly looking for ways to improve." So I guess I felt, I don't think of myself as that; it just surprised me that she said that to me. Anyway, that's enough of that.

While Florence was very humble, it was apparent that she worked to be the best teacher she could be. She believed she had some characteristics of a good teacher, and while somewhat uncomfortable in sharing this story, noted that others recognized her efforts to be a good teacher.

Florence then continued with her list of characteristics. Good teachers:

work well with students and staff and parents and administration. They have a positive and professional manner. I think it's really important to involve parents, that they are your active partners and support [you and the student] because the children do not want only to impress you, but the parents are also a pretty important part of their lives; they can be a real asset. You need to be patient, use a variety of activities, and [give] lots of encouragement. [Teachers need to] have a flexible personality because there are times when things are going to change and you have to be able to change with them. Like the high school sometimes had testing schedules that changed your schedule, and [another example was that you needed to be flexible with] the sharing of materials. I've always had trouble with accepting people who are very lazy and don't pay attention to their job. That makes me upset. I like somebody who is on-task. I like to give my all and I expect people kind of around me to do that also.

And let's see what else. I guess it's not an 8-4:30 job. It's different in that respect from people who work in other types of jobs. It seems like you're always preparing things at home. Young teachers should know that; there are more demands on it than just the time you spend in the building.

[For example,] you're expected to work at basketball games; they like you to attend to support the students and student athletes. And the music programs; it's not really demanded that you're at the music programs, unless you're an elementary teacher and then you have to sit with your class through their performance. Having an administrator for a husband, we were at everything. Our lives just revolved around school. So it was just natural for us to go to all the events and the plays. [There were no other contracted responsibilities,] unless you coach... and really it wasn't even written in the contract that we were to work at a basketball game. They were on a certain schedule, so it wasn't really contracted, it was just expected.

More information about how teachers were expected to work outside their contracts, using the basketball game example, came next:

What they did was just went through the alphabet and signed up everyone for a time to work and if it didn't work for you to be there that night then it was your responsibility to switch with someone. So the teachers just say, "Yes, I'll do that. Just to help out." That probably wouldn't happen in other professions. They expect you to be paid for [doing extra] but you're not.

### Changes Florence Discussed

One of the changes that Florence listed was the expectations for students' knowledge at all grade levels.

I think a lot more is expected of children at each grade, the type of material they're expected to know. Now they're expected to be reading [in Kindergarten]. There's a push to keep up with other countries. They say what our children know at certain levels where they're tested, we're falling behind other countries, and there's a parent push, too, for children to be doing more. [Some] are doing a lot more with [their children] at home subject-wise; it used to be that you taught them the ABCs when they came to school and [now] if they've been worked with at all, they know their alphabet. So they generally are ready for more. I think as long as you can take them at their rate, as long as you don't stress them out.

I have seen some children pretty stressed, and usually, generally it is a stress that they put on themselves. They know they can't get what everybody else is doing. They don't understand it. Then children can just shut down when they're under too much stress, so you just don't want them to get to that point. You need just to support them and take them at a slower pace, or approach something in a different way so they can get it. I think it's personality, why some of the kids that are pretty sensitive; they worry about something new, will they get it, will they know it. So just to let them feel relaxed and let them try new things without getting them too worried. I can remember one little guy, Toby; he would just get very, very nervous about anything new. He had average to above ability but he just got really uptight any time we did something new. Generally, he would get it, just was worried [about] something new. People are funny, aren't they? People are interesting.

Florence communicated her perception of the change in the prevailing "attitude toward primary education:"

Through the years there has been a lot of value placed on high school and I think that the lower, the primary grades were thought of as not as important. I think that is kind of changing now; they are realizing it is important to get [children] off on a good foot, get them started off in the right direction. And they're realizing that young children can do a lot more than was previously thought.

She thought that this change happened because "people are seeing the results of children being worked with a little more," but her statement sounded tentative. Later, she said, "Maybe part of that attitude is you're not teaching them physics or chemistry or

something that requires [advanced thinking], you're teaching just the very basics so they don't think that's very important." In the final interview she added one more reason for this change, "They've done more research to find out that the early years are important."

Then she compared the contemporary context to her own education:

I can remember when I was in school, the first part of the school year was review of the last year; it seemed like they reviewed forever. Maybe the first semester was a review. Then the second semester of your current grade you got some new material in math [and other subjects]; so I think there was an awful lot of review. When I was in school, we didn't have special ed teachers, so you were trying to get everybody through that grade. And so you just suffered through a lot of review (laughed) so that everybody could get it and move on. Seemed like forever.

As she told me about the changing services the Area Education Agencies (AEAs) provided and the materials they delivered to the schools, she included another change, equipment:

Gradually we were able to fill out a little slip of paper to order [materials]. They had a delivery person that would come [to the schools] like they do now. Schools had their own little libraries with a few things that would go with what you were teaching but they didn't have materials, the wide variety of materials that they do now. I remember running off papers – you had to use the old, you had to type something up and you had to put it on this big drum. And you would roll it, what is that machine called? [Students did] less writing because things were run off for [them], [they] just filled in a blank.

I think the budget cuts, [pause] it seemed to me for a while there were a lot of building projects and money went into building instead of services. I thought we didn't have the support that we had [at other times]; when they went through their building phases, I think education kind of suffered then.

The beginning of a teacher's union at the state level was a change that Florence reported during the second interview:

I can remember in the year that I was in Old English; that would have been 1973 to '74, at a teacher's meeting, we were urged to write a letter of support for the fact that teachers could have a union. These letters of support were kind of a form

letter and it went to our congressmen. So I taught in the days before the ISEA [Iowa State Education Association]; that's a change.

She also recalled an annual meeting that she attended back then that is no longer held:

In the days before the ISEA, at the beginning of the school year, teachers went to Des Moines and they had meetings. I can't remember if they were one- or two-day meetings, but they were at the Veteran's Sports Arena. You could go to little seminar meetings on different topics, they had educational supplies displayed, and there were motivational speakers. It was a wonderful way to kick off the school year because you went and saw fresh new materials and you heard positive things to get you mentally set for the beginning of your year. I really missed going. I don't know who had organized all that for the teachers. ISEA began then, but that [meeting] stopped.

Those multi-workshop sessions were really nice. You would see people from all over the state because everybody came at that time. You could meet with other teachers at your grade level, you could go to a subject level meeting, or you could go to a meeting on a certain topic. But they'd have the keynote speaker kick it off. And then just to see all the new materials.

Now they do something similar to that, but I don't think the teachers have an opportunity to see it. Administrators have meetings in November and the last day of the administration meetings they have educational displays set up and teachers who have done something innovative in their classrooms might be some of the presenters there. I always went with my husband; I took two days off and we'd go down and I'd go to some of the meetings. I'd go through their displays, so I got to see some of that, but teachers just don't have the time off to go see all this stuff. And you weren't paid in the early days to go to [the annual meeting], so it really wasn't professional development. It was something you did on your own before school started. But lots of people went. When I first started teaching you really weren't expected to get paid for everything you did. [Many teachers] did a lot of things just to make you a better teacher.

This was another example of work-related activity in the past for which teachers were not paid. When I asked Florence if she had any idea what precipitated the changed expectation by teachers to be paid for everything they did, she replied, "Maybe [it was] just that era of people. Maybe the union, they represent you and then it's more of a union mentality, an hourly-wage worker kind of thing. Your contract is 'you will do this, your job is specifically outlined.' I don't know."

### School Nurses and Medications

Near the end of the second interview, Florence recalled an issue that is becoming critical in contemporary rural schools:

I was thinking that in the early days, there were no school nurses. We [teachers] did everything any child needed as far as medication; there were no medical forms, they brought the medicine to school themselves. There was a high level of trust at that time. I had one little girl that had cystic fibrosis and I had to give her breathing treatments.

That was in my Blue Hills days, when I had fourth grade. I gave her breathing treatments and took her into the restroom so no one saw what was actually happening. [I remember] her name. She only lived three or four more years after fourth grade. Sweet little girl, but we had to do those breathing treatments. I think later in the 1980s they would have a part-time school nurse that would come in.

Florence told of a related change, medication prescribed for students who were inattentive or disruptive. She described one student:

That was the year he was identified as needing medication. I videotaped how he was in the room as part of seeing exactly [what behavior was happening]. That boy, the day he took that medicine, the very next day he was a different child. It was absolutely instantaneous. I couldn't believe that medicine could work that quick. Hopefully, he's still doing well. We just knew he had to have, there had to be something that could help him.

It was just overnight with this little guy; he was just able to sit and listen, could just be quiet in his desk. [Before,] he was all over the place. There was another instance, I documented and tried, we did all kinds of things. You know, in my heart I knew that this was a more severe case than most and felt that medicine was the answer; but again you can't do that [ask for medication to be prescribed] because you have to go through the process.

I don't think we ever said medicine is going to be something we recommend. What teachers are going to say is we need to find something to help your child be able to pay attention. No, because I think you always let that determination come from testing and stuff.

I did have David in kindergarten, referred him to the...clinic to go through evaluation to try and reach that father, and how to change his environment a little bit at home because he was making the boy deliver papers before [school]. He would...then try to come to school and work. David had average ability. He was too tired, he was just worn out; there were some other things we addressed with him, too. I knew David was headed for trouble. But there was a dad that just had



no parenting skills. How do you reach parents that need to be helped? Those are the people that don't come for help.

It's bad, bad feeling, very sad feeling. I guess it's life that you can't make everything better and you can't affect everything in a positive way, but you sure try. Thank God in Kindergarten everybody comes [to conferences] because they haven't heard the teacher say much of anything [negative] yet, and you try to gently break whatever news there is for constructive work to be done in a positive way. Those poor parents, [after many years,] they've got to be tired of hearing it, too. You wish there could be answers earlier for everyone.

There was a time when school nurses were not employed, and the teachers handled individuals' treatments and medication. Florence's stories about these two students illustrated this change, and although medication was available to children and administered by teachers at times, teachers did not "diagnose" students and recommend medication trials to the parents. The scenarios did not have positive medical outcomes, and hinted at more complex underlying issues in David's situation.

### Curriculum and Textbooks

Florence described changes in curriculum and textbooks that occurred during her tenure:

Once I told you something about in the old days you followed just the text. Because the texts were laid out, the book companies had a scope and sequence, to what was taught throughout the grades and so I think you could easily teach that. Identified what were the objectives for what the lessons should have been. I think when we went away from textbooks and teachers taught units based on maybe student interest. There was a time when you had a lot of freedom in what you [taught].

I think what was lost during that time period was the scope and sequence of learning. A teacher might have taught something that they really enjoyed or that the students really enjoyed, but maybe some of the skills weren't covered. Now what they have teachers doing is writing their own curriculum guides if you want to, and just trying to plan the skills and making sure you're getting to everything you need to teach. [You make sure you document in your lesson plans] that you're doing it. There was a time when there wasn't much documentation of what skills you were actually [teaching] at different grades. So I think that [is] trying to get back to more of a scope and sequence.

### Special Education

Earlier, Florence mentioned that there were no special education teachers when she was a student in school. Florence's second mention of special education was, "When I first started [teaching], there were no aides at all in the classrooms." She thought this change came about because "they are trying to meet the needs of students who have learning difficulties." When I asked Florence when the schools began to hire paraeducators, she replied:

When did they start having aides? Well it would depend; a lot of aides at first, I think, were [hired] based on need. Did you have a student that was identified as a special needs student? Then you got an aide. That's pretty much how that worked. I think now they are running funding for that out of the early childhood funding from the State, to have more aides, because that's where the source of money is. Basically it was, Did you have a class that was too big? And that was a number that was arbitrarily set by the administration. [One year,] I had 27 [students in my room] and I didn't have an aide. That's a lot of Kindergartners.

The superintendent had told Florence if one more student would enroll that year, an aide would be assigned to her classroom; the student census remained at 27 throughout the year. Florence commented on the number and impact of the paraeducators:

I just can't believe the number of aides the school has. It's a lot. It's very nice for the teachers. Oh, and good for the students, too, I guess; if they're doing [what will benefit children.] I don't know what they're doing; I guess it's good for [the students], I would think, I would hope!

This comment likely related to the aide described earlier and others who Florence did not perceive as putting the children first.

Florence described how she worked with the paraeducators:

I wrote lesson plans out for my aides. If they ever had to work with a student who was not working in the classroom, if they ever had to take them aside or do something special with them, then I would write lesson plans for them. Then I expected them to check off what they got done and then to write to me any notes

or any problems they may have had with the material. It worked for me. Probably my best aide was Ms. Light. She was pretty amazing; she probably should have been a teacher. She's just very, very, good. And as far as supervising what they do, I guess that's how I monitored what was happening; I had a tablet and I'd write the week's plans for her and get the materials. I got a desk for her right next to mine so that whatever materials I had ready for her to use would be right on her desk with her plans and everything ready to go. So she knew what to do.

She brought up the topic of inclusion:

Something that's kind of interesting is the one time that I subbed [at the school after retirement], I was thinking about inclusion. The children in the third grade class went to another room to work with the elementary special ed teacher. I was looking for her to come into the room, but they went to her room. So I don't know how much inclusion they are doing.

I inquired when and how inclusion was introduced to the staff at South River Falls.

Florence responded that this policy had been announced two years before she retired:

We were informed that [inclusion] would be happening; I think that we were probably just told that would be the way it would work. And I would imagine that would have been at the end of one year, then it would be beginning the next year, that [inclusion] was a policy we were [beginning].

In the third interview, Florence recalled:

When the whole idea of inclusion came about, I think we went to a meeting at the Area Agency about inclusion, and then I believe it was just stated at a faculty meeting that this is how we will be operating. I don't think there was really any dialogue, but yet I don't think there was any written policy, it was just a verbal [notification]. I don't think things were written down much, what we would be doing; it was more or less we were told and that's the way it was. I think those decisions were made by principals, for the most part.

Regarding her observations about the implementation of inclusion policy,

Florence explained what happened the year after she retired when she was serving as a substitute teacher:

I just thought that was interesting that the only inclusion I saw was that an aide came into the classroom at the very end of the day and said to me, "Is there anybody you want me to work with anything on?" And it was ten minutes or

twenty minutes after three, so she only had ten minutes. For inclusion, I was expecting the special education teacher to come into the room. But it didn't [happen].

When I asked if teachers discussed any of the policies and changes that were implemented, like inclusion, Florence responded that she was at a disadvantage because of her isolation at South River Falls, but that inclusion specifically was not implemented in her area:

to the degree that I thought it was going to be. At the kindergarten level, when I was working and Ms. Rock came that first year, she came and took students out of the room to work with them. Maybe that's because at the Kindergarten level, people, little ones are so easily distracted by anything that's going on around you. It really is better at that level if you are going to do anything where you expect the child you're working with to pay attention [to minimize distractions].

The story of one boy who entered Kindergarten a few years before Florence retired, and prior to the announcement that inclusion became school policy, was an example of Florence's willingness to work with students who received special education services:

I volunteered to have Jeff [in my class]. Because he's a challenge, and I thought, what can we do with him? And the parents were wondering, really, what would be the best thing for him. They could have left him in special ed at a neighboring district; he had started pre-school there. We met with the teacher from the other district, and she wanted to work with him, too. It's not like no one wanted him.

That was the year that Ms. Light came to work in my room because she was assigned to Jeff. I would say she was just by his desk making sure he understood and kept him working. [The special education teacher] was going through some health issues at the time, and so she might have met with him a little bit, I guess, but basically we kept him in the room.

You know it's kind of amazing when I think, what he was able to [accomplish that year], I don't how he's doing now. It's very hard to assess, just how much ability and just how far can you take someone. What is possible. [He made] very good progress. I think the parents were very pleased.

He might have been two years older than everybody in the room, so we had to watch playground time pretty carefully with him. But he was generally pretty loving. Everybody got along with him. He had this thing if he was happy or

if things were going really well he'd watch sports and he'd see them give that (gestured to indicate a slap on the behind – and she laughed) we saw [him do] that quite a bit [with classmates]. But that was, those kinds of things, those experiences you just can't get anywhere else. I mean you just have to have a child like that in your room and go through seeing them so pleased that they can function. It was important for him to fit in and try and learn. He wanted to be there.

It was a lot of fun to work with him. He still gave me a hug when I went to sub, he came up and gave me a hug. He's a very loving child.

In teacher training, I never experienced working with anyone severely handicapped. Now I have a different experience. I have never worked with anyone more severe than he was.

Florence's account of Jeff's year in her classroom indicated that it was a beneficial arrangement – for Jeff, Florence, and the other students in the classroom.

The process for identification of students who were eligible to receive special education services changed during Florence's career.

When I first started teaching, if you had a child that was having a lot of problems, you met first with the parents and talked over what they expected of their child and how they saw their child functioning. [The official referral process would start with] your principal. You would visit with the principal first and sometimes the principal was even involved with meeting the parents. There would be a team meeting to discuss areas of concern. Then it was basically to line up diagnostic tests through the Area Agency; and I think it seemed to happen quicker, they would be identified and they would get help sooner.

Florence reported that this process did not require that an intervention to address the identified difficulty and the results of that intervention were documented; the school just contacted the AEA to begin the evaluation process. At the meeting, the teacher would be present to introduce the AEA team members to the parents, “And talk about what type of testing there'd be, and then there was a meeting after that, and then you discussed a plan, a plan of action for what would happen, and it worked very smoothly.”

When asked if students who were brought into this identification process were found to be eligible to receive special education services, Florence replied:

I think they were pretty much, they were. And I think it's because (pause) I don't know if that's really fair to say. I think the administration, I guess I'll just say it, the administration I think at that time had confidence in you as a teacher that you had done about all you could and that you had tried. You know, it's not that we had to document everything we had done; you just worked that hard with every student, so that they knew that if there was this much of a problem it needed to be addressed. So it's not that you casually referred people.

It's just that you didn't have to document everything and now you sit with a team of people who come up with more things that you can try.

Working in kindergarten it might be different; I'd have a different feel for it because you don't have a lot of kids identified in Kindergarten. When someone would come in it takes a long time, a long process.

Florence described her perspective of and response to the change in the process:

I guess in a way it's frustrating because you feel that you've done so much already. I guess having taught that long, you kind of know what works and what doesn't work. You know the child. That's another key piece in the puzzle, what's going to work for that child and what will that child best benefit from. I probably wouldn't refer anyone until I'd try just about everything I could, so maybe I should have started referring people a lot earlier so it wouldn't be frustrating.

It's not that there was any difference in the amount of effort you put into helping the child, the same efforts was given earlier as I would have given three years ago, but the process is delayed and delayed and delayed and delayed and delayed [in] getting the child identified. And there's a kind of pressure from the school system, too, to meet a certain date for their budget in identifying people.

I was interested in understanding Florence's perspective regarding the reasons for the "delay" in the process of identifying a student as eligible to receive special education services. She shared her perspective and reported her teaching partner's as well:

The delay was in place for more than one reason. One reason would be scheduling, when can you get everyone together to meet, I think probably the teacher documentation was going on as events unfolded in the classroom, as events were unfolding, and that's another big demand on your time, of course, you're writing all these things down. I did talk to my former teaching partner about this a little bit this morning. She said, "I think they recommend a lot of things that we just knew weren't going to work and we had to do this for two

weeks until we could meet again. So, it's just like you feel you need to try everything that's suggested and it just seems like it delays, and delays, and delays, and delays help [for the student]." She said she wished everybody that was giving information [consultants from the AEA] had to student teach; I think she thought the background of some of the people [was not in teaching so] were they were offering ideas that were not practical. That's what her take on it is.

I guess everybody's willing to try something that might work, but she too thought that there was quite a delay in getting help for students. I think documenting is not a bad idea, and to me it's like an insurance policy for everyone involved. If someone ever comes and says well you never tried this, you never did this for them before you went ahead and identified someone. I think people are worried about being labeled and that's a part of it probably too.

I asked Florence if it would be possible to get the students the assistance they need without that label.

Who requires that label? Not me. That's the key. Who requires it? The State of Iowa? Probably the education system has that set up; to get funding for the student that has special needs, they need to be labeled this. I don't know who demands the label; we're just looking for help.

Referring to her student, Jeff, Florence recalled:

He was a Level 2, that's what [the special education consultant from the AEA] thought anyway, so I guess that did happen there. I've never worked with anyone more severe than he was. I didn't even know what she meant by a Level 2. She said, "Well, you know, he's probably a Level 2 at least" and I'm thinking, okay and that is? I don't know what. I'm thinking it must be bad, it's not a 1.

In this excerpt, Florence commented about her lack of understanding of the funding level numbers which the consultant used; it did not appear that the consultant noted Florence's confusion or assured that Florence understood the terminology being used. This labeling system illustrated a contradiction; although Iowa is considered to be noncategorical in identification of students who are eligible to receive special education services, each student is assigned a level, or categorized, for funding purposes. Under this system, students assigned a Level 1 rating were considered to have "less significant needs," Level

3 students have “more significant needs,” with the needs of students rated a Level 2 falling somewhere between the two designations. The amount of funding a district receives for a student who receives special education services varies according to the designated level of need, with the most funding provided for students who are assigned to Level 3.

When sharing her experiences in the year Jeff was included in her classroom, Florence mentioned that she did not recall that the special education teacher at the time had worked with him very much outside of the classroom. Ms. Rock was a young woman who was hired to replace that special education teacher after she retired; Ms. Rock worked at the South River Falls for two years before Florence retired. Florence described the role of the new special education teacher:

The first year she was there I saw her working as almost a behaviorist. At kindergarten anyway, if someone had trouble, she'd be up and have a little session with them. I was kind of mystified by her role that first year. I know she probably had classes in the elementary subject-wise, but she did a lot of behavioral kinds of things, [for example,] come and take a child that was having behavior problems for a walk.

When I asked if there was anything else Florence thought of to tell me related to special education, she recalled the following story:

I'm trying to think of other kids I've had, I remember. Do you remember the principal I had that I told you I taught her [class for] PE? There was one boy in the class that had trouble with classroom behavior. She actually told me to have him be identified. He was horrible on the playground and I think she probably knew I was using all the patience I could to work with him and she said, “You know you don't have to put up with him, Florence.”

Well, because she was the principal, she had a lot of the behavioral things that were coming up on the playground and she really encouraged me to have him identified. And he's the kind of kid that had a lot of, well he didn't behave at home and he had a lot of trouble at school, just a confused little boy. In fact, one



time I told him something and I turned to walk away from him. He was giving me the finger and I turned around and I saw him with his finger up.

At that time [he was] in my fourth grade room. Anyway, I turned around and I was very angry but I thought what do I say to him? So I took about three seconds as I walked toward him and I said, "Brian, what do you think putting your finger up accomplished? It might make you feel good for a minute but that does nothing to solve the problem of the way things are now." [I told him it is] not solving the problem at all when you don't tell me what's wrong and we don't talk about it. So I talked to him and got him calmed down and let him know that I didn't appreciate it, it was inappropriate, and it did nothing to solve the situation.

He ended up increasingly troubled through school. I think he was in trouble with the law and everything. I left that school so I'm not sure what really happened to him.

In her account of this story, Florence had not indicated if she followed the principal's directive to refer Brian, so I asked her directly. Florence responded:

Well, I did because the principal said I should, because she said, "I know he can't be good for you all the time in the room." He was pretty good for me, he was pretty respectful. But he was horrible on the playground. He was always constantly thinking of things that were inappropriate – on the playground or on the bus – mischievous was just more than his middle name. I think that one time he had a problem and he was very angry inside and he just flipped me the bird (laughed). I just turned around and there he was with his finger up. Okay, we didn't solve that problem. [I referred him, but] nothing happened, not that year. We just kept him in the room. He didn't go out of the room.

I think my principal thought I was too tolerant. It was like let's get this kid identified. And I wasn't ready to run him through that; to be honest, he really didn't have learning disabilities, he had behavioral issues. He had a really rough home life so the poor kid had problems at home which were really bad. The hardest kids to love are the ones that need it the most.

I tried to show him that there's a different way to solve problems. There was a lot of violence in that house.

Regarding supports that were available at the time for students with challenging behavior, Florence indicated that she had this student in class before there were guidance counselors available in the elementary schools in which she taught.

In our final interview, I asked Florence to define special education:

Special education is a prescriptive plan for instruction for a child that has need for [assistance. It is] a special plan for working through difficulties a child has with learning, where you monitor the progress. Usually the plan is reviewed with not only just the principal but also the parents are involved so they know what's happening with the child. Communication is kept very open between the parents and what's happening in the classroom so the parents can be supportive of what's going on.

She responded to my question about benefits or drawbacks to students receiving special education services by stating,

I think it's pinpointing their needs and it's supposed to be a prescriptive individual plan where you can monitor their growth and they can work toward a goal. Hopefully, by working through the plan, the child will feel good about the progress that they are making and not just be stuck, unable to learn, because whatever they're doing in the classroom now is just not working.

Florence added, "One thing I would say, I was thinking about this: you hear parents say, 'Well, I don't want them pulled out of the room for help. I want them to be like everyone else.' We pulled gifted students out of the room to be helped..." This statement indicated the pull-out nature of services provided to students who were different. Florence also mentioned a change in family structure: "It's amazing what kids have to deal with, these poor little kids that have split custody. At the end of the day, they get all worried trying to remember what house they go to."

Florence described many changes related to special education; among these were personnel changes, the identification process, and amount of time students who received special education services were included in the general education classroom.

### Physical Discipline

Florence brought up the topic of physical discipline:

This probably doesn't sound very nice, but there was a lot more physical discipline in the earlier days. I think at the time it surely highlighted the students'

fear and cooperation, just the thought that they might end up with a swat or something. Teachers, principals were allowed. I know principals would have little paddles just so they could give them a little whack if they thought they'd been really, really naughty. That's not happening now; I would say there was some physical [discipline] going on in the 1960s and maybe the early to middle 1970s. There was no spanking in the 1980s.

I think at teachers meetings they would just say we're not allowed to spank or to push somebody up against the wall to make a point, or...not that I did that. I was just thinking of that. We had a music teacher when I was growing up, she did music lessons, piano lessons, and if someone would make a mistake she just had a pencil and would rap your knuckles if you made a mistake (chuckled) in what you played. I didn't take piano lessons from her but kids told me the horror stories. But there were more physical things done to children to kind of correct their behavior than what we have now.

I think it's probably good [that the physical punishment is not allowed any longer]. I never was into it much. I don't think I ever hit a kid. I bumped one once with my hip; that was in kindergarten. We had this little boy who would just always shove and push to get in line and so I walked up to him and said, "You know what? I want your spot." And I went like this (gestured with bumping her hip) and he looked at me like, "What?" (chuckled) He felt what it was like, it was nothing that hurt him. I said, "Now you see how other people feel when you do that to them. It's not nice is it?" So I did do that. It stopped his pushing. Things came slowly to him, socially, and I just had such a time with him; he was the sweetest thing, but my word. I probably shouldn't have done that. Sometimes you would do things and you would think, oh, I probably could have gotten into trouble for that.

While physical discipline was accepted early in Florence's career, she never used it much and viewed its discontinuance as a positive change.

### Learning Channels

Florence discussed a time when teachers began to change their teaching strategies based on differences in how children learn:

Another thing that I thought of is the idea that children learn in different ways, different channels. That's something we weren't taught at all when we were doing our teachers' training but that came along after I was teaching; they would have classes at the area agency. I would go to meetings...[that] talked about [learning differences] and I took college classes. I think in the old days, people just thought if you just said it a little louder they'd get it (laughed). I would say that probably came about, the thought that they were more kinesthetic or maybe they were more

visual or maybe auditory, the fact that you should try different ways to reach children, maybe they have a better way of learning, maybe one of the stronger modes for them, and I'm thinking that came about in the 1970s, probably mid-1970s.

I think people still consider that. Especially primary grades want to provide a lot of different types of activities that touch on whether one child might see something and actually grasp what you're trying to tell them because their visual mode of learning is so strong, and another child might need to physically need to touch and feel and form different letters out of clay, use different textures and that is kind of a link to learning. Maybe not everyone can just hear something and understand it.

I think in my very earliest years of teaching, it was just you review and review and review and I guess you didn't approach it from a different way. And that would have been even with the 4<sup>th</sup> grade [students I taught].

#### Amount of Writing Required of Students

Florence told at least one story that indicated not only that there were changes during her time as a teacher, but also that school was different during her tenure than when she was a student:

When I was going to school, they didn't even mimeograph a lot of things. For example, the teachers would write on the chalkboard that you were to read in social studies a chapter and you had to copy down all the questions that were on the board. Then you read your material and you wrote the answers out so there was tons of writing. I just remember when I had my tonsils out, I missed quite a bit [of school]. I missed school during that time and the thing that was really amazing to me was that the teacher had given me a copy of what was on the board and I didn't have to write all that (laughed). She was so sweet, I thought, "She's giving me a copy of this, I don't have to write it all out" because she would just fill the board with questions. That could be 40 questions that you would copy, that was your assignment, then you read your text, and wrote the answers to the questions and then maybe the next day or two then you were to discuss the answers to the questions to make sure everybody knew it; that was how she taught.

I think it was probably good for us because then we knew sentence structure. We had a feel for how a sentence should be put together. We copied a lot from books in junior high; the books would have exercises and you would decide which was the correct answer. For example, [you would need to choose] the [correct form] of a verb, was or were. You didn't just write your [one word] answer, was or were; you had to copy the whole sentence and then put in your choice. I think all that writing was good, but it sure was tedious.

When Florence shared her view of her own teachers having students write a lot, it implied that students were required to write less in her classroom and that she believed more writing was beneficial to students.

### Class Size

Florence commented on the impact of class size on students she taught as she described the year she had eight fifth-grade students in her classroom:

You don't have as much discussion when you have [a small class but] they all got a lot of individual attention, for sure. I felt that I was really on top of what everyone was doing and how they were doing. I think they had a good year but very rarely would you ever have a class that size. Now maybe if I taught a class of (laughed) high school physics, I'd have a class of eight, I don't know.

This excerpt illustrates benefits for both students and the teacher.

### Teaching Strategies

Florence also discussed mandated teaching strategies, specifically the Picture Word Inductive Model (PWIM; Calhoun, 1999).

We were supposed to take pictures and brainstorm what was going on in the picture. It was to allow the students to use more descriptive words and to share experiences that happened to them, maybe in a similar setting as the picture. It was supposed to be language development. I think more demands were put on teachers to try different strategies; you were expected to do so many projects of a certain type that were extra that I didn't have earlier [in my career].

The reason behind the mandatory strategies, according to Florence:

There was a big push that we didn't want our students to qualify for extra reading; we needed to meet their reading goal set by the State for No Child Left Behind. Teachers were saying, "Well, this is going to leave no teacher behind. (laughed) No Child Left Behind, well, there's not going to be a teacher left standing." The teachers felt a lot of pressure to have each grade continually do better on their test scores each year than they had the previous year. This was so we didn't qualify as a school in need by the State of Iowa. I just felt there was an extra push to make teachers accountable and so we were trying all different kinds of things. Maybe you felt you were doing a pretty darn good job but then here's something more

you're going to do. And it was required of everyone. I don't know, maybe there was a classroom somewhere, you have no idea what's going on in different rooms so maybe they were trying to fix something somewhere in the system and everyone did it because they were helping someone [in particular].

As Florence continued to discuss the topic of NCLB and avoidance of becoming a school in need, her feelings of isolation again surfaced:

Another thing, too, is [this:] because we were separated, I had no clue what was happening in any of the grades as far as what they were teaching; so there's very little articulation [about] what was even happening in second grade or third grade, or what did second grade expect from their incoming [students], what level did they expect first grade students to have finished. I don't think there was a lot of talking across grade lines; I think they're trying to improve that.

Florence described the mandatory strategies put into place to increase student achievement, and that the physical isolation of the Kindergarten building may have contributed to communication challenges.

### Scheduling

As previously described, Florence's location in the Kindergarten at South River Falls was separate from the building that housed grades 1 through 12. Florence described this arrangement as "double-edged":

My last years of teaching, and part of this is because I was in a separate [building], I had almost no contact with other elementary teachers so that was kind of a double-edged [situation], the fact that I was isolated. It was wonderful for the students because they were able to experience how to solve problems with children their own age and not have older children to cope with; to try to get some of those social skills down. But also I think maybe ideas and communication between teachers of different grades was not as easily accomplished. I could go a week [without talking with a teacher other than my teaching partner], unless you saw them where the busses were at the end of the day.

In the lunchroom, there's no time to talk. You're supervising the students and trying to eat. In the old days, you were given, the children had more time to eat their lunch, enjoy their food. Now they just shove them through and if you haven't eaten, you scrape it off your plate because it's our time to leave the lunchroom. They learn to just shovel it in. Either that or they take the time to talk

a little bit, eat very little and visit a little, and then food is just thrown away. You're on a time schedule and when I first started teaching, [teachers] went to lunch and I sat with my class, which was fine, supervised them eating, but we didn't push them out of the lunch room and they had time to play outside at noon and it was much more relaxed. I think we just gave them time to eat, they could talk but we were not on a strict [schedule]. Maybe that's because in my first school it was a K through 6 building so we didn't have to leave before the high school came, we had more time. You know, you talk about healthy eating habits and you take them to the lunchroom and they almost just inhale it.

About time to communicate with other coworkers, I think that basically happened generally at lunch time and there was a teachers' lounge so you could eat in the teachers' lounge. Teachers took turns supervising in the lunchroom so four days out of five, you ate with teachers and you talked during the noon lunch time. That was a time when you could say, "I am having trouble with..." You're not supposed to talk about children, well, they do. I think if you do it respectfully, it's productive. If someone had that student earlier, you can talk to the present teacher and give thoughts on what worked. I don't think it was ever meant to be malicious or to talk about children in a bad way. Problems were [discussed]. I'm too social, I guess. I kind of missed that; [before I worked at South River Falls,] it was a tiny staff, small school so we were all in one building. [My Kindergarten teaching partner and I] had a little bit of time but she was the only person I had contact with, which was good too because we could talk about her class and my class. I guess I didn't have anyone else, not as much contact as I was used to.

While Florence's teaching situation at South River Falls did not change much over the years, it was a change from her earlier teaching situations. The limited opportunities for communication between Florence and other teachers was indicated in this anecdote; she was "social" and her feelings of isolation were a consequence of the segregated setting.

The recalled experience also illustrated the impact of the mandatory decrease in the amount of time allotted to students for lunch. I asked Florence if her students had ever commented about the contradiction between what they were told about healthy eating habits and the practices in the lunchroom; she replied, "little people wouldn't pick up on that, but there is the chewing your food. And little people tend not to question too much if the teacher says you have to leave, you have to scrape your plate. We tried to say you

have five more minutes or to get them to think about eating, but you are just pretty... well...there isn't much time."

A more encompassing scheduling change that Florence related in the interviews was a shift from a daily schedule to a six-day cycle:

Changes in scheduling happened for both elementary and high school because you used to have your classroom schedule Monday through Friday. Then it changed to a six-day cycle. That has impacted the classroom because you have less music, less library, less art. They're spreading the specials thinner. I really don't know why that happened.

I don't think it's harder to [follow a six-day schedule], but I'm just looking at the experiences the students get out of each week. It doesn't seem like much more just to add a day to the cycle, but it would be. Oh, I'm thinking at the time when this change was taking place, I was probably teaching fifth grade. Before, PE classes would be every other day for 45 minutes; now, I would say PE classes are probably still every other day, but they are for half an hour. You get music twice in six days, whereas music would have been every other day [before]. You're losing one music class every six days. [Before] we'd have library twice a week, now they have a library class once a week, and they do offer just a story, and as a second session, not much of a time. I didn't care for the six day cycle.

Maybe there is more of a push to be more content-oriented as far as subjects that are being taught. Maybe they want more math or more reading or whatever. I'm not really sure why that took place.

Between the participant meeting and her final interview, Florence discussed this change with her husband. "He explained with the specials, it was purely from a budget standpoint of the school, trying to stretch the dollar."

### Merit Pay

Florence stated she had not been evaluated by her administrator until the concept of merit pay was introduced in the district she was working in during the 1980s.

In fact, they tried just a tiny bit of [merit pay] and it was terribly ineffective because it was a small enough district that everyone talked about what was mentioned about your strengths as a teacher. They tried to give just a little bonus if your students scored highly on this test or if you went to all the basketball games. (laughed) I think it led to some negative competition among teachers,



where people weren't willing to share ideas because they wanted to feel they were doing something special and important and wanted to look like a better teacher. So I think it fostered a negative kind of atmosphere. I think they only did that one year as kind of a little experiment.

Florence shared her current perspective on merit pay for teachers:

I think it would be wonderful to reward people who are dedicated and do well in their jobs, but you always have the whole thought of how subjective [it would be.] Who's going to judge what is [exceptional work] or who is going to say [one teacher] is better than someone else? "You're \$200 better than your next-door neighbor." You wonder if it's trying to get everyone to do their best. Do you suppose it's an incentive for people to do more? [In the 1980s "experiment,"] everyone wanted the money. You all want to be appreciated but it's so subjective that to measure it is pretty tough and then to get somebody to agree, "Okay, your idea is right. I agree with you."

This description brings to light that some changes implemented during Florence's tenure had negative and/or challenging aspects; not all changes were beneficial or maintained on a long-term basis.

#### Impact of Changes

Florence made a simple statement about the impact of the changes that were implemented during her teaching career, "I think [the students] got a better education because of the changes [that took place in the school]. I think they were all positive changes." Of the impact on teachers, Florence said, "I just think teachers had a better understanding of how children learn, you just became a better teacher, more information." The impact on her, personally, "I just think it made teaching more exciting to learn more about different ways to approach things. I just loved new information about teaching and about children. Trying different things, so I suppose I was always open to do that."

When I asked about the barriers to implementation of change in schools, Florence replied, “Teachers have to be willing to embrace change, be willing to try to work with the system.” She reported that one barrier to implementation of special education was communication between general and special education teachers:

I’m not sure I always knew exactly what was going on [with students who received special education services]. When they worked within a special setting, maybe that’s the time issue, but there wasn’t always a lot of communication.

You’d look at the paper they did or their work; sometimes they’d show you what they’d done, but sometimes they’d just throw it in their little cubby hole box where their work was going home that evening and you wouldn’t see it unless you happened to just remember you’d better go look at what they threw in that box. A lot of the progress, you weren’t sure exactly how they were doing until you had a meeting an IEP meeting. It would be nice to maybe work a little more closely with the special ed teacher, what they’re working on. You have the IEP but [it would be good to know] how’s it going more [often] than just wait 6 months or whatever. It would be nice to have a meeting a little more often than when the IEP came up; it might be nice every quarter.

I can’t remember, I might have only once had a special education teacher come to a parent teacher conference meeting. It’s all handled separately. (Sighed.) I don’t know, I suppose there are so many conferences going on, there aren’t enough hours and days for them to get everywhere they need to go.

### Retirement

Florence related a story that occurred when she was pondering retirement:

I asked someone once, “How do you know when you’re ready to retire?” because I think that is something everybody wants to know. [She] said to me, and I did not care for this answer, she said, “Florence, when it’s time, you’ll know.” And I thought, “What kind of an answer is that? I want more information!” (She laughed.) “Don’t give me that!”

As it turned out, Florence’s decision to retire was precipitated by her mother’s illness:

The spring before my last year of teaching, my mother had a stroke. It was a horrible year because I had everything to take care of for her and I was trying to teach, and there might be evenings I would have to be in [my hometown with her]. Oh, I was having to pay all her bills and take time off to take her to doctor’s appointments, and so it just, I think it just kind of wore me down. She would never want to hear that, of course; and now I have her friend that I’m doing the

same thing for. This friend is now in a nursing home and she has no family. My parents were always friends of this woman and her brother. The woman had never married, had no children, no relatives at all, anywhere. [She had a brother who] got cancer and my parents always drove him to appointments for treatment. [When the brother] was in his last hours or days or whatever, he said to my parents, "Now will you take care of her when I'm gone, help her?" And so they promised they would.

[My mother's friend] has been wonderful. When my mother had her stroke, she stayed with my mom, just like a sister. Then they diagnosed her friend with dementia, so now she is in [a nursing home] it is very, very, sad. When that happened, my mother has power of attorney for her and I am listed second. Well, my mother is not healthy enough to do any of that, so I am doing all that too. Everything works out the way it needs to be, so that is where a lot of my time goes. Now I am doing different work.

Florence told me of her inspiration for becoming a teacher, "It's that fifth grade teacher that wrote all those sentences on the board for me that inspired me. As a freshman in high school we had to write what we thought we might have for a career, and I wrote I wanted to teach because of her. She was a wonderful person." About her time as a teacher, Florence said, "I loved every[thing], I just loved it all. How lucky a person has to feel to find something that agrees with you." Florence had realized her dream.

After retirement, Florence initially accepted one assignment as a substitute teacher in a third grade classroom. "I knew a lot of [the students] because I'd had them in Kindergarten but I think when you sub you don't know what the expectations are for a classroom, the way the classroom normally is run, and I felt they were respectful enough. Each day it got easier to go back to it." After that, she did not accept additional substitute positions due to family responsibilities, volunteer commitments, and travel plans with her husband who had retired a few years before she did.

### Recommendations

Florence discussed several recommendations regarding how to better prepare future teachers:

I feel that when I graduated, I was highly naïve about parents and support, support of parents, to the point of...here's this for instance. I had a girl that was having a lot of trouble. I had the father in for a conference, he was a single dad, had him in for a conference, and the conference went wonderfully well. We had a plan for him to support her and help her in the areas she was having trouble with, and he never followed through. I was just totally unprepared for the fact that some parents just don't follow through. I guess I was just very naïve [that] all parents don't function the same way.

She also suggested that changes to the educational system would be beneficial, specifically allowing time for teachers to work together:

Teaching is work. You can't get it all done, *never* get it all done from 8 to 4. Interestingly enough, I have to tell you that [where I vacation] in Florida, every Wednesday, school gets out at 12:30. *Every* Wednesday, and the teachers have the rest of the afternoon for planning or work or inservice or whatever, that's every Wednesday. And the parents, it's pretty amazing, they take that time off. I don't know if that will be a trend or if it will change here.

Florence also recommended a longer period of time for student teaching:

I don't know how practical it is for them to have more time in the classroom for student teaching. That is what I would like for them; to be able to take the last year of college and just be in the [class]room. The joy of getting through those three and a half years is that you've got your student teaching and that is what you worked towards. And then you would experience just what it is to get through a year. I think of doctors, they intern and teachers do, to an extent, but it's kind of a short period of time.

She thought that a year-long period for student teaching would help students understand that there are more demands on a teacher's time and there is more to being a teacher than just the amount of time you are in the building.

According to Florence, “mentors are a nice idea.” This brief comment led her to discuss the college and high school students who worked with her over the years:

I have had students come [into my classroom] that are taking education classes and they are there only to observe or to they are there teach one lesson. There is a lot more of that going on than there used to be, so that is good.

I have had a lot of high school students [come into my classroom to work with the students] and you’d be surprised, some of them that maybe have kind of a tough rough exterior and they get to kindergarten and you see a whole different side of them. [Administrators] were debating about whether they should give the students credit for that. In the first years, I did give them a grade and they did get a credit, but I am not sure right now what they’re doing.

Her recommendation was to continue to offer these types of experiences to benefit students.

#### Summary

Some of the pieces of Florence’s puzzle were different than Charli’s, in part due to the grade levels of the students each taught. Also, Florence’s work was in five school districts, the last 17 years at South River Falls, while Charli was at South River Falls for her entire career. Among the interesting different changes Florence discussed were school nurses, physical discipline, class size, scheduling issues, and merit pay.

## CHAPTER 7

## JANE: "IT TAKES A LOT OF WORK"

At the participant meeting, Jane was seated to Florence's left at the dining room table; she was also across from Charli. (See Figure 1.) Jane sported short, curly hair and glasses. Her occasional big smiles contradicted the gruff sound of her voice.

I recalled sitting together in Jane's tidy home for the three individual interviews, at a table-height section of the kitchen counter that accommodated one wooden chair on either side. It was in this setting that Jane shared her background and recollections of her 34-year teaching career, which was longer than the other participants'. Jane began the first interview by asking me to review the 1975 legislation, Public Law 94-41, that "kind of started this," which I did.

Jane's Context

Jane then described her education during the initial interviews. She was educated through secondary school in the Eagle View District. She recalled her first grade experience:

When I was in first grade, which is a very important grade as far as education is concerned, I had the measles, mumps, chicken pox plus the flu, and strep throat and all those other things that go around. I probably missed half of the year; I missed a lot here and there, and there were a lot of holes [in my learning]. I went into what we called remedial reading for a while, got some of those holes plugged in, and went on. Otherwise the gap probably wouldn't have been filled and I probably wouldn't be a teacher today.

Jane began her post-secondary education at a community college, from which she graduated after two years. She then transferred to a four-year public university and earned

her Bachelor's degree after the next two years. Jane described the time she spent as a student teacher:

I remember my experience [was] at one grade level, in a fourth grade open classroom, and I mean that literally. I would have my class here, and there might be this cupboard here [classrooms were not separated by a wall], and the next teacher was having her class. You would try to keep your class organized if [the other teacher] did not. It probably saved teachers time because one teacher would plan a unit, use it, and then give it to another.

Maybe I did not have a good, great [background] because I came from a very poor family and went into a school, a [student teaching] situation where there were doctor, lawyer, Indian chief-type parents. They could afford more than I could. And I had the largest class in the district; I had forty-eight kids. The teacher was there for two days and was sick, and the principal said, "Hey, you're there. If you have any problems, send them to my room, but I'm not hiring a sub."

And any time the teacher went out speaking – they would do these mini-units, on dictionary skills and different things, that was the thing at the time, to make these little booklets and the kids would go through them and do them, skill after skill, I felt I had an excellent teacher as far as that goes – but whenever she would go out speaking, I was just there.

Jane's student teaching placement was a challenge because she was given a large class, taught in a distracting, open environment, and often was left to teach on her own and did not have the support she needed.

In addition to her undergraduate training, Jane had also earned a Master's Degree, as Charli had. However, Jane's path differed from Charli's in that her degree was in Learning Disabilities and she completed the requirements at a private college during her teaching career.

Jane began teaching in 1971; she served her entire career in the Eagle View School District, which she had attended for her Kindergarten through Grade 12 education. Throughout her career, Jane taught students who were primarily at the elementary level. When hired by the district, her position was in a first grade classroom,

and she stated, “I can’t give you the exact years, but I have taught every grade from first through sixth at some time. For the most part, [the grade I taught] was administratively assigned; maybe once or twice I got what I asked for.” Jane spoke of one modification to her comment about teaching elementary students, and chuckled as she told me, “When I was in learning disabilities, I had to go over to the high school and work a little bit with kids at that level [in addition to working with elementary students]. So I didn’t have too much free time.”

Jane shared the story regarding her decision to complete a Master’s Degree program:

There was a need in the school. It was at the beginning when there were demands everywhere and administration basically convinced me that [getting a degree in special education] would be good for me to do. It was beginning to change where all teachers had their BAs, then and it was coming into more and more we’re getting Masters. So I thought maybe this is an area I’d really like to work in and it’s going to come to the point when teachers are going to need a Masters, so [I could] get the jump on that. [The principal’s] wife was doing it at the time and he just thought it was a wide open area, plus I was given a little bit of pressure; if you don’t move into this, we’re going to have to get rid of a teacher. If you go into this area, we don’t have to get rid of a teacher. It was that guilt; I felt it was a guilt trip anyhow.

At that time, you only had to have 12 hours but then you had to continue it and had to have it done in 3 years. I took one or two classes and decided forget it; I had a nine-month-old child and a four-year-old. At that time, the reading course was extremely hard; you went through one area in one week and you were expected to do 15 readings and write them up and study, have a test, all in one week. And read the book; it was terrible and I thought, no. Actually, I quit for a few years, did not continue.

Jane had received provisional certification to teach students labeled with learning disabilities and eventually did return to complete her Master’s Degree. She described the impact of her additional education and her decision to return to a position in general education:



[I only taught students with learning disabilities] for probably three or four years. [After] I got my Masters, I only taught [in special education] one year or two at the most, so it wasn't a long time. I always felt that hopefully that helped me to understand other kids, and helped me to do better as a classroom teacher. I felt when I went back to the classroom that I was a much better teacher than I had been before, and obviously as you get experience, I think you just get better.

I was raised in a very strict home and so I had very strict discipline when I first started. And probably one of the best things that happened was when I first started with my Master's degree, I think I backed off of that strictness a little bit. I mean I still ran a fairly strict [classroom], but not as much so. I started to see the differences and tried to meet individual needs and helped them more so than I had before. And I know I changed some of my teaching strategies. I had one teacher, every day when we came in, we recited what she felt we needed to know for the test. So I would try to continually go through, especially in science, social studies, and some of the math, to review what I expected [my students] to know. These are the things you need to know, "Who can tell me this?" and asking questions. We reviewed so that the students really knew what was important. And I think I tried to teach them how to find the information on their own, how do they approach the science and the social studies. Where can they go to find [an answer] using the subtitles and things like that; what clues were the books giving them to find the answers?

I started this before Reading First, which [included] some of that, and I felt it helped the kids a lot more. It seemed like in the Science [textbook], the first question usually was on page one so I'd teach the kids, this is the first question, look at the front of the book, or the chapter. [Then I would] go through and say, "You can find that and if you don't know a word, instead of searching that chapter for each word, go down through the black words, find them, and match them with the meaning as you go through the chapter instead of going through the chapter for each word." I was teaching them that bold face words are important in a way and tried to get them [to understand that], but it was really hard. They'd keep searching anyhow and come up and ask. I tried to get them to use their index more to find answers. It seems like in the social studies, a lot of their subtitles were questions. "Okay, you see these key words here? That's where you would need to look. Look for the key words in the question." And I think that was some of the things we were trying to do with Reading First. So I really felt that I changed a lot in my teaching after going through my Master's program.

I missed the classroom so much and that was kind of at the point when they changed and decided that they could have one [special education] teacher do K through 12. [The teacher would] tell these associates what to do and the associates would work with [students]. There happened to be a teacher in second grade who retired so it worked out that I could get in there; I had requested it. That was probably one the one time I got my request; basically I was always told, "Well, you're so flexible and you can adjust" and this and that, and I finally got to

the point, “Quit giving me the bullshit and just tell me where you’re going to stick me.” (Laughed.)

Jane indicated that she provided special education services to eligible students for a relatively few years, and the special education service delivery model changed during that time. These remarks illuminated Jane’s opinion that what she learned during her coursework to obtain her Master’s Degree in Learning Disabilities (special education) greatly impacted her teaching, despite the few years she actually taught students who were labeled with a learning disability after earning the degree. Jane believed that she utilized this additional knowledge to benefit all students in her general education classes when she left special education to teach second grade. Of interest are Jane’s comments related to her request to return to the general education setting; other requests she had made were not granted but this one was honored by the elementary principal.

#### Administrators

During the time Jane worked at Eagle View Elementary, six administrators served as her supervisor. In her first years, there was a superintendent for the schools in the entire county; at various times, the superintendent also was the elementary principal at Eagle View. Regarding Jane’s interactions with principals, not all were positive. She stated, “Some of my administrators didn’t back me and even changed things I said around and used them against me. Some did support me. It varied.” She spoke of one administrator who was her neighbor and shared “party line” telephone service; she suspected he listened in on some of her telephone conversations and she did not always agree with how he handled situations as an administrator.

Of the elementary principals Jane described, she spoke most about change related to Mr. Teague, who was principal at the elementary and middle schools during the last years of Jane's tenure at Eagle View. Among the major changes that occurred during his employment were the implementation of the Character Counts program. This was designed to increase students' self-esteem and character; one highlight was a gathering of the elementary population that occurred on most Fridays. These celebrations included character-related activities such as a different grade level performing a skit each week; singing various songs accompanied by Mr. Teague on guitar, including a song he had composed; etc.

Other changes while Mr. Teague was in charge were NCLB, Reading First, and a program that paired middle-school students to serve as an older role model/mentor for elementary students. Changes related to NCLB and Reading First will be described in later sections; of the mentoring program, Jane said,

Some of the middle school students would just play with the little kids, but some were good about planning activities for them. Sometimes we had to revise some of the things they had planned, but they would help the kids with work they were behind on or work on the computers with them.

Jane thought the student mentoring arrangement was beneficial to all involved.

#### Teachers' Role and Responsibilities

When asked if the role of the teacher had changed over the years since she began teaching, Jane responded that the change in role was related to changes in parents and family situations.

The role of the teacher has drastically increased. When I first started, most of the kids had a mother that was home all the time, the father worked. That's changed. There weren't as many single parent homes [back then]. There was a change in

parents and in what kids expected. When I first started, kids were sent to school to learn, the teacher was in authority, the teacher was right, you behave or...that's changed a lot. Now, the first thing [the parents] want to do is blame the teacher. 'It's not my kid's fault; it's the teacher's fault.' Kids expect things, that they don't have to work hard, they're just going to get it. They don't think they should have to learn math facts; I have a computer, a calculator; I don't need to learn that.

And it's much harder to get parents to work with children; but at the same time there's a lot more split families, single families trying to make ends meet and having a very hard time with that. And I think the parents' time is taken so much that the kids just get lost. [Even in two-parent families,] they don't have high-paying jobs and both of them have to work to make ends meet.

Like with character education, the parents are so busy working and so overwhelmed that they expect the teacher to educate that kid in the classroom. They don't want a lot of stuff coming home that they have to help the child with. The single parents are so overwhelmed that they aren't into helping a great deal with homework and projects.

Some parents think, "I am going to take care of my needs and then my child." It reminds me of the "me" generation. "My kids have homework, but I need to go shopping, so we're going to go shopping and the kid can just tell the teacher tomorrow that we weren't home and couldn't do it. We're going to do what I want to do." Or, "We want to go out, but we have only x number of dollars. Do we put them toward the kid or do we go out?" It seems to be centered on me.

As time went on, I felt I had to teach the kids manners, to teach the kids about world things and what's valuable, to do a lot more of what parents used to do as far as teaching. That I needed to consider the whole child instead of *just* educating them. When I started [teaching], it felt like a lot, I mean you did some but there wasn't so much of an importance placed on it. Now more importance has been placed on it; *you* need to develop the whole child and take the whole child into consideration. You have to be mother, father, teacher, nurse, psychologist, social worker, what have you. Also, we've become much more of a bookkeeper because you have to be able to document what you have done, every phone call, everything you've done to try to get the parents, everything you have done to help that child. You have to be a jack of all trades and a very patient person, more than it used to be.

For the most part, most of your children really look up to the teachers; obviously, there are those children who are what we consider troublemakers who don't feel they are loved. Sometimes you have to put a lot out for them. They are the ones that really call for your attention *however* they can get it whether it's good or bad. They just need that love and attention and take a lot of time away from the so-called teaching time. That's getting to be a bigger percentage of the kids. We still educate them, we still do our teaching, but there are so many other things that you have to do in the classroom, like Character Counts, that cut back on strictly teaching time.

[One time] we went through a skills training program. We talked about emotions, and there were some good things about that. Letting the children know that everybody has these emotions, and how can we handle them to be acceptable, but there was a lot of “gimme” and “I’m wonderful.” That was when we got in to a lot of rewards, and I think we got into too much of that. It took time out of education that we could have used better.

In addition, Jane stated, “The role of the teacher to keep up with the changes and laws was a challenge.” It was important for teachers to learn about the changes, like new technology programs that were introduced for the students to use. The laws that were enacted related to education during her career, most notably NCLB, had an impact on Jane, her students, and her colleagues in the school. Technology and NCLB will be discussed in greater detail later in this chapter.

Jane described the characteristics of a “really good” teacher:

They have to have the child’s interests at heart. They have to know their subject area. They have to be caring, feeling people. Because teachers deal with parents, they have to have some expertise in public relations. I feel that is the area where we get no training; that’s the area where I got the least preparation. I got some of that from my husband who had to deal a lot with people. He would say, “I wouldn’t do it that way; I would do it this way.”

[Good teachers must] be able to stand up for and support and justify what they think is really good for the child. They have to be somewhat of a disciplinarian. Someone the kids could come to and admire.

Jane also described good teachers as flexible:

You have to be willing to change. I know there are some teachers who will not flex, who will say, “This is the second week of school so this is where I have to be with my lesson plan, no matter what.” We had some of those, and they were very resistant to change in anything. But there were others who could see some good [in a change], who could see where it would fit in, and said, “We’re going to try it.”

In addition to earlier noting that her administrators stated she was flexible, Jane described her perception of herself as a teacher several times during the interviews. For example, she stated:

I guess I like to think that I was a flexible teacher, and that I could change. When we had to change something, I would look at it and say that it was good, and look at what I did before, and I would not give up what I thought was good from before so there wouldn't be those gaps. Like in one reading program we adopted, there was not a lot of phonics, and I put in those phonics from past programs, so there wouldn't be a gap.

One thing that helped me is that I taught every grade, I've not just been stuck in one grade or place. I know when I got to the upper levels, I thought, "Gee, why are they teaching that? It was taught back there and it's taught again here."

Jane also discussed what she believed she did not do as well:

I think it is important to keep in contact with the parent, to talk to parents. It is hard with parents being gone during the day, they don't want to be contacted at work, although some do, and it was hard to keep track of who did and who didn't want that. I think if you can work a good relationship with the parents, it makes it much easier with the child. I also found that if you can let them know when the child does something well, and not just contact them when he/she does something bad, that it helps. Good news letters, midterm notices, etc. to keep in touch. I know a lot of parents prefer the one-on-one contact, but it is much harder to do. I guess it is the teacher's job to find out as much as you can, as much as the parents are willing to share with you about the student. A lot of that comes at conference time, but sometimes it needs to come out before that time, especially if the child is having problems. Some teachers do an excellent job of that. I'm not so sure I was so great at that; my downfall.

Jane's stated comments seemed congruent with the description of herself as "an average worker" that was included in Chapter 4. She acknowledged that she had strengths and areas that she believed needed improvement.

#### Changes Jane Discussed

In addition to families, different administrators, teaching assignments, and teachers' roles, Jane recalled many changes and innovations that occurred during the

years she taught at Eagle View. Some of the topics of greatest interest or that Jane provided the most information about during the three interviews related to expectations for students, curriculum, standardized assessment, and special education. (See Table 5.)

### Preschool and Kindergarten

When preschools opened and it became popular for children to attend, it had an impact on young children as well as those who taught Kindergarten. Early in the first interview I conducted with Jane, she said,

Once preschool started, you could definitely tell those kids that had been in preschool and those that had not. You would say, "Line up" and [the students] who had not would say, "What does she mean? What's a line? Huh?" I remember one teacher that went from fourth grade to kindergarten and she said, "Line up" and the kids had no idea what she meant; she didn't know [that they would not know what to do]. Now, [most children] go to preschool, they get a lot of things that we used to teach in kindergarten; they learn how to write their names, the alphabet, they can count a little bit, they are familiar with words. I guess I still think it's a good thing for kids to go to preschool. I think they really miss out on a lot, the things they need to know, if they don't.

Without preschool, Jane believed children were at a disadvantage. She also related the pressure to assure students achieve at high levels, and the relationship between achievement and continued funding:

We have to push, we are now accountable. If you want [the school district to get the funding], so many of your kids better be here or there is no money. Money always does the talking, I don't care where you are. Money always talks. I think preschool was a necessary thing to prepare them. [Children] learned to get along with other kids and learned how to play socially, and that we used to do in Kindergarten. [Preschool] became a necessity because we no longer expect to teach those things in Kindergarten. So if you didn't go to preschool you were just kind of behind; plus we changed kindergarten from a half day then to a full day now.

Table 5

*Changes Jane Discussed*


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Preparation and Professional Development	Curriculum
Personal Teaching Practice	Reading First
Declining Enrollment/Consolidation	State Mandated Daily Reading Time
Teaching Assignments	Common Reading Time
Job Titles for Support Staff (Aide, Associate, Paraeducator)	Expansion of Classroom Libraries
Credentials Required for Teachers	Science and Math Curriculum
Teacher Evaluation	Science Kits
Teacher Autonomy	Length of Kindergarten Day
Administrators	Specials and Daily Breaks for Students
Area Education Agency (AEA)	Curriculum Mapping
Services	Career Education
Law/Accountability	Grade Retention
Grant Funding	Preschool
Standardized Assessments	Gifted Education Program
Publication of Results	Academic Expectations at Grade Levels
Goal Setting Based on Results	Departmentalization of Upper Elementary
Mandatory Reporting of Abuse	
No Child Left Behind	(table continues)

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Privacy	Responsibilities
Special Education Services	Physical Contact/Punishment
County System	Instruction
Continuum of Services	Grouping
Content Taught	Teaching Strategies
Identification Process	Open Classrooms
Factors Outside School	Classroom Rules
Dynamics/Parent Attitudes	Learning Styles/Preferences
Student Work Ethic/Expectations	Interventions
Student Access to Metropolitan Areas	Documentation Requirements
Technology	Rewarding/Praising Students
Computers/Software	
Teacher Websites	

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The increased expectations on students took a toll, especially at this very young age. Jane described a year when the district piloted full-day Kindergarten with a class that had a low number of students that did not warrant two full sections of the grade:

one year they tried all day kindergarten because they were a single section and a very small class and it was a complete disaster. The kids were turned off from school. I don't know if it was just too much; that's when the pressure was starting to 'up your curricula' and I'm not sure if that was part of it and we just weren't ready for that or if it just happened to be that group of children weren't real, there weren't really a lot of really good, top students in that group. They were all kind of in the middle and bottom, most of them. There may have been one or two really good [ones]; it could have just been the makeup of the class. And so that didn't last, and I don't remember when we actually went to all day kindergarten [on a regular basis].

Jane voiced her opinion on the impact of the increased expectations:

Personally, now I think that is one reason that some kids have problems; we have upped the curriculum and lessened the breaks that we give the kids. Those kids who really don't get it have to work so hard and it's just so much pressure on them. And I think we have forgotten to let kids be kids. A little bit. [Not] every school [has significantly decreased recess breaks; some] pretty much give their kids three breaks, or one long break and a short break [during the day].

The increased expectation for academic achievement did not stop with Kindergarten. Jane discussed the decision some parents make to keep their children who have summer birthdays, especially males, at home for an additional year:

I had just had too many kids that could make it through kindergarten, it wasn't that [they] were not ready for Kindergarten, but [they] were not going to be ready for first grade. I was looking on down the road and what [they] were going to have to learn. [Parents who] seriously think of holding out their child, I feel [some are] better able to make the decisions [they] had to make [later] because [the children] were older. I know there are exceptions to every rule, but [sometimes] I think the parents are right in holding back and just not starting [the child at 5 years old]. I said yes [to keeping my son out of school an extra year] and I will never regret that. They went from being the youngest and I felt really not ready...

These changes, including expectations for students to already possess good social skills upon entering kindergarten, increased demands for students to understand more complex material at younger ages, fewer minutes of non-academic time during the school day, and parental decisions to delay their child's entrance into Kindergarten had a negative impact on Jane's students, that is, a significant increase in their stress levels.

### Retention in Grade

Additional stress was placed on students who had difficulty with the academic material that was students at a specific grade level were expected to master.

Another big change when I first came was if [a student] was not up to grade level, then he or she was held behind. Well, what we learned from that is we pretty much just turned those kids off. Because they knew the curriculum, but pretty

soon these other [younger] kids would outperform them and they fell back down to the bottom. They pretty much felt, “I’m worthless.” That’s when we started retaining [only] those kids who were having some problems that [could be mediated by] one year; they needed more maturity, to see this one more time, then they would grasp it and be more at the top of the class.

The school’s policy on retaining students who experienced academic difficulty changed, but the pressure to perform well academically continued.

### Curriculum

As previously mentioned, Jane reported that curriculum changed (“upped the curriculum”) over the years throughout the district. Changes occurred at all grade levels, often due to the increased expectations for student achievement. She spoke at length about the reading curriculum and discussed science and math to a lesser degree.

Jane described a real-life example of the longstanding debate between proponents of the whole language and phonics approaches to teaching reading, and the shift in popularity from one to the other. Additionally, the utilization of grouping and inclusion of non-fiction materials in the curriculum varied over time. When Jane first started teaching,

With some of our students [who read poorly], we did Sally, Dick, and Jane yet. One or two years after I started teaching, we went to a series that was supposed to be the catch-all. It got into leveled reading and you were supposed to move your students according to what level they were in and that was supposed to eliminate need for remedial reading and Title One and those kinds of things. Obviously, that did not happen. But it had some [benefits]; I felt the weakness in that was in the phonics. Although [the curriculum had] a strong phonetic [component, since I was] just starting into teaching, [it] was difficult for me to pick up some of those things. Also as we went along, I think the leveling kind of stayed in there. I guess I found some good and bad with all of the series.

She described an approach to teaching reading that she was expected to use, likely beginning in the 1990s:

As time went on, you got more and more real stories that were actually available. We had taken a class they offered that began this; they were trying to integrate where the kids needed to write and to read and get more into 'book books,' real books, but not so much of the non-fiction as the Reading First. They seemed to leave phonics behind and I guess I felt that there had to be some phonics there.

What did they call it? It was before Reading First and they had their kick phrase for it. They tried to get the kids to read and write and all of this at one time, maybe whole reading? Whole language, because they thought everything should be included in the reading: language, English, phonics, writing. We didn't do a whole lot of [non-fiction]. I mean there were always a few, even with the whole language. That was another thing that kind of came with the whole language and really got into with Reading First but it started with the whole language business. Before there were [entire] stories and it started where you would get parts of a novel in the book and you couldn't just go to the shelf and pick out [the actual book] and read the whole thing.

At that time, when I was teaching 4<sup>th</sup>, 5<sup>th</sup>, and 6<sup>th</sup> grade and I started with the 6<sup>th</sup> grade, we worked with [the AEA] and the reading specialist that they had there. Instead of reading parts of the [stories that were in the textbooks], we actually bought the novels [of the short stories that] were in the same series so that the kids could read the whole thing. We also bought [more] novels that related or were written by certain authors. So that's when we started to expand our classroom libraries to include more books.

When the novels came in, we were departmentalized at that time; I basically taught the reading and language arts and all of the math for 4<sup>th</sup>, 5<sup>th</sup>, and 6<sup>th</sup> grades. That was a real challenge, especially if I had three novels going that I hadn't read. I would come up with questions and vocabulary along with reading the novels to be ahead of the kids; then trying to check their [daily] work, that was a real challenge. Thank goodness my [own] kids were older and they could take care of themselves a little bit, but when I came home at night I'd have to read a chapter or two and check papers and if you had three books going...but the [students] actually really got into that. And then I think [reading scores] started dropping down a little more and that's when the Reading First really kicked in.

Jane commented on the support at that time for the whole language approach:

Parents didn't buy into the whole language that well. The thing the parents had [difficulty with], it's like that new math [versus] old math, that [used different terminology and approaches; an example is new math] calling it trading and they were used to calling it borrowing.

I wasn't completely happy because books were supposed to be all inclusive, you could do your writing your spelling; all this started at that time and everything was supposed to be geared from your story and that was supposed to be more meaningful to the kids, but the phonics just wasn't there. And they went too fast, and the skills, they brushed over them and the kids couldn't pick them up

that fast. I guess I thought you always had to add [instruction in phonics]; especially in the lower grades you had to really add because that's where your phonics really comes in, is in those lower grades. And you either get it or you don't and you're in trouble if you don't (laughed) They didn't have good sales on [whole language] and it pretty quickly was not [used;] everybody kind of did their own thing. That's when our reading started to stretch out and took up most of the day. That was before the science and the math [curricula changes] came along.

According to Jane, over time, the amount of time dedicated to reading instruction increased, and beginning in the 1970s, more non-fiction books were made available. The Reading First initiative was a primary impetus for the increased utilization of non-fiction materials.

The Reading First was probably what really brought in the non-fiction; part of the reason for doing that was because of the high level of vocab in the science and social studies books, that was usually a couple of years beyond the [students'] reading level.

Plus the gifted program had kind of been put off to the side and that was starting to come up again. They had put so much emphasis on the lower kids that those parents that had exceptional kids were really beginning to say, "Hey, who's going to be my leader, who's going to college, who needs this help?" The other reason they gave us is they felt those students preferred to read more non-fiction.

### Reading First

Prior to retirement, the last and possibly the most significant change in the reading curriculum that Jane and her students experienced came in the form of Reading First, and the materials, strategies, and documentation required for that program:

The big change came with Reading First, which was my last few years. We were notified that we were a school in need. We got started with trying to get more non-fiction books into the curriculum; we also felt that those kids who were more advanced preferred reading non-fiction books. And that's when we started the talk-alouds, think-alouds, and read-alouds.

[The elementary teachers] worked on [Reading First]; some of the individual ed programs participated; the resource room teachers participated in the middle school, but the teachers per se did not. They do now, but they didn't [at the time]. They felt like they had to start some place and move it up, thinking [the elementary teachers] would be the least resistant. [Administration also thought]

that it would be harder to implement with most of the middle school and high school teachers [providing instruction] in just their [content] areas. I think now [upper level teachers] are required [to use talk-alouds, think-alouds, and read-alouds], even the music teacher and band teacher have to do one or two reading [activities,] a novel or something. I'm not sure exactly how far that goes, but I know it's in the middle school; they are continuing. And of course you had to do so many [strategies] per quarter, fill out all those forms and everything, and hand in your notebook and have it checked to make sure you were doing it right.

Jane reported that the part-time curriculum director and the principal were very involved with this change, and assured that the required documentation was completed.

Jane discussed the impact of the Reading First program on the teachers:

Time became a real problem for people to get work done. We would meet about once a month after school for an hour or so and then in order to get our materials and get enough stuff ready, they would offer a couple of nights, two or four nights a month, that you could stay for an hour after school and work on this. Then you were divided into a lower elementary group, which was basically K through 2, that I was involved in because at that time I was teaching second grade; and then [grades] 4, 5, and 6 met together; and the resource teachers met together. So we basically had three different groups; we shared what we were doing or if we had a problem, or did a presentation to practice what we were doing and how we were going about it [in front of] the group. [In the after-school sessions,] we were also given time to go get materials from the library, order [materials to borrow] from AEA, write the [paperwork,] and other things. And we were paid for those [sessions].

The Reading First program had a positive impact on the school:

That grant we were part of was one of the best things for our reading program because we had a lot of funds [as a result]. Our library got a lot of new books, classroom teachers got a lot of new books, mostly nonfiction (counting how many we had of each), and that is when we got to a place that was ahead of a lot of other schools.

While it had benefits, Reading First had taken a toll on Jane; it was one of the factors she indicated that influenced her retirement decision:

That new program took up about 80% of our time, a stepping stone toward my retirement. It was too much, the Reading First. All the paperwork, all this work, and all these meetings were very stressful. This was also the year when we were

going to merge, so it seemed the perfect time to retire rather than have me continue; they could get a new person to start in this new situation and continue with all this training. I tried to be flexible. I started out with Sally, Dick, and Jane and the heavy phonics, then less phonics, but when I got older, I tried to take what was good from each series, what had been good for the kids, and keep using what I knew needed to be done in the classroom for these kids to succeed. That was a big advantage.

This final comment illustrates Jane's view that her knowledge of teaching grew over her many years of teaching, and also was an example of the autonomy she had related to curriculum, despite the constraints of curriculum changes, especially Reading First.

### Science Curriculum

Jane described a change that had occurred with science curriculum, an initiative for rural schools:

There was the emphasis in science that probably came in the early 1980s; they wanted more science and math. The [scores] were way behind and they really pushed for that. That's when we got into the Science Co-op, where we would buy a science kit that was paid for by the grant, plus the school agreed to buy two more kits. Almost everything the first year was paid for, [including] our time. We wrote curriculum during the summer; [we worked] with different school districts according to which kit[s] we had gotten.

Then that changed; you were on your own, you worked in your own group. You had a leader who tried to help steer you. I thought that was nicer because it was all-inclusive. You could skip and do what parts you felt were important or grade appropriate. A lot of times you could stretch the gamut.

We started writing math curriculum; science and math became more prevalent.

The impetus behind the change in science and math curriculum was low scores on standardized assessments.

## Grouping

Jane discussed the changes in instructional practices related to grouping, both early in her career and the more recent time period when efforts for the gifted program were renewed:

Then we went back to groups; at one time they tried to have everybody in one group, everybody read the same story, and [the teacher] varied the work, and that just did not work.

[Students who had difficulty reading] couldn't say the words, they weren't prepared for that. If you can't understand – and you had kids that were reading very fast – the [students having difficulty] couldn't even keep up with them. They couldn't comprehend because they didn't have the vocabulary or the background to understand the stories. And if it was their turn to read [aloud], you had to practically tell them every word. Well, how can a kid get anything out of it if you're having to tell them?

That's when we started going back to groups. Very slowly, I would say that was in the late 1990s, too, where you tried to tell the parents that we're all in second grade but this child is reading this set of books and this child is reading this. Or you would say they are at this point in the book where others may be reading a different book or a beginning first grade book at the start of the year and we're trying to pick them up where they are and continuing, wherever that might be. That was the responsibility of that teacher then, in that classroom, to meet each of those children's needs, and put them in the group that they best fit without having an unmanageable number of groups.

There was a shift in materials used, from "one size fits all" to differentiation according to a student's skill level.

## Learning Activities and Textbooks

The activities that were provided to children in the classroom differed between the time Jane began her teaching career and when she retired.

We probably over stress busywork and just push too much at them that they just kind of [think], that's another [work]sheet, get it done; "oh another sheet..." That was our answer, keep them busy by doing sheets, but now we kind of keep them busy by activities and doing and practicing these things. I think it probably is better that we do very few sheets, and that was kind of hard to swallow for a while.



The shift from worksheets to activities was a challenging change for Jane.

When discussing changes during the interviews, the topic of textbooks also entered the conversation. Jane related a story about one administrator's position after new textbooks were adopted: "When we got a new math series, he did not want to see an old math book in the building. 'If you want this and we are going to spend this much money on it, it is going to be completely implemented. No using the other books. Get rid of them. Do not let me see them on the shelf.'" Jane's earlier comments indicated that while she no longer used these old textbooks, she would continue to teach the former content once the curriculum changed if she believed it had value for the children.

#### Standardized Assessments

During the interviews, Jane infused the topic of standardized assessment in her responses to my general questions and inquiries about other topics. She described several changes related to standardized assessment: (a) changes made to the curriculum based on the results of standardized assessment (while this has been previously reported, additional comments will be included here); (b) the types of standardized assessment given to students; and (c) change in composition of the standardized assessment(s).

Jane responded to my inquiry regarding who determined what was important for the students to know and described the relationship between this and standardized assessment:

It got to that point where [administration and the curriculum director] would look at the Iowa Basic Skills. They started analyzing the questions to determine the kinds of questions we [needed to target]. Around here, our vocabulary [scores] were always a low area so the administration really pushed for us [to address that in our instruction]. If they saw a certain [low] area, reading, science, math, or

anything else, we would respond, “We teach that, just not that great.” Well, we had these administrators that would say, “Somebody must teach it at this level. You need to up your curriculum; you need to get your curriculum up here so our kids are doing better on Iowa Basic Skills.”

When Jane discussed the number of days she accepted substitute teaching jobs after her retirement, she also included the topic of standardized assessment: “Before, when [the school] had the grant, they [hired substitute teachers for] two and a half days, but they had to do more tests [then]. Now they’ve lost the grant, so they get one day of [pay to do] testing; one day. They’ve gone to Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills; this is the first year they’ve done that.” The Eagle View District was required by the government to complete all of the assessments because it had been identified as a Reading First school. District administration allocated two and a half days of substitute pay in order for the teachers to complete the required assessments. At the time the first interview was conducted, Jane did not know if the school had continued to be categorized as a school in need of assistance; she did, however, report that the district no longer received Reading First grant funding. This lack of funding was the impetus for the district to cut back on the types of assessments administered to the elementary students.

Jane discussed the publication of standardized test results in the local newspapers:

[Local papers began publishing some districts’ test results,] I would say probably in the later 1990s, and a lot of administrators really balked at that. [They were asked,] “Well, why won’t you print yours if this [district] prints theirs?” And then finally the administration just said, “Forget it; you’re holding us too accountable. It’s one test.” Then they really started to emphasize that some [students] do not test well. It’s one test. It has some reliability. [The emphasis became,] “Did your child show growth? Okay, your child’s down here but she showed a year’s growth. You have to look at that growth.” We had meetings where we tried to educate the parents on how to interpret the scores because then we started to have to give them all this information on how their child did and the parents [initially]

had no idea what it meant. We had to start plotting the scores and sending home the information; that's when it became a really, really big push.

I asked Jane if the parents (once they understood the standardized scores), the school administrators, the AEA, or the State was the source of the emphasis on test scores and pressure for accountability. She responded:

I would say a combination of all. As the parents realized "My kid's getting this grade but look at where they are in their basic skills," we had to kind of go back as I said and really try to emphasize, did your child show growth or did they fall back? They're making steady growth so be pleased with that. Even though they may not be quite at grade level, they made this much growth. Actually some of the teachers and I tried for a while to plot [test scores] each year in a different color so you could see their growth, and even though they were behind, [we'd say,] "Okay, we don't teach this [at this level]; our kids are not quite ready.

I think that helped the parents for a while, although there were always those that want their kids pushed on further. [They'd say] "Okay, my kid's at the 99<sup>th</sup> percentile; how are they going to grow any more?" I think that's when they tried to get the gifted [program] back in and tried to make the schools accountable which was probably in the late 1990s, early 21<sup>st</sup> century. Those last few years, they seemed to actually be pulling the [advanced] kids out and actually doing something with them; they had to be accountable to these kids, too.

The timeframe that Jane mentions here would coincide with the No Child Left Behind Act (2002). Jane also mentioned accountability when discussing changes that took place when Mr. Teague was elementary principal:

That's when people wanted us to be more accountable. Mr. Teague was big on the teachers keeping diaries. More regulations kept coming down; we had to document, more documentation to prove what you were doing. It probably started before he came, but it really took off during his tenure. Mr. Teague had a lot of things that he had to be accountable for, so he did start a lot of [changes], and the AEA had to take more of an active role. The [AEA reading consultants] had to go to a lot of meetings and keep up on Reading First. That's when we had to do a lot of testing and keep a lot of records to [document] if the students were actually improving or not.

Jane discussed how the standardized test results were used and the impact of the scores on the students and the curriculum:

In the 1990s, maybe the late 1980s, it was there for quite a while, they really started [closely examining results from standardized assessments] and we actually got a printout of who missed which questions. And then they changed the Iowa Basic Skills Test; that really threw the kids for a loop for a while. And so then we had to kind of change [the curriculum]; a lot of these changes came because of Iowa Basic Skills and where you ranked. Then of course, you had to tie it to your goals. [That was when] goals started being emphasized and [we were asked,] “What areas are your students weak in and what are you going to do to raise their scores?” You were made accountable to see that they [were improving.]. I would say in the 1990s, accountability got to be a very, very big push.

Jane noted that in the districts in which she provided services as a substitute teacher, assessment data was being used to make educational decisions.

It is good that they are doing testing and using the results of that testing. They are using Iowa Tests but also other specific reading tests, and you can see what the child is doing. In the past, there wasn't a lot of time to examine the results, and there probably still isn't a lot of time, but you have to do some analysis because you have to write a report [about the results.] That's good; it gives you a good feeling for the kids' [achievement]. It happens early in the year so you can see the progress that is made throughout the year and if they are meeting all of their goals.

Curricular changes resulted from updates in the composition of the standardized tests, and Jane saw benefits from using the test scores to monitor students' progress.

### Special Education and Inclusion

Jane shared stories about special education over her years in the Eagle View District. She elaborated on the changes to the special education program:

When I started, like I said, recess and lunch are the only times we shared. Gradually, as it came to the least restrictive [environment], they began to join as appropriate according to their abilities; not necessarily age appropriate, but for their abilities, they started to get them into music, art, and PE. Then there was the big push to get rid of the [segregated] classrooms and that's when resource rooms came to try to help. We started by pulling the kids out of class and working with them at their grade level. Otherwise, they were in the classroom and that was probably one of the harder things because I don't feel that we were prepared for these kids. For example, we had one student that could only communicate with sign language. We were supposed to learn sign language and be able to sign,

which is a lot with everything else. I know personally most of the teachers kind of resented that. We tried to balk at that a little bit, that too much was being placed upon us.

And then resource teachers would come in and they would work. There was a little bit of pull-out but much, much less than there had been.

I would say it would have been after 1975, in the late 1970s or 1980s, and of course it has continued, [all the districts] started pulling their kids out [of the County special education program at our school] because they had to be able to take care of them in their own district. We went through a time shortly after that when they decided to move first grade over into the trailers because I had to change classrooms. Those were the most profound; students they felt could not be educated in a regular classroom, could not fit in. [This happened] because [this group of] kids was getting the stigma of the “trailer kids” and so they decided if they moved part of regular ed over there in the trailers and moved the special ed into the school building, that would help get rid of that stigma. Well, that lasted one year and we moved back again.

Among the changes that occurred were what the special education program was actually called:

We kept changing the titles and the names from special education to individual ed to students with personal IEPs and all this and that. [The reason for] the different titles was because of parents; when we wanted kids in speech or if we wanted to send them to a resource room, it was all filled out on the same form and it said *Special Education* right at the top. Parents balked at that. It was very hard to get kids moved to where you needed them, especially those kids that needed a resource room, because parents did not want their kids in special education. They didn't want that title, so that's when things changed. Now it's pretty much accepted.

I will never forget one child that I put into special ed and her mother did not want it. Another teacher told them that it shouldn't happen, which was kind of bad. That was when they had the trailers. The mother told me once, “Mary could never figure out, she thought you didn't like her and didn't want her in your classroom.” And that always haunted me, and it was very hard for me to place kids because that's always been in the back of my mind. Mary did learn how to do things and she definitely was needed to be put in there.

Jane had mixed feelings about the school's policy of inclusion and how it was implemented. She also described more changes in terminology and some of the questions related to the school's implementation of inclusion.

What they did, I think one of the problems, is they tried to move these kids into the regular classroom with very little help. Okay, so now they are taken out of their comfort zone with people and put in a classroom – age appropriate, not ability appropriate, but age appropriate – and most of them were 2-3 years behind in anything academically. Now I think that’s why we have so many associates, especially at the elementary. I know there was a time when the school board would say, “Hey, our enrollment’s going down, why do we have to keep increasing [the number of associates]? We have the most aides.” The board was really balking at having to hire all these aides or associates. And they were called aides until Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome (AIDS) came out and then they were called associates.

I think that now they’ve gotten to the point where they realize that if you’re going to have to do every child [in the classroom], there’s this wide variety from behavior to learning to all these other [issues], that these kids need some help. There was a while that I thought, “Well what’s the use? I have my Master’s degree in learning disabilities but now there are all these associates, and they feel an associate can teach this and do what I used to do as a teacher. That kind of makes my degree like nothing.”

Jane further explained the use of personnel in Eagle View’s special education program at that time:

We had one teacher and she directed [activities] according to [the student]. A lot of times, I was required as a classroom teacher to come up with things for these kids to do. To be real honest, the last few years there was a clash between the [special education teacher] in charge because I just felt like [activities and support provided for students receiving special education services] were not appropriate and I had to keep coming up with my own things more and more.

When I asked about Jane’s collaboration with the special education teacher, she replied, after some hesitation:

I wouldn’t say [we collaborated] a lot. It varied according to who it was. And I guess personally from experience, I felt that some things they had these aides doing were not benefitting, you couldn’t see [the students’] progress. I oftentimes would throw in some of my own things and have the associate work with [the student using those activities.] That was mostly the last few years that I taught.

Like the [two sisters, Sally and Susie]. I felt that much of their [work was not appropriate], because both girls were in [my classroom]. Sally basically should have been a fifth grader but was in a second grade room. She was fairly advanced [physically, not academically]. We really had to push hard to get Sally [moved]; actually that was the last year she was put in with this group and she

was put in an age-appropriate [grade]. But she was so far behind. Sally was a good reader, but math, she couldn't figure out up from down with the math. She knew how to add, she knew how to subtract, but she couldn't tell you the facts or any of that. And of course, money and those things were poor. [Time and those kinds of concepts] were very hard. And the other problem was, Sally was in with her sister, Susie; her sister was not a good reader and Sally was, there was always that. I think Sally had more common sense, better mental [abilities], a higher IQ, than her sister, who had a terrible time with reading but she could get the math and some of those other things but needed help. It got to the point where Sally really resented being pulled out with her sister. I think that set her back a lot, so I think it was better when they were separated.

She gave two other examples of challenging students she taught who received special education services that illustrated her beliefs about inclusion.

(Sighed.) The Smith girls, they were adopted. I don't know; they were very clingy and if you gave them any [attention], they just like cherished that. They would horde things because they had done without for so long and they had a lot of problems there. I met quite a lot with the supervisor that was trying to help their mom at home. They were very good at manipulating people and lying, to get what they wanted or whatever, and make their parents seem evil. So it was very hard to tell when they were lying and weren't lying and mom and dad were extremely strict with these girls. I don't know how helpful the parents were with their education. I think they got frustrated, but then they went from just [the two girls] to four children; they did adopt the children just like that. They did not appreciate what the school was doing with them and where the girls were going.

[For a few years,] they kept them out of school, started home schooling them, and those were lost years. The girls came back to school now and they are very far behind. I know even now that's hard for the kids, when I'm substituting, because I've been in the classroom a couple of different times for long-term.

There's another Smith family [not related to the first] now and this child is in second, third grade. He might come with his t-shirt backwards, his pants backwards, his shoes on the wrong feet. You have to, literally, he has to go into the resource room and have her look over to make sure his clothes are all on right. And this is a third grader trying to function. He doesn't know letters and numbers very well. And he's not learning cursive, barely learning manuscript. He cannot count comfortably beyond 15, [he can count to] maybe 20 once in a while. But both boys [in the family] are very, very far behind. In some ways it makes me think, "Are these kids better off?" Nobody plays with them, they aren't coordinated, they don't get out and see real world a lot. Are they better off in a classroom with these kids that basically have nothing to do with them and nothing in common and they stand out? Or were they better off when they were with people of equal learning ability and learning some of these survival skills?

Because that is some of the things they are missing now in school; where before at least with special education, they were taught a little bit how to cook, how to dress, how to work with money. They were with kids of their same ability and I'm wondering, that's something I've always kind of fought with in my own mind: which is better for these kids?

### Area Education Agency (AEAs)

Iowa's ten AEAs "function as an intermediate service unit and assist the Department of Education in providing services and support to school districts and to schools." (Iowa Department of Education, 2009b). Further defined,

AEAs are regional service agencies, which provide school improvement services for students, families, teachers, administrators and their communities. AEAs provide special education support services, media and technology services, a variety of instructional services, professional development, and leadership to help improve student achievement. The AEAs work as educational partners with public and accredited, private schools. Agency staff members, school staff, and families work together to help all children reach their potential. (Iowa Department of Education, 2009c).

Every year, an AEA school psychologist, social worker, and special education consultant were assigned to provide services related to special education to Eagle View and the other school districts in the region. Content area consultants and other professionals (e.g., speech pathologist, occupational therapist) also provided services to the district's students and staff. Jane's discussion of Reading First, presented earlier, included mention of the increased involvement of the AEA reading consultant at Eagle View.

The AEA also began to assist with curriculum adoption in addition to the consultation with special education and content area professional development at Eagle View.



It used to be that you could write or call a book company and tell them that you were going to examine texts for a change in your district and they would send you all sorts of samples. Well then they started saying, we send them to your AEA, or that you could use [the sample materials] but you had to send them back. That was tough, because I always had some favorites in series that we weren't currently using, so you would keep a few copies to use. And heaven forbid if you finished your reading activities and wanted to use something from another level in the series! That was their territory and you shouldn't use it. But that went by the wayside when we...a lot of those were given to students when we didn't have room and didn't want to transfer all that stuff.

Jane described one additional change with which the AEA assisted Eagle View, curriculum mapping. Her description of the mapping process came about when I asked how it was determined what the students needed to know:

When I first came, there was a reading package so I don't know how that was decided. Eventually as we wrote curriculum, first of all we just taught what we thought and what was in the book. Well, then they did away with that, and [we discussed] what do we think these kids are capable of and what should they learn; so it was somewhat [based on] our input. The administration here, for the most part, didn't get into curriculum a lot but they didn't want the same thing taught year after year.

Then we started the mapping, where we had to map where [a skill] is going to be introduced, this is where it's going to be reviewed, and this is where it needs to be mastered. And we went through that with all [subject areas] and the administration had the printout [of the curriculum map]. The AEA really started putting a lot more into curriculum mapping, or were considered to be the people in the know as to what should be [taught].

During most of my teaching, once the PE, music, art were scheduled, I was allowed to fit in my [curriculum] as I wanted to and teach them as I wanted to, but I needed a justification if I [taught a specific concept at a specific time]. I really was not asked why are you teaching this and why at this time, but sometimes they would ask. It became more and more that [curriculum] was dictated as we started to do the mapping; it made sense that everybody isn't teaching the same thing. You knew [students] were supposed to be mastering with the mapping.

### Interventions

Jane reported that as early as the 1980, documentation of interventions teachers implemented to help a child who had "a particular problem" was required prior to getting

the AEA involved and obtaining the parental permission required to “test the child” to determine eligibility for placement in a special education program. Jane discussed reading interventions that happened in the schools she substituted in after her retirement:

I feel like we are moving in the right direction at least in reading because right now, every teacher, during a half hour, does what they call an intervention with the children that are having difficulty; just working on skills in a small group. We have the Reading Recovery program, remedial reading, and the resource room. We are doing a lot so these kids are getting a lot of extra help now that they didn't get in the past. You know, we've always had these kids that didn't quite fit and we didn't have a program for them. Hopefully, with all these things in place, they will be helped. Some of the kids are in more than one of these programs, but it takes an awful lot of work.

Jane suggested that the effort put into the reading interventions being conducted should be expanded to include math as well:

Reading and math are the big [areas] for kids to succeed. Yes, science is important, but if you can read and you can do math. I think we have taken reading [instruction and intervention] quite a [long] way. Even though some teachers would hate to hear me say this, I think we need to do the same thing in math. I know there are some interventions there, and they do have goals that have to be met and rewards are given, but I don't know if we test and analyze enough in that area yet to break it down. I think that is what is going to have to happen if we are going to get math [scores increased].

Given the amount of work Jane described that was involved with the reading program and intervention, and that some teachers would not want her to suggest doing something similar for math, I asked if it would be possible to sustain the level of intervention in both areas. She replied:

Yes, I think it is possible, but it would take a lot of work. But this has taken years [in reading]. It didn't happen in one year. Every year there is something new added to the reading that I can see. In math, I think you would have to break it down into what skills are needed and some tests would have to be developed to be able to do this. But if you are going to educate. Another thing that makes it work is that there is almost an aide for every classroom, especially in the lower grades. A full-time aide. Primarily what is happening is that the teacher is taking these

few kids for interventions, and every classroom teacher is doing something, then the associate or aide is doing something with the rest of the class.

### Technology

As the years of Jane's career went by, the technology that was available in the school and at home was constantly changing. In comparison to Charli and Julia, Jane did not discuss technology as much.

When computers first came, I took classes; that was after my [Master's] degree, and I really was up on them. I just didn't keep up on the changes. In the lower elementary, I was comfortable with the programs I was teaching. We had [some] new computers and old computers; I just stuck with the old ones and I felt like I really fell behind. Then the school and the AEA started offering computer classes and I took some of those. Then with the Reading [First,] it just consumed your whole life, practically, trying to get all that done.

I think part of the reason teaching has changed is because the world has changed. Education has got to change with the technology. I think we are trying to incorporate that with the child so that they can see, "Oh yeah, I could use technology for this. It's not just playing games; there are some other uses for it." We've tried to get the games out of there so it is more for learning and is more lifelike.

With technology, you tried to keep up, but it became an almost impossible task. We each had our own website and you tried to keep each week's [spelling] words on there. You were also supposed to try to keep your curriculum and notes about what was coming up in the class, etc., on there; but I found keeping the website up to date was an impossible task. I fell way behind. It took time to change that, putting all the assignments on the website.

As computers developed, I probably didn't know all the shortcuts, either, although my kids participated in a chat room with another group of kids. We did find other things [on the internet] that related to what we were studying, but it was hard to get all the kids around to see one small screen. I tried to see that they didn't fall behind in the use of technology. I ordered some disks, etc., and we did use them for some writing programs. We also did some keyboarding. They wanted to play games, but the school didn't approve of that. Some of the math was game-oriented, but we expected them to play [non-educational] games at home.

The last time Jane mentioned technology was in the final interview. Consistent with her earlier interview references on this subject, she briefly stated she had begun “using the technology as a tool in the writing process.”

### Level of Engagement

Jane described a change in her level of engagement in faculty activities and professional development. She provided an example that related to technological innovations, and gave reasons for the decrease:

And there was a time in there when I was very active in teaching, and I think as the years went on, other people just kind of took over; I'd had enough and wanted to get out of being so active. When computers first came, I took classes; that was after my degree, and I really was up on them, but I just didn't keep up on the changes. In the lower elementary, I was comfortable with the programs I was teaching. We got new computers and had the old computers and I just stuck with the old ones. I felt like I really fell behind and then the school and the AEA started offering computer classes and I took some of those. Then with [Reading First], that just took over your whole life, consumed your whole life practically, trying to get all that done.

Jane described different stages in her career, which fit with different stages in the literature about teacher career cycle.

### Implementation of Change

Jane related the circumstances that frequently occurred when changes were introduced, including the rationale for, the process of, and reasons behind discontinuing programs and practices. Reasons behind the decision to make changes varied. As mentioned in the discussion of standardized assessment, the results of students' performance on the Iowa Tests of Basic Skills (ITBS) and the changes to ITBS resulted in changes in the curriculum at Eagle View. A rationale for change was not always

provided; Jane said that sometimes, “We were told they were adopted. The administration made those decisions.”

[How changes were introduced] would vary. Some of the programs, [administration said,] “You will do it.” For academics, every so many years, the book would change or the philosophy would change. And often administrators would say, “This is the year we are going to change the math series.” That used to be our and the administration’s decision. Later, the AEA became more involved because they had all the books. It got to a time when they became the experts in the curriculum areas. They knew what was going on in the curriculum areas and how teachers were reacting to it in other [schools]. The [AEA consultants] told us what to look for and how to go about the process; they offered a lot more help [at the end of my career] than when I started.

Or a teacher would hear about a program and describe its advantages. A teacher could initiate interest in a program.

There were many reasons Jane gave for discontinuing a policy or program that was once hailed as a needed change. She used the skills training program she mentioned earlier as an example:

They thought it would be good for us to go through this training. Eventually, we ran out of money to get the prizes that were needed. Or the administration changed or didn’t care. Teachers didn’t think it was that valuable to take up their time. They wanted something different. It was probably a combination of different reasons, but teachers didn’t see its value and quit using it.

Something else would come along, and they would say, “This is better, we don’t need that anymore.” Administrators would hear about other programs, hear about their successes, so the administration would try to get [teachers] fired up for it, get some inservice [on the new program].

Jane recalled one instance of teacher initiated change: “One of the teachers had gone to this workshop and really got into writing, writing, writing. She sold it to the administration and the administration sold it to the rest of the teachers.”

Jane related that over the years she taught, some changes were drastic: “I found with education that they tend to swing the pendulum too much; they just have never

heard of the middle of the road. I think we're finally getting closer to the middle, more realistic." The reason that Jane thought changes were implemented over the years was:

There was pressure on the government and parents, and [education] just wasn't working. I think parents probably became more active [when they said], "My kid's not learning." The other thing is that there were a lot of parents that had bad experiences in school and they didn't want their children to go through that again.

The government just thought that teachers ought to be able to educate everybody. But what they didn't take into account is that there was never a time when every child learned what they needed to. They either quit school, when we had the old one room [schools], or they were put into special ed or a reading program or something else. [They were either] pushed or just simply passed on, "There's nothing I can do, this kid has a poor attitude, move him on."

While many of the changes experienced may have been unwelcome, Jane related a story of a teacher during the era her son was in elementary school, and the impact of this experience on her:

They moved this one teacher out of her little niche that she had been in for about fifteen or twenty years, moved her into another situation. She hated it, resented it, and basically took it out on the kids. She thought, "I'm mad, I'm disappointed, you've got to pay."

There were times when I didn't want to move, didn't want to change, wanted to stay put, but I thought, "I'll be darned if I will make those kids pay for it. They're going to get my best." I guess when I looked back over the years and I changed so many times, I thought, "You know, this is probably helping me. I can see what's happening here, and what happened there, and I can see other peoples' depth, something that most teachers don't ever get a chance to do. Few teachers get to, or have to, teach that many different levels. Now I feel like that was an advantage for me. When I went back to lower elementary from upper elementary, I could see some things I needed to do, some things I needed to change.

### Barriers to Change

During Jane's final interview, I asked about barriers to change. She stated that some teachers were more resistant to change than others, how the new program or policy was presented, and level of involvement in the professional development related to the innovation.

Some [teachers] weren't going to change, no matter what. I thought, "Oh, those poor kids. How bad for them." Overall we had a good group of teachers, and they were willing to accept change pretty readily.

It depended on how much changing we had to do and how much extra work was involved. Sometimes you were thinking, "We do need a change; this is not working," and then you were ready for the change. There were other times when you thought, "I don't really buy into it." It depended on how it was presented; was it something that was sold to us in a positive way or was it rammed down your throat – "You're going to do it and by gosh, like it!" [It also depended on ] how much input we had into it, or how involved we were in helping to make the changes, [as well as] how much of a need you saw for it, and how drastic the change was going to be.

One drastic change that Jane discussed at length was the Reading First initiative.

She drew a comparison between it and whole language:

There was resistance, but it was more the work that we resisted than the actual implementation; all those extra forms to fill out, not the idea. I know that when the whole language came in, I just couldn't buy into that; it was not fully developed, not well presented. And the way it was presented, kind of crammed down your throat, "We are going to do this" rather than, "We think there needs to be a change. We are going to look at this, see what's out there, and [determine] if we are doing things right."

#### Impact of Change

Jane discussed the impact of change on her students, her teaching, and her colleagues:

I think about a speaker we had [at a professional development session] who said that everybody hates change, and I say, "Yes, but change is inevitable." From the very beginning, I was always picking up [ideas and strategies] from other people, thinking, "Gee, that's good. I like this and the way they do that, and their presentation of this." I tried to fit [those] into my classroom. I got the idea that education is going to change after so much time. We were talking about change being forced on us and having to adapt, but I think teachers are a little bit like kids. They want to know what's new. What's different.

In some instances, Jane sought change rather than fought it, and mentioned the changes that she thought were most important:

Yes. I think it helped to build me as a person to accept some changes. As a teacher, I think I got better because of changes. The big, big changes were in reading, math, and science. It was just exciting. It went from, "Oh no, not another one of these!" to "Oh, I'm going to like this idea. I can hang my hook on this one." At first I resented having to change grade levels a lot, but then I realized that it might make me a better teacher.

### Retirement

Jane spoke of her decision to retire after 34 years of teaching in the Eagle View district, "The final edge that pushed me into retiring was all that bookwork. You had to fill out three forms every time you did one of those things." This quote referred to the Reading First program, as reported earlier.

Since retirement, in addition to visiting her children and grandchildren and traveling with her husband, who also had retired, Jane had remained active with substitute teaching in two nearby districts. She reported that she had been called and had accepted substitute teaching positions for all but four school days one month. Jane elaborated on the number of days she was scheduled to substitute during that month, "But that was extreme. A teacher had surgery and they had their testing, so that was extreme. I'm averaging probably two days a week."

### Recommendations

Near the end of the final interview, I asked Jane about advice she might have about change for (a) someone just entering the teaching profession, (b) administrators, and (c) professors in teacher education programs. Jane suggested that teachers and administrators need to keep abreast of new technology and other ideas in education. In addition, her advice for those entering education included:



I think that until you really get in there and have your own class, you really don't know. They have to be prepared for and know there is going to be change [in education]. It is going to change because of the world around it. The technology and other things [will change]. When you are looking at a new program, you have to think, this is the group of students I have to teach, is this going to be good [for them] or not?

Teachers need to go in and look at the mapping to find out what is it that they are expecting these first graders to know. If I'm teaching first grade, I need to look at what they will be expected to know.

Go to your colleagues. I think most teachers are willing to share. They might not give you the exact material you need, but I see a lot of my materials floating around. Teachers who taught with me then moved on took it with them. I know we have mentor teachers, but especially at the elementary level, is that mentor teaching the same grade level or two or three levels ahead of or below your level? I think you also need to mentor with your partner, with whom you are teaching. And don't just necessarily accept everything they say, but ask, "Is this going to work in *my* classroom?"

Jane's recommendations for administrators included facilitating mentoring relationships and identifying teachers' strengths and areas to improve: "As an administrator, try to get into that room when that teacher is in there, and say to that teacher, "Maybe you ought to talk to such and such a teacher because she is good in that area, has a lot of experience in this area."

Finally, for professors in teacher preparation programs, Jane recommended:

That might be to take your students to [the Area Education Agency] to see these [curriculum] guides, look at what is expected. And then look at the reading or math series and find some things that are good and some things that are bad about them, how they would help or not help meet the guidelines. Look at how these teachers have mapped out what is expected at this grade level. This is what this district expects; does this book help meet this expectation?

I haven't been in college for a long time, so I don't know what is going on there, but we talked about differentiation. Here's a child; here's a lesson. How are you going to change that lesson to meet the child's needs? How are you going to "dummy it down"? How are you going to make that meet [the needs of] a gifted child? Because you are going to have that gamut in your classroom. So how do you do that? There was some of that when I was doing my Master's; maybe that's something that is really [covered well] now, but that one new teacher I subbed for just really did not know how to change the lesson to meet the child's needs.

[Make sure they know] where to get materials; I know [college programs] try to work on some of that.

It just takes some time. I guess I feel sorry for the poor kids who had me for the first couple of years! (Laughed.) I think they got robbed.

Specifically related to student teaching, Jane recommended a longer period of time for student teachers to get a better idea of what their future teaching experiences might be like.

I think the problem is they are getting students to try different levels, so students who are going to be [an elementary] teacher want [placements in] a lower and an upper grade. They put [a student teacher] in the lower end and in the upper and skipped over the middle, unless they specifically asked for [a middle elementary grade]. I think they tried to vary it when the [students were in schools for] their six weeks, or four weeks, or their observations so that they would know where they wanted to go.

I saw a lot of students trying to make themselves more marketable by trying to get into a regular classroom and then into a special education setting like a resource room, remedial reading or a Reading Recovery room or something like that; then they have [experienced] more than one area. I think it is a good idea, but I don't think they get a good grasp on either one. I think they cut themselves a little bit short. But they do get experience, they see both ends, which may help them down the road.

### Summary

Jane made some general comments about the value of the changes in programs, curriculum, etc., that had occurred during her tenure at Eagle View:

I think each change had some value to it. I don't know that I thought that any one program or change was a complete value or a thing I could do without. They all had some excess baggage, I think. That was another thing you had to be able to do, to decide what's good about this, what do I keep when they throw the program out. You had to learn to evaluate. I don't know that any one program achieved everything that it wanted to achieve. There was probably some value to most of the things. I can't think of one that we thought was a complete waste of time.

Other changes that Jane discussed during the three interviews were external to the school.

These included changes in legislation, primarily special education law and NCLB;

parents and families, services provided to school by the Area Education Agency. All of the changes Jane related, whether specifically occurring within the school or external to it or implemented locally or across the United States, had an impact on individuals – Jane, her students, the teachers, and administrators – as well as on the school district as a whole.

## CHAPTER 8

JULIA: “YOU CAN MANDATE CURRICULUM, BUT  
YOU CANNOT MANDATE LOVE AND CARING”

The fourth participant, Julia, had been seated across from me at my dining room table when the participants met. (See Figure 1.) She was of medium height and slight in build; she wore her blonde and gray hair short. Julia’s animated eyes sparkled, and her face was very expressive; she always appeared to me to be bursting with energy.

Julia’s Context

Julia related that she wanted to become a teacher since she “was a little girl”:

It was probably because my mom was a teacher. It’s funny because I saw this fellow from high school at one of my earliest reunions and he said to me, “You know, you are the only person that is actually doing what she said she was going to do.” I don’t know if that was good or bad, but I was always struck that he made that comment. I must have been saying back in high school that I was going to be a teacher and I went to [the university] with that in mind and that’s what I did.

[Mom began teaching when she was] an 18 year old. It was when you only had to have a high school education, and I don’t know if you had to pass a test or what. She taught at a country school, where the teacher had to start the stove and draw the water and all that sort of stuff.

It was apparent during the first interview that Julia’s mother was a role model for her and a primary reason she chose to become a teacher:

My mom really influenced kids. When she died, we had a visitation and a memorial service. At the visitation, there was this young man. He stayed there, he waited and waited, and finally he got a chance to [introduce himself] and he didn’t have to say more. I knew who he was. My mom had him in school; I could remember my mom talking about him and working with him. He was kind of a slow learner; there wasn’t anything wrong with him. He just didn’t do it like everybody else did; he did it his own [way]. I don’t know if they were called educable [back then]; he was a kid that just needed to have patience and my mom had it. He said, “I had your mom as a teacher. I graduated from high school and I went to college and graduated. I work at an insurance company [and am successful].” I think the reason that he [talked for a long time] with me and every

one of my siblings was because my mom made him feel like he was okay. And I said to him, “If I can have one kid feel this way when I get done with my teaching career, I will have made it.”

His mom would cry every time she saw my mom; she was so thankful because [my mom] had the patience to help [her son]. He couldn’t come to the funeral but his mom and dad came; I’ll never forget when she went through the line, she just wept. She just wept. If it hadn’t been for [my mom], her boy wouldn’t be where he was today.

Julia began teaching in 1974, after earning a Bachelor’s Degree from a four-year university, the only institution she ever considered attending. She chose the university for three reasons: (a) it was well-known for its teacher preparation program, (b) it was the university her brother had attended, and (c) it was “a nice distance from home, not too close, not too far away.” Julia spoke of her preparation to become a teacher:

I probably had a fairly good education for a teacher, but I don’t think they taught me nearly what I needed to know to be a teacher. Part of that is just that you have to go do it. They covered content, because you had to know the content. They tried to cover methods, how to [teach], but the thing that they really didn’t do was tell you about kids and behavior and differences. That was probably *the* hardest thing in teaching, to have everybody working on something worthwhile at the same time because you had the hares and the tortoises, and the tortoise could be just as bright as the hares. Everybody had different speeds and different ways. I don’t think we addressed differences of kids and learning styles that much when I was in school, so that was one thing that was *really* hard. And to know how to deal with problem behavior, I don’t think I remember *anything* about how to deal with problem behavior. You learn it from watching other people, talking to other people, experience, and boy if you don’t have it, they can get away from you pretty darn fast.

I don’t think there was the emphasis on individualizing instruction or meeting individual needs as much then as there is now. And that’s good thing [for teachers to know about]. I think that probably a lot of things that are going on in education now are *really good*, and kids hopefully will be better equipped coming into teaching now than we were when I came into it. I probably learned the most from doing it and watching other teachers, and asking questions and trial and error. So hopefully kids today are getting a better education. It’s probably harder now, but I think if it helps people going into the job to be able to do it better, that’s good.

Despite Julia's recollection that her program of study was beneficial, she identified gaps in her knowledge that she indicated might only be learned through experience. Of her student teaching experience, Julia said,

I had a lady that really didn't let me do very much and then didn't give me much guidance [about] what I did do, so I don't think I got very much out of student teaching. It was this lady's last year; she was a nice lady, but she was used to being in control. You get a lot more out of your first teaching years than you ever get out of your education; experience is the best teacher.

Julia's first teaching assignment was in a small town in western part of the state.

She described her first few years of teaching:

At first, I didn't really know what I was supposed to be doing and I can remember [thinking], "Okay, in the morning I teach reading, in the afternoon I teach math, and then what else am I supposed to teach?" Definitely, I really didn't know when I first started. [I was] soooo overwhelmed; I wanted to [teach], I just didn't know what to do.

Actually, my first few years teaching second grade were a nightmare because I got into a classroom where there were very, very few materials and I was afraid to say to anybody, "I don't know what to do." I didn't feel comfortable [asking]. I can remember going [to school] at 6 or 6:30 in the morning and *long* before the kids were supposed to get there. I knew that I needed to do something, I just really didn't know what to do but there wasn't much there. I don't know if that teacher that was there before me took [everything] with her, or if she knew more about what to do with them that I didn't know yet, but, oh, (exhaled) it was just awful. [Or maybe] she was resourceful, and that's a lot of it. Experience really is the best teacher because you learn so much just by teaching about how to handle things and ways to keep kids busy, et cetera. At first, it was really, really hard.

I remember thinking if there was anything I could do to *not* be doing this [teaching] and be able to earn a living, I would do it. But I didn't have any other options so I just had to stick with it. It was hard, particularly some years with some classes. Fairly early on, I had a class with 27 kids, which 27 kids *now*, I mean, there used to be bigger classes than that, but that was one of the biggest classes I had. [That large class included] a range: this kid who should have been in special ed but his parents would not go for that at all, to the other extreme, an extremely bright kid who was probably talented and gifted – I don't know what we called it back then, we just knew he was a smart kid – and then [students] everywhere in between [the student who needed special education services and the student who was extremely bright].

Once I was sick and I got back and my principal was a neighbor of the gal who subbed and she really badmouthed me because I didn't have enough work for them. I thought, *hey*, I don't have enough stuff for them when *I'm* there. As a fresh, green teacher, I didn't have very many tools in my tool box to pull out to know what to do with them, but luckily you do figure that out.

Part of my trouble back then, probably the two main things were classroom management – discipline-wise – and valuable [activities] for them to do, and I didn't know enough about either one of them. Years later, and probably at the time, too, I thought, “Am I doing these kids any good?”

After teaching there for five years, Julia determined it was time to move:

I decided I didn't want to live there forever, and if I didn't move then, I would never move, because I would get my years of experience up too far and then I wouldn't be as marketable. And I always liked northeast Iowa... The time was right, although I liked [the town]. I had good friends there, and I have a lot of respect for the school district, but it just wasn't where I wanted to live my whole life. The area wasn't as pretty as [the scenery is] around here. I just knew it was time to go, as hard as it was [to leave].

Julia's new position was as a remedial reading teacher in Prairie Crossing School District, where she taught for the remainder of her career. She began teaching in two schools located in small towns near Prairie Crossing. These were later closed; at that time, Julia was transferred to the elementary school in Rudolph, where she taught first grade for 12 years. After the school in Rudolph was closed, she began teaching first grade and Reading Recovery at Chens Elementary in Prairie Crossing. Eventually, Julia was required to teach first grade full-time until she retired.

### Administrators

The ten administrators that served as Julia's supervisors throughout her career were very different from one another. Julia was critical of the performance of many of the principals who supervised her over the years, and she provided examples that supported her critiques. She spoke at length about some administrators, and had little to say about

others. Mr. Daniels was one Julia mentioned using just a few words; he was the principal who hired for her first teaching position, and remained her administrator for the five years she taught there.

Julia also discussed another administrator on a more surface level, Mr. Sauer. She described him as a principal who was often difficult to find. In the Prairie Crossing District, he was assigned to oversee the building in Rudolph.

He wasn't very effective; he was a "good old boy." I didn't dislike him as a person but I didn't have any respect for him at all for administrator. He was really, really wishy-washy, never wanted to commit to anything or make a decision of any kind of magnitude. One of his favorite sayings was that it wasn't written in stone, it was written in wet cement or something like that, because he never wanted to say, "It is this way." He wasn't here very long, just a few years. I think he was [also director of special education] in addition to being principal at Rudolph.

Mr. Field and Mr. Underwood were two of the nine principals during her tenure at Prairie Crossing who Julia described as having negative interactions with teachers.

Mr. Field, was a very, very big man. I'll never forget once I asked if I could go to a conference and he said, "You reading people, you..." and I just looked at him and said, "Listen, I didn't ask to go, I was asked *TO* go." I stood right up to him and then after that he never gave me a hard time again. But there were some people he really rode and some of them were older experienced teachers. I don't know why he did it, but it was kind of like if he thought he could, he would. But if you stood up to him, or at least in my case I stood up to him and I never had another problem with him. But he really, he really picked on certain teachers and made their lives miserable, really made their lives miserable.

After Mr. Field, there was another principal who "was just not very effective anymore, he was just biding his time until he retired. We were really optimistic about a new principal but Mr. Underwood turned out to be a real disappointment. Beyond that, he was very poor for our school system." While her comments about Mr. Field and the



principal after him were limited, she spoke at great length about Underwood's year in the district

That was a really bad time for our school as far as morale, because he really made people feel uncomfortable about what they were doing, inadequate. I would say he had little man syndrome and he made you feel like you weren't doing anything right. There were at least a couple of people who retired that year who maybe wouldn't have because he made them feel like their methods were outdated. One of them is a wonderful person who I think was a wonderful teacher; Underwood really made her question herself. She probably had ways that were something she'd been doing for a long time but that didn't make them wrong. One thing was that she did timed math tests and he said to the kids one day, "Oh, those don't mean anything, that's not effective" or something like that right in front of kids and her, but he said it basically to the kids which just undermined what she did. He was disruptive and he would come in and he would get the little kids all wound up. He didn't really know how to interact with them appropriately, just got them stirred up. I think [that teacher] might have still been there if she would have had an administrator that hadn't made her feel badly about her teaching.

Underwood wanted [teachers] to change to doing guided reading but... instead of going around the back door and getting us on the wagon to support it, he tried to cram things down our throats and people really took offense and were upset. The climate that year was very, very tense. There were a few people that thought he was on the right wavelength but they were in the minority; he just didn't have good people skills. I'm amazed that he is still a principal.

Underwood was fairly young [when he was at Prairie Crossing]. He'd been in the military and he'd had a number of jobs. We heard things from the schools that he had been in about the same kind of [situations we experienced with him], and a teacher who had heard it wasn't a good situation with him [in the past] as principal had contacted a school board member and the [board member] didn't seem to listen. We eventually had a meeting with our superintendent at that time; we basically begged to have Underwood be fired, or not rehired. People were really, really desperate because he just had everybody so upset all the time.

[For example,] he would come in [to the school] and he would be whistling, but yet if he were walking in the hall he might not even speak to you. He'd come in and be all happy and I remember one time I said to somebody, "How can he be happy like that when he treats people the way he does?" I think it was even somebody who was a friend of mine who told another office staff person, [who in turn] told Underwood [what I said], so he called me in [to his office] on a Friday at the end of the day. He wanted to know what I said and I told him what I said and why I said it; because he said to a custodial staff person something like, "Teachers are here (gestured with her hand to indicate a high level, approximately shoulder height) and you're here (gestured with her hand to

indicate a low level, approximately hip height).” Then when he called me in, he denied saying it.

I said, I think that you did [say it]. He said, “Are you calling me a liar?” And I said, “I think that you said that.” He was trying to get me to call him a liar, and I said, “I want somebody else in here during this conversation.” So he went and got one of our secretaries, who was the kind of person who always wanted to be “in” with whoever was in power. Basically as [the conversation] went on, he said, “Well, we’re going to continue this conversation on Monday” or something like that. I remember crying the whole weekend; we had company from Iowa City. I just cried and I talked about it and I couldn’t sleep. I thought I was going to get written up; I didn’t know if I was going to get fired, just because I had said, “How can you act happy like that when you treat people like you do?” which I truly believed.

[He said] that kind of stuff all the time and we really felt like he listened, eavesdropped, over the intercom. You would kind of hear the intercom pop and you thought that it was on; we were afraid to even talk in our rooms in regular voices because we were afraid he was listening. It was just a horrible year.

There were a lot of people that said, “If he comes back next year, I think I’m going to quit.” I don’t know if people would have done that, because they were people that weren’t first year teachers. That was another thing; he made one first year teacher do way above and beyond what anybody else had to do, and she was afraid. She had to have all these meetings with him and she had to do special stuff that nobody else had to do. She would never stand up to him or tell him no because she was afraid of him and she was afraid it would reflect on her teaching. It was just awful. I remember later talking to [a school board member] about some of the stuff that Underwood said and did to that first year teacher and he said, “That is harassment.” I don’t think she was a part of the teaching association, but there were people that joined after that year or maybe people joined even during the year because they were so afraid of Underwood. He was a very threatening person and it was just awful. You know, teaching is a hard job no matter what, but if you don’t have your administration behind you, it just makes a hard job that much more difficult.

Julia also spoke of Mr. Tuhlman, who served the elementary school after Mr. Underwood. He was responsible for the Junior Kindergarten (JK) program and Kindergarten through 4<sup>th</sup> grade. The 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> grades were considered part of the middle school that was attached to the north end of Chens Elementary, and were the responsibility of the middle school principal. Julia’s assessment of Mr. Tuhlman was mixed.

[Mr. Tuhlman] was warm and cared. He wasn't a strong administrator as far as making decisions and stuff, but we really liked him as a person. Mr. Tuhlman was really supportive of me and of us and so I just had good feelings about him. (Chuckle in her voice as she said this.) I can remember even hugging him one day when he came and helped deal with [a difficult situation]; with Underwood, you would have been afraid to even say you were having a problem because he wouldn't have supported you and would have made you feel like you were inept. There are some situations where you just need some help.

[Mr. Tuhlman] resigned and left after three years [at the most]. It was really rough for him. I think Mr. Tuhlman was asked to do a very difficult job at Prairie Crossing. Most of us really liked him. Kindergarten teachers didn't like him but I think he was told to get the Kindergarten building (three sections of Kindergarten were housed less than a mile from Chens Elementary) shaped up because there was a lot of dissention there. They didn't want to do what they were supposed to do or asked to do; it was always kind of a hornets' nest. There were one or two people who were the cause of it, and everybody else had to go along with them or life was miserable. I think it was because he was told to get in there and clean house, as far as getting them to do what they were supposed to do and all that sort of thing. [One of his superiors] didn't like him and they broke his spirit. Mr. Tuhlman was told [by his superiors] to go in there and straighten them out; [the faculty and staff in the Kindergarten building] would talk about things that he said and did there, and it was like he was a totally different person than he was at Chens.

The people that were there were still bucking him because they didn't like anything that they were told to do; if they had to serve lunch in their rooms, they didn't want to do [it]. They were just very difficult. Now if you got one of them and you heard their side, I'm sure it would be very different; but they were just real stinkers. I know to this day you could ask some of the ones that were there about [Mr. Tuhlman] and they would say they didn't like him because he did this or that. I think he did what he was told to do; I don't think he could really change things and I think that might be one reason that he was getting grief from people above him, because he couldn't really make an impact. He wasn't a strong person or administrator, and maybe he's gotten better, *I hope*, because I think he is still an administrator somewhere. He went back where he was from [originally], and I think that they like him there.

The last two principals who supervised Julia at the end of her career were females. Mrs. George succeeded Mr. Tuhlman, and also was responsible for JK through 4<sup>th</sup> grade. This was during the time when Julia shared the 1<sup>st</sup> grade classroom and Reading Recovery with her colleague, Mrs. Lean. About that arrangement, Julia said,

“The classroom sharing situation with Mrs. Lean [and part-time with Reading Recovery] was a really, really good combination as a job for a teacher. Also, Mrs. Lean and I were very compatible, really compatible and I don’t know if I could have found anybody that I would have gotten along with as well as she and I got along.”

I asked Julia to tell me about Mrs. George as principal at Chens. She responded candidly, without hesitation.

It’s hard for me to talk about Mrs. George without being negative because the reason that [Mrs. Lean and I] had to change from our teaching situation of sharing that classroom together is because she made that happen. I didn’t think at the time that was necessary and I still to this day don’t think it was necessary; plus after she got it changed, she left the next year. She wasn’t even there to see it implemented.

The change was that one was to do reading and one was to do classroom. Mrs. George thought one reading person would have more flexibility to work with more kids; we said that we could do that in our current situation, that the person who was teaching reading during the half of the day [and the other during the second half] could serve whoever they needed to serve, if there needed to be more kids served. I truly believe it was a matter of power struggle, that she wanted [the two positions separate]. It was her decision and since she made the decision, she was not going to back down. But we got to the point where we felt like we had to fight for the program, Reading Recovery, rather than for our own situation because if we didn’t fight for the program they were going to discontinue it. We felt very strongly about Reading Recovery being a really good program.

Mrs. George was a very difficult person to work with because she was more of a dictator. We are hearing that where she is now, they’re not very crazy about her and it sounds like the reasons are the same.

Strong, clear reasoning behind the change in teaching assignments for Julia and Mrs. Lean apparently was not communicated, or if it was, Julia’s interpretation was that there was no benefit in making the change. The implementation of guided reading reinforced Julia’s perception of Mrs. George’s unilateral decision-making, as well as poor leadership in her use of district funds and failure to use available resources (Julia and

Mrs. Lean) to benefit the district. Julia did share one positive outcome that resulted from Mrs. George's dictatorial style:

I will say that she did get people to teach guided reading. She said everybody had to do it. Mrs. Lean and I started doing [guided reading] before anybody else did because we went to a class about it one summer and then we asked Mr. Tuhlman, who was not the curriculum director, if we could buy the materials to pilot it and he told us we could. We had already done it for a year or two at least before Mrs. George [started as principal at Chens]. When she came, she wanted everybody to do guided reading but instead of asking us how to do it or using us as a resource, she brought somebody in that cost the district a lot of money and she had that person try to implement it. We always wondered if it was that she felt people would say, "Ask Julia and Mrs. Lean, they've been doing guided reading, ask them," [and maybe she didn't want that to happen]. She never once asked for our input even though we'd been doing it. It was like she didn't want to hear it from us, she had to hear it from somebody else that she thought knew more or whatever.

I can remember we would go to all these meetings this gal [led] and I didn't have anything against her, but I don't think there was anything I heard from her that I didn't already know. Also, Mrs. George tried to use that same person, who was an elementary person, for middle school and high school and oh my, they just about ate [the guided reading consultant] up and spit her out; she didn't have the expertise to give them help at their levels. I don't really fault her for this because I think the district signed her up to work with us because she was an independent consultant, but because they paid her x amount of money she had to come up with [strategies] to do at [all] levels. She was not well-versed to deal with those other levels. The district [faculty and staff who attended the sessions] really lost a lot of respect for administration, that they would [hire] this person who really didn't have what we needed to improve our reading programs. She would [share] the same [information for elementary, middle, and] high school levels, but high school is different; it isn't the same [as implementing guided reading in elementary classrooms]. It was a bad deal.

Mrs. Green was assigned the upper elementary grades when she was hired, and

Mrs. George was responsible for the lower grades. Julia described the arrangement:

Junior Kindergarten through 2<sup>nd</sup> grade was [assigned] to Mrs. George and then Mrs. Green was going to have 3<sup>rd</sup> through 5<sup>th</sup> grades. They had it for a little while like that, and then Mrs. George left; she basically bailed during August, [they must have let her out of her contract] which tells you something, too, right there. Mrs. Green went back to being principal for Kindergarten through 4<sup>th</sup> again and 5<sup>th</sup> grade went back to the middle school [principal's responsibility]. The 5<sup>th</sup> grade

teachers (Julia laughed) definitely were elated when they knew that they didn't have to work under her anymore, and were just a lot happier with the administrators that they had [at the middle school].

Julia had not said much about Mrs. Green's leadership to this point, so I asked.

I don't think she is a good administrator. I don't know how to explain her; I don't think she really knows what she's doing. She is impulsive and plays favorites, and sometimes she is not very reasonable. I know staff is not happy. There were times [in my career] when a certain principal might even be the one that wants things done a certain way; that is where we are at in our elementary building right now. That is why people are unhappy there, as opposed to the middle school where people are happier because they don't have somebody making them jump through a lot of extra hoops. The principal at the middle school is a lot more supportive of people and caring and I just don't think we had that.

Unprompted, Julia shared that her negative opinions of the two female administrators were not related to gender. "It's not the fact that either of those two are women, because I know there are women principals who are *excellent*. I just don't think we've had anybody who was a woman that was excellent." Julia then mentioned two principals who served in neighboring schools who had reputations for being highly skilled, top-notch administrators. "We just have not had very good luck with getting strong administrators that are effective."

When I asked Julia why she believed this to be the case, she responded:

A superintendent in the past said that we were going to come to the point in the future where we have a real shortage of principals, and I think that's part of it. There are not a lot of great candidates out there, and it's hard to get them [to come to a district like Prairie Crossing]. There's probably a shortage of good people in that field because it is a hard job and not everybody can do it. It is likely a combination of the challenge of the job and the amount of pay that [principals] get. If somebody wanted to be a principal but yet could do [a job] in the private sector and make [significantly] more money and have far fewer headaches, people [are likely to choose the private sector jobs]. I am not saying that principals have it easy by *any* means. If they do a good job, it's a very challenging job. I think a lot of them probably don't do a great job.

Not all of the principals who supervised Julia lacked strong leadership skills or had a negative impact on the school climate. Mr. Doll had many positive attributes; Julia spoke very highly of him.

Mr. Doll would sit down on the floor next to the kids and talk to them, get down on their level. You felt like he really did like kids and knew who they were. If you said [a student's name], he knew who you were talking about, where some administrators would not have a clue because they didn't take the time to get to know the students like Mr. Doll did. Mr. Doll told me once that basically, you're not getting paid for all those good, clean, smart little kids; you're getting paid to teach this one that isn't clean and doesn't have it all figured out. I don't remember how exactly he worded it but it made a lot of sense at the time; that those other kids are going to learn in spite of you, but that other kid who needed the extra is why and how you made your money. Mr. Doll was really a compassionate person and actually he became a minister after he left being a principal. He was the reason I got that first grade job at Rudolph. As the administrator of the schools they were going to close, he asked me if I would be interested in teaching 1<sup>st</sup> grade there. Of course, the choice was no job or do this, so I agreed.

Mr. Doll wrote you notes and gave you positive strokes; he was one of the few administrators I can ever remember that did that. He would both tell you and he would write something and put it in your mailbox. I wouldn't be surprised if I don't have some of those somewhere because that meant a lot; you didn't hear it very often. Even if you screwed up, he didn't make you feel stupid. He was compassionate. I think once he was observing me teach something for teacher observation and it didn't go the way it was supposed to; he was very understanding and recognized that when you're nervous, sometimes you do things you wouldn't normally do. Luckily, he was in [classrooms] enough that you didn't get as nervous with him as you did with a lot of administrators; you really were pretty comfortable with him, even though you were a little nervous when it was a formal observation. A lot of administrators would only come in your room when it was time to observe you. The rest of the time you never saw them much except for in their offices.

When Mr. Doll left here, he went to [Nearby District]. I think he got in trouble for being rough with a student; he just finally lost it. I think he burned out; I don't know remember what happened exactly, but some kid did something that he just could not tolerate. He just finally lost it and that's kind of understandable.

Mr. Edge was another administrator that Julia viewed in a positive light, and she admitted that he had to preside over an especially difficult task, closing a small community's school.

He was better than some principals because he seemed to care about staff and I think he cared about kids, too, but he had a really tough job. He was the principal the year that Rudolph closed. We had an assembly at the gym, with parents, the teachers, and the kids. Somebody in the community made us all these shirts with one of these sayings, I think I might even have it up here (on a card on the refrigerator), something like this: "To teach is to touch lives forever." We all got this shirt that they made for us, and somebody had written a poem about the school, and it was very tearful. All of us were standing up there in front of all the parents that could come – because it was on a workday – and the kids and we were all just crying (laughed) because it was really hard. We didn't want to lose what we had at Rudolph, but they said it was just too expensive to keep that center open.

It's very hard for a town to lose their school, because when your school goes, your town kind of dies. For parents that had their kids, especially little kids, [at school] just two blocks away right there in town, to have a little kid get on a bus and have to go somewhere else instead of right there in town, especially if you worked in town, that was really hard for people. It's always really hard. That's why there are still hard feelings about [the other two schools] being closed. Because then they got to Prairie Crossing and they built [an addition] on and every time one of these bond issues would come up, they'd have a really hard time selling it because "you closed our school and now you're saying we need more room." I bet people would still get heated about that.

To summarize, Julia's stories illustrated that she believed good administrators cared about students, faculty, and staff; recognized and acknowledged employees' knowledge and efforts ; possessed and used good communication skills; and were available to support and assist teachers when needed.

#### Curriculum Directors and Other Colleagues

Like Charli, Julia also reported that when the State encouraged the districts to hire curriculum directors, Prairie Crossing also began with an unsuccessful person in that position.

We have not had good leadership over the years; if you had, then it was a lot easier to implement things because you didn't have so much to change. [A neighboring district has a good curriculum director] and I think that we kind of had to play catch up because we did not. We weren't on board with what we were supposed to be doing for a longer time because we didn't have anybody that was



doing what they were supposed to be doing. We have lagged behind in keeping up with stuff because we didn't have the leadership. And I'm not saying that teachers are perfect or anything like that, by any means, but I think that we have not had consistent, good leadership so that we were [always] trying to play catch up. Maybe it would be interesting for you to talk to somebody from another district and see what their perspective is, maybe they would say, "Gee, we really haven't had that. We have had a little change." Here, I think it is overwhelming, but maybe everybody doesn't feel that way.

Some of this is what is required; this is what we have to do. It's gotten a lot tighter, [curriculum]. But I think if [the district] had been doing what we were supposed to be doing all along, it wouldn't be such a shock as it's been. Kids in our district didn't really suffer in general, because I think teachers were doing a lot of things that they should have done, but not everybody, which is kind of par for the course. It has been a bigger gap to [close in order to] get up to speed.

As previously stated, Julia enjoyed her association with Mrs. Lean. She also described some of her other colleagues at Prairie Crossing.

We have a fairly strong [more recently hired female guidance counselor]. The person who has been there for a while, Mr. Guide, it's probably time for him to be rolling it out; I don't know how much longer he has [before he retires]. There have been times when I can remember [Mrs. Lean] and I talking about some kids for whom we just knew bad things were ahead. Maybe the guidance counselors are so busy putting out fires that they can't get in there before that fire has started, but it's too bad we can't be more proactive to help because sometimes it is pretty obvious that things are going to go badly for a kid.

#### Teachers' Role and Responsibilities

Julia discussed many roles and responsibilities of teachers during the interviews.

These included: (a) delivering the curriculum; (b) teaching the students additional information, including much of what was previously taught within the family; (c) helping students be caring and have good self esteem; (d) being a responsible role model; (e) having good relationships with parents and knowing the students' background/context; (f) providing students with emotional support when needed, and (g) knowing education

laws. Julia explained many of the facets of a teacher's job, beginning with being a role model.

There's a lot of responsibility to be a role model when you are a teacher, to set a good example by the way you live your life and the things you do. I'm sure there are other people that have a big influence on kids, but I think teachers are probably right up there with or more than any other profession as far as how they can make a kid love or the other extreme, too.

The teacher that had been [at Rudolph in first grade] before me was really mean and for seatwork, she would make the kids copy out of books. Just to keep them busy. Meaningless stuff. And to go to the bathroom, they had to put up one finger or two fingers to let her know how long they were going to be in there and stuff like that. When I came to Rudolph, I was young and this lady was an elderly woman, and this was my first class there, and when I came I had 10 kids [in the class]. Because I followed somebody like that, they were already just glad to have me but it kind of set me on a pedestal. And I remember the principal, saying, "It's the gospel according to Mrs. [Julia]." They would go home and repeat what you said, expressions [you used]. They just took you at your word so you had to be very careful; that really made you think about what you said.

Because teachers are role models, their words can have a powerful and long-lasting impact on the students in the classroom as well as the students' families. Julia tied this thought into her discussion of additional teacher roles, especially in working and communicating with the families of her students:

There are definitely [teachers] who have hurt kids for the rest of their lives and the students never get over it. Sometimes they see that with parents of the kids that we had in school. When I was teaching, some parents were reluctant to come to school. Well, they'd had a bad experience with a teacher and they never got over that, so it's important to have good relations with parents. We would try all kinds of things and some gains have been made, but it's hard because they probably had a bad experience and coming into a school is about the last thing they want to do because of what happened to them when they were in school. Hopefully, we are a lot better about dealing with kids that have either learning problems or family problems. Hopefully, we're compassionate and more able to handle them, but I'm sure that is kind of hit and miss, too. You know, you can mandate curriculum, but you can't mandate caring and loving and that sort of thing. I've always thought, "You don't get into teaching for the money" (laughed), so hopefully it's because you really do care and want to help and that sort of thing.

You can make a lot of money and you can do a lot of things, but you know all that stuff about “Thank a teacher?” We make ‘em and we can break ‘em, and that’s why I am so sad when I see somebody who doesn’t have the right heart for [teaching]. I really do think loving people and making kids feel good about themselves is more important than the content [knowledge].

Julia spoke at length about students’ families, how she learned about them, and to what extent she went to communicate with them. During this discussion, she described how busy teachers are with their daily teaching responsibilities:

A lot of times, [I would learn about family dynamics] from the teacher the year before, sometimes a home visit but that’s not [common]. Teachers are *so darn busy* (said very slowly), so busy, that they don’t always have time to do anything but what they have to do with lesson plans, teaching, correcting, et cetera. I don’t know if every teacher knows the kids’ families as well as they should and I think that’s really important; it tells you a lot about the kids. I hope that everybody who is a teacher is interested and cares enough to pursue [important information]. I think that in most cases they do care, because they wouldn’t be teaching if they didn’t really care.

There were times when you couldn’t get a parent to come in for conferences, they could never make it, so there were times when I just said, “I’m coming to your house.” I took Mr. Guide with me a few times and went a few times by myself; sometimes you have to do that.

Sometimes it was the academics, sometimes it was behavior. You always saw the parents of the kids that did well at school at conferences; the ones you didn’t see were the ones you really needed to see. You could write them off or you could keep pursuing them. Some of those people who I suppose weren’t probably considered very high on the social ladder, but I tell you, they never forgot you if you tried to work with them. And they always appreciated it and spoke to you. I think it really had an impact, that a teacher was caring and interested.

Sometimes that’s hard [pursuing contact with parents] because you get frustrated. You keep trying and trying to get them in and to talk to them and you can’t get any help [for the child] and it’s just too bad.

I usually persevered to have contact with them. If it meant having conference in [the department store] aisle, I did it, even though some people would say, “That was not very professional, not the right situation.” When you had them there, by golly, I would be telling a parent, [your child] needs to be reading every single night, he or she is behind and is not going to get ahead by reading once in a while. (Laughed) Sometimes they probably didn’t want to see me coming, but you just had to take your opportunities wherever they were and usually, unless they moved away, we would keep trying to work with them.

Providing emotional support for students was also part of a teacher's job description, according to Julia.

Hopefully you have a good guidance counselor; you could get a student hooked up with that [service]. But just to be a good listener for that child and let him know...it's really kind of hard with little kids because they don't really even know, can't even verbalize sometimes why they feel the way they feel. The children can come up to you and lean on you or whatever or you can just tell by how they look that things aren't going very well. But trying to understand their own particular situation and getting them some help with counseling, if that is something that is available, [is important].

I asked Julia if it was important for teachers to know about education laws. She took that opportunity to again discuss how busy teachers are and the overwhelming nature of the job.

You need to know what you can and can't do but it can't be so overwhelming that you can't figure it out because you're just so darn [busy]. The thing about teaching is that it is so overwhelming; the amount of stuff that you have to do and what you're responsible for is absolutely overwhelming. I do worry about that part for any student going into it. But you know, like [my colleague] said, they don't know any differently and maybe part of that is just the learning curve. When you are young and you go into it, you are going to learn what you need to learn in college and in your first teaching years. Whereas for me [later in my career], it was like, "Oh, all this on top of everything else?" Maybe young kids are better off because they don't have so much to try to change from the way things used to be. I think they need to know about the laws, but it has to be doable because there's just so much [for a teacher] to do. It's just a big job. I don't know how people taught without going back on weekends. I have never figured that out. I always had to go back on weekends and spend, I would say, three to six hours at least. Now maybe it was because I wasn't organized, I'm sure that was part of it. I wanted to have different centers and I wanted to have it so I could get around without piles [on the floor]. It just got to be more and more and more and *more* that you had to do. I think it's harder now than it used to be because of all the requirements, the required curriculum and other requirements. It's harder than it needs to be, for sure.

In the final interview, Julia elaborated on how busy teachers are:

It's always [been] busy but I think it's gotten busier. It's lesson plans, preparation, working with kids one-on-one, disciplining the kids, all the paperwork you have to now do, the meetings you have to attend. When you go to school, from the time you are there, until when you leave, your brain is school. That is one thing I've enjoyed so much [since I retired,] that I'm not totally absorbed in all that anymore.

There's been a real demand for accountability and because of that, there is more of a paper trail being demanded than there ever was before; some of it is worthwhile and some of it is not.

She also shared that not all teachers had to do everything teachers at Chens were required to do.

It's always busy, but I think it's gotten busier. There's been a real demand for accountability and because of that, there is more of a paper trail being demanded than there ever was before; some of it is worthwhile and some of it is not.

It's hard for me now because I've been away from it, but if there are ever any things that are coming around that are on the cutting edge of what is going on in education, it's like they make us do it at the elementary level but nobody else kind of has to do it. I think the elementary people have to do more "stuff" (she gestured using air quotes) in our district than the other buildings. I think some of it is unnecessary.

I think it's always been the case to a certain extent, it's always been, but I think it's more so now under the leadership that we have.

I think elementary people in general individualize more, I think they are less likely to make a lesson plan and teach it the same way for years. There's more room requirements, as far as bulletin boards and management. There's so much to manage in an elementary classroom. You don't have that time to do stuff like they have maybe with middle school and high school kids, because those kids can work on their own for a while and little kids can't. So you are always busy, and you cannot sit at your desk and put grades in or any of those things because you've got to be working with kids and managing and supporting, etc., etc.

Like before school starts, elementary people generally go in maybe even weeks before school starts to get their rooms set up. High school teachers might slap up a couple new posters, and I'm generalizing. I don't know about everybody, but from what I've seen, there's just so much more at the elementary level that you have to do because of the nature of little kids: their shorter attention spans, their lack of being able to be independent, and all that sort of thing and it all adds up to a lot more time and a lot more – I don't know – having your brain on. And I don't mean that there aren't good high school teachers; I just think the nature of little kids is different than big kids.

During the interviews, Julia described many roles and responsibilities a teacher is expected to fulfill. She did not hesitate to share her opinions on this topic. Given all that she listed, her observation about how busy teachers are should not come as a surprise to anyone.

#### Characteristics of a Good Teacher

When I asked Julia to describe the characteristics of a good teacher, she brought up the name of one colleague without hesitation, and quickly added a second colleague's name. "There it is right there. They loved teaching and they loved kids. They were creative, patient, fun-loving, knew their subject matter, were organized; all that. I would say both of those people are, to me, the epitome of what a teacher should be."

Julia also mentioned a colleague, not by name, who possessed characteristics opposite of these two exemplary teachers. Through her description, she elaborated on what makes a teacher a good one.

There have only been a very few [people] about whom I thought, "You should not be a teacher," but there have been some. I told at least one for sure that she needed some help, but...

[She was] inflexible, only liked the kids that were capable, and had no patience with kids who had trouble getting work done. Also, she didn't sincerely laugh or smile. You could tell in this person's whole demeanor, just didn't seem like a very happy person. I think it probably went back to how this person grew up, *but* the world shouldn't suffer because of that. They should have picked a job where they were doing something [else]. Being a teacher is too important of a job for somebody to be doing it that doesn't really love it because you need to love it, you really do. You need to love kids, [but] you don't always like them all. And then there are kids, I remember one little guy I had in second grade. He was *dirty* and his nose was always boogery, and that year I knew that he was the one that I needed to love because he needed it so much. Not those cute ones with the nice outfits on and cute haircuts. This little guy who was very needy. He was the one that I needed to give the extra to, and it's hard sometimes. The children that smell, but they need you more than the other students. The other ones are probably going to make it no matter what. Teachers probably didn't have to do a whole lot to

teach some kids, but then there are other kids that you have to work really hard to teach. The variety is unbelievable; all the differences that there are, just unbelievable

Simply stated, Julia believed that those teachers who effectively fulfill the many roles and responsibilities of a teacher and who truly care about children are good teachers.

Julia shared a story that depicted what she thought was the most important part of teaching:

It is really important to look at each kid individually. I want to tell you a story of something that happened at school the other day. I was there to listen to some kids read. There was a little boy, sitting in the hall crying, with paper in front of him, and I happened to have this little boy's sister, and she was very frustrating because she couldn't get anything done when she was my student. So I knew this kind of background about this kid's sister and I wondered if he had some of the same problems. I tried to talk him a little bit, and he was crying and pouting. He was supposed to complete this paper and wasn't doing anything in the room, so he was sent out into the hall to get it done. I found an associate who asked the teacher if she could work with him. Oh, and the teacher had said to the associate that she could work with him *if he would be respectful*. So she worked with him for awhile, I was privy to it because I was out in the hall [listening to students reading]. [The associate] had a hard time [getting him to work], but he finally picked up his pencil to do something. Well then, she came over to me afterwards and said that the child had told her that if they don't get their electricity bill paid, they are not going to have Christmas. It made me angry, because this is one of the people I think should *not* be in teaching. Instead of trying to find out what was going on with that kid, she probably got into a power struggle; he's going to do that paper no matter what. Instead of trying "you tell me and I'll write it" or asking him some questions, she got into the power struggle. What was in the back of his mind was that if they don't pay the electric bill there will be no Christmas, and doing this paper is the last thing on his mind that was important. That kind of thing – all the standards, benchmarks, everything else is important – but the most important thing is to be aware of kids' needs like that, to try to find out what you can do to help that kid. That's the *most important part* about teaching. You have to be the kind of person that tries to find out what makes that kid tick and not just force him to "we're all doing this paper, you're in my class, *you're doing this paper*." When I see that (Julia's voice trailed off, and after a slight hesitation, she started again.)

A few years ago we had a friend who was a retired teacher, who was pretty elderly even then, who was volunteering. Her job as a volunteer was to get kids to finish all these papers. And you know, that is not what it is all about. Of the whole thing, what's up there at the top of my list of education and teaching, what good teaching is about: what you teach is important but how you teach them is just as important. If they leave your room the year you have them and you have diminished their sense of self or self-esteem, then you have not done what a teacher should do. For the most part, I have not seen very many people in our school district that I thought shouldn't be teachers, but there are a few and that bothers me probably more than anything. The problem is getting them out, and that's an administrative thing. And finally there is one person who is retiring, not the one I mentioned in that last story. And (said this in a whisper) *I'm so glad* she won't be here damaging kids any more. I don't think she realizes she is doing it, she doesn't realize she is doing it, she thinks she is doing the best she can, and maybe she is. But she should never have gone into this line of work. I don't know how you [do it], somehow, those people need to be screened.

#### Changes Julia Discussed

During the interviews, Julia discussed many changes that occurred during her career. (See Table 6.) “When I think about from the time I started to where things are today, or even when I retired; wow! What's available and what's being used, it's amazing.” Between the year she began teaching, 1974, and the year she retired, 2007,

the many changes that she recalled included teacher autonomy, families, students “at risk,” physical contact with students, technology, and reading curriculum. Julia admitted, “There were probably changes in other areas, too, but I probably know the most about reading because reading was really my forte.” She also discussed the need for improved teacher preparation:

There was the emphasis on individualizing of instruction or meeting individual needs as much then as there is now, and that's good thing. I think that probably a lot of things that are going on in education now are *really good*. Hopefully kids will be better equipped coming into teaching now than we were when I came into it. I probably learned the most from [actually teaching,] watching other teachers and asking questions, and trial and error. Hopefully kids today are getting a better



Table 6

*Changes Julia Discussed*


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Preparation and Professional Development	Responsibilities
Teacher Autonomy	Teaching the Whole Child
Teachers' Handwriting Legibility Requirement	Physical Contact - Hugs
Data Based Educational Decisions	Determining/Writing Curriculum
Administrators	Instruction
Physical Contact with Students	Grading Student Work
Inservice Content and Delivery	Assessment
Curriculum	Reading Recovery
Teacher Choice	Efforts to Decrease Noise Level in the Lunchroom
Standards and Benchmarks	Law/Accountability
Limits on Teaching Topics with Religious Connections	No Child Left Behind
Teaching "Traditional Family Responsibilities"	Special Education
Character Education	Teachers' Paperwork
Variety of Literature Available	Continuum of Services
Guided Reading	Factors Outside School
Technology	Poverty
Inputting Grades (Computer Software)	Family Makeup and Mobility

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education. [Teacher preparation] is probably harder now, but I think if it helps people going into the job, to be able to [teach] better, that's good.

### Teacher Autonomy

Julia and a colleague had discussed a difference between teachers of their generation and those, like her colleague's son, who were considering teaching as a career now: the new teachers would not know about a change in level of teacher autonomy. She stated:

[Her colleague's son] doesn't know the difference as far as how things are today compared to how they used to be because he hasn't seen the change that we've seen. We used to be able to teach what we wanted, not totally, but we had a lot more flexibility. Now, because of the standards and benchmarks and what we have to teach, you don't have nearly the flexibility to do anything but stick real tight to the curriculum. That's good, but that means we don't get to do some of the fun stuff that we used to do, and that's too bad. Hopefully, a teacher can be creative and figure out how to [do some fun activities], too, but it's harder.

[We could do] holiday projects. Now there is so much diversity and different religious beliefs that some places can't even celebrate or even talk a whole lot about Christmas because of their clientele, but we've always been able to do that.

If there was something special that you liked, you could build your own unit around it and teach it and it was okay. For example, when I taught first grade for all those years, I would do this big bear unit in January. The reason it came about was one Christmas vacation, I was thinking about going back [to school] and I was just not very excited about going back so I needed to find something to get me excited. I developed this whole unit around bears. I suppose we had some science in first grade at that time that was expected to be taught but it wasn't like it is today, mandated that this is exactly what you had to teach, so I could do a little bit of science, and I could do math, you could do everything in the unit. We made t-shirts and we baked teddy bear cookies, and we had a party at the end of the unit. We just did all kinds of stuff, a lot of crafty kind of things, because the resources were just endless around the bear topic.

Now, [teachers would] probably have a hard time squeezing that in because of all the stuff you have to do. It was fun to be able to do what you wanted to do and I don't think it hurt the kids or that they were going to miss out on a whole lot, because you were still trying to teach what you knew that they needed to know as far as reading and math and all that sort of thing. There's so much more testing now and accountability, and it's pretty, pretty specific and so

for those of us who experienced that [autonomy in the past,] not having it [and changing] to what it is today was really hard.

### Curriculum

Julia discussed the changes related to curriculum over the course of her career. At the start of her career, teachers planned what would be taught given available materials; at the end of her career, standards and benchmarks had been implemented.

Well, a lot of times it was the books you were given. You would have some textbooks, and you could see what the content was basically. It was just a lot looser than it is now. And it's not all bad, it really isn't; I just wish there was some kind of medium between practically telling you when to breathe to nothing. There seems like there should be a place for flexibility, because that is the beauty of teaching. An individual teacher can be the person she is and teach the way that she teaches; that should be able to happen. When it doesn't happen, then it scares me because I think it would be really boring to be a teacher if it was so laid out that you didn't feel that you had any wiggle room. It would be boring for kids, too, because I don't think it would be very exciting for [students] if a teacher had to do things a certain way and not be able to add her own little twist.

I wasn't sure of the curriculum when I was teaching at Rudolph [in the Prairie Crossing District in my early years there]. There were days that were really hard down there, it was such a long day. The kids got there at 7:30 in the morning and they didn't leave until quarter to four. We had to eat lunch with them, and sometimes we had to be out for recess if there wasn't enough [supervision], if the aides were sick or something. We were with them all day long; the principal was very rarely there, and we had to handle everything ourselves. [The teachers] would help each other as much as we could. I can remember thinking, "Have I really done any good? Was I really meant to do this?" Then I got home from school [one day] and I got a letter from one of my second grade students [from earlier in my career] who said, "I can remember when you did this and you did that." Even if I didn't do justice to the curriculum, I did justice to their self-worth. That little girl, I went to her graduation, I went to her wedding. I'm afraid she's divorced now; she's got four boys. And she's successful in her work and that sort of thing. I saw her this summer; we are still in contact. So I feel like I had a little piece of that.

In the third interview, Julia again discussed her former 2<sup>nd</sup> grade student who had written to her and kept in contact over the years. These excerpts discuss that the curriculum, or *what* is taught is not always as important as *how* it is taught.

It made me think again that what you teach is important but how you teach is maybe more important, being kind and being warm. If the best teacher of academics in the world doesn't like kids or if kids feel like she doesn't like kids, they students are not going to get as much out of that year as somebody that's just warm...It is really interesting to see people you've had in school like one who was in my 1st grade class and she came back [to Prairie Crossing] and is teaching and is a top-notch teacher. A lot of it is just the personality of the former student turned teacher that makes a difference. [Another former student] told me in church a couple of Sundays ago that she was in the accelerated math group and that I had contributed to [her choice to become a math teacher]. I said I probably didn't contribute to it but at least I didn't hurt [her] because math is not my thing. It makes you feel good that you can see kids that you [taught] go on and be successful and think you had some part of that.

Julia also counted a young, male band teacher at Prairie Crossing in her list of former students. She spoke of how these students reminded her of what was important for teachers to do to help their students prepare for their futures:

Sometimes I think that it's really important for a teacher to teach the kids the curriculum, but I think if a kid enters and exits your classroom without feeling good about who they are, then I don't care what you taught them from the curriculum because I don't think that's as important as feeling good about yourself. That is going to take you a lot farther than anything else in the world.

Changes in curricula were frequent during Julia's years at Chens Elementary. She described the process and discussed that while some changes were perceived to be recycled versions of prior practices, others were not.

Some of [the curriculum] was a great big fat notebook of stuff that just seemed like it was a big waste of time. There have been so many periods of that kind of stuff over the years, where first we're going to do this, and then we're going to do this, where you just got to the point where it was almost laughable. Well *now* we're going to do it this way.

And maybe things do change as far as how you teach and maybe calling something one name and then five years down the road you're doing it the same way but you're calling it something else is just normal. For example, guided reading; it is different; but somebody might say that's just reading groups, we did that twenty years ago. Well, it isn't [the same] because when you used to have reading groups, every kid, every group would go through the same book. You would start out with the bluebirds and they began with this story; well, the

blackbirds didn't get it until three months later because they weren't ready for it. The thing that's different is that there are leveled texts and flexible groups; maybe [a student] started out in this group and was not getting it so was moved to this group at her level, or [another student] started out in this group and it's totally not challenging enough so she got to move up to a level to where it's more challenging. It's not like the old reading groups per se, but there are things that we do that are not really anything new but there just calling it a new name; there's a certain amount of that. How we teach reading now, if you do guided reading the right way, it's a really good thing because it supports kids where they are. It moves them up and it's flexible so that if you're here (gestured higher than the table with her hand) and it's too hard you can go here (gestured to indicate a higher level) and if it's too easy you can go here (again gestured, lower this time). We even did it across [classrooms]; this teacher had one kid at this level and you have three, so they can come over and join you. I really think we hit on a good thing with [guided reading] and I hope they stick with it for a while.

Julia further discussed the cyclical nature of some aspects of education. She stated that a strategy or practice that fell out of favor and then reappeared:

[A change] really is a good idea, but then what's popular and trends come along that other people want to try. I think if it keeps coming back around, there's probably a real good basis for it.

Cooperative learning would probably be [an example of something] that was real hot and now they still do it but it's called something else. I think a lot of things get cycled around in education; I remember my mom saying, "Well I did that 30 years ago." You're doing such and such [and you think] it's really just the same thing with a different name. I wish I could cite more examples but [I can't]. I do think that really there are just so many cycles in education.

The process of writing curriculum at the district level was labor intensive for the teachers at Prairie Crossing.

There had been some resistance to a certain [curriculum] model that we were going to follow. It was like reinventing the wheel instead of using something that somebody else had already thought up that would work, we definitely had resistance with people saying why are we doing it this way? It's ten times more work than it needs to be. [The superintendent at the time] was a big advocate of this model, and we would look around and see other districts not sweating blood and accomplishing the same thing, whereas we had to go through all this stuff to get done what we had to get done.

[Use of the model did not continue after the superintendent went to another district]. That's one of the problems right there: so many things get

started; we do this for a little while and then we try something else. I don't think there's been consistency and continuity along the way. [The curriculum process] was a *whole lot* of work with results that I think could have been gotten another way.

### Reading Recovery

A significant change in Julia's career occurred when she was trained to teach Reading Recovery. When she first began this phase of her teaching career, Julia and another colleague, Mrs. Lean, attended the training sessions.

Our [Reading Recovery] teacher-leader was *excellent*. I had a lot of respect for her; I think we were very well taught and [the training] was great. We had other people over us after her that I didn't feel were as good as she was; now the person that's over the [trained Reading Recovery teachers] comes in and teaches a child or two right at Chens in the reading room. They made a little spot for her to come in and teach whenever she can.

Julia described the program and the benefits for students:

You are supposed to have four students; that is the optimum [number]. Sometimes you might have more than that, but idealistically four is the best because you want to know those four kids really, really, really well. It's a lot of recordkeeping, a lot of reporting and recording; and if you have more than four, they think you probably would get burned out.

[Each session is a] half-hour lesson; it was supposed to be a 20 week program, 60 lessons. Sometimes it took a little longer and sometimes students moved faster and they graduated earlier. When I say graduated, [Reading Recovery] also used the term discontinued, which meant the same thing. Dismissed meant that children had the program but they weren't able to reach the level they should have. And if they're dismissed, a lot of times they might have gone into a special ed program or some other group situation for reading help for the rest of the year, and probably for the rest of the time [they were in] school because the kids that didn't graduate [from Reading Recovery] usually were kids that were going to have a hard time. Almost all of them made progress even if they didn't graduate; it gave them some solid tools to help them in reading. I still think it is such a good program and I'm afraid we're going to lose it, because of the expense.

The expense associated with Reading Recovery was an obstacle to keeping the program available to students. Julia elaborated on the costs involved, and their efforts to continue to offer the program.

We really had to fight tooth and nail to keep [Reading Recovery] when Mrs. George was [principal]. We just weren't really sure how hard she fought for it. Reading Recovery is an expensive program. It's really expensive to train people and it's expensive to run. You have to have continuing education, where you meet [regularly], I think it's every month. Even after you're trained, you have to keep spending money on it because you have to have this continuing contact [with the teacher-leader and other Reading Recovery teachers], but that was one of the parts of the program that was so good. You would go in and problem-solve with each other, you would talk about what was new, and you helped each other. It was very collaborative and collegial.

Especially with dropping enrollment, the Reading Recovery program is probably going to go down the tubes. It is something they've kept but [Administration] always thought, "If we can do without it, we would save 'x' amount of dollars." It's too bad, because [Reading Recovery] is one of the [programs] that I've seen really help first graders in reading and then helps kids as they go on to upper grades. Sometimes we even dipped down and helped Kindergarteners a little bit, if we had served everybody in first grade that needed [Reading Recovery].

When the time came for our final interview together, Julia had learned that the program would be discontinued at Chens. Julia described a unique observation that she was able to make given her unusual arrangement of teaching Reading Recovery half-time and teaching first grade half-time.

You didn't normally get to do [what I am about to describe], but this was really cool. I taught reading [during my half of the day with the entire class]. I had a youngster in my room who I eventually got to work with during the half of the day that I taught Reading Recovery. [I found that] I could not do for him in the classroom what I could do for him in the Reading Recovery program because then it was just him; it was intensive. It's just a different [program], such a good deal.

But we're losing [Reading Recovery]. It's gone after this year. Mrs. Lean is retiring; they're not going to replace her. The [other] gal who is teaching Reading Recovery right now at Chens, she won't be doing it anymore. They'll do more groups and I think that the kids are really going to suffer. The first grade teachers, maybe some of them have appreciated it and realized the value but I

don't think a lot of them have; they're going to go "Whoa, now it's all up to me." Whereas before, [a teacher] sent them off for half an hour [for Reading Recovery] and maybe [the teacher] didn't think that kid was grade level, but [in Reading Recovery,] she made some really good progress, so it's a sad deal.

What Julia had feared earlier in the study, the elimination of the Reading Recovery program at Prairie Crossing due to budgetary factors, had come to fruition.

### Data Based Educational Decisions

Julia discussed the time during which she served as a half-time Reading Recovery teacher and the data collection that was involved in that program. While the data collection was extensive, Julia saw it as essential to thoroughly know a student's skills and progress in reading.

[Students' Reading Recovery data] is in their files. Reading Recovery started out in Ohio so that's where our documentation was turned in to initially but it seems like that has changed. They are still keeping track of all the information to try to support the reason to have [the program in the Prairie Crossing District].

Even the special education experts would sometimes use our documentation to help or work with kids who were [being evaluated for] special education [eligibility]. The good thing about the documentation was that we had a baseline, what we would do with them in the beginning of the year. In fact, they used that Reading Recovery Survey for every kid in first grade; they would [survey] at the beginning of the year, again midyear, and do it again at the end of the year. It [includes] word tests, concepts about print...I imagine we'll continue to use it because I think it's a very well researched and thought out pre- and post-test for [reading skills].

The example Julia used was related to Reading Recovery; however, she also spoke of the increased reliance on data to document student progress in general over the years. Prior to the later period of her employment when so much written documentation was required, Julia reported that educational decisions earlier in her career were based on observation and experience:



I think you just did it from your gut, from watching the kids and being with them and you weren't required to do all that [data collection] but you knew just from your interactions with them and whether that's bad or good – do you call that subjective? It used to be you could do your grades without having a lot of numbers in front of you. It's not that you couldn't have [used numerical data for grades], it's just not how we did it back a long time ago. It's gotten more and more and more [based on data over the years].

I think it makes [teaching] harder because it's so time consuming and because we have so many behavior issues to deal with that you just feel like that person spinning all those plates trying to keep everything going all the time. It's just very (laughed) challenging to deal with behavior issues and deal with kids and their problems and teach them and test them and report the [results]. It is really hard to keep up with it all.

### Grading

Julia's difficulty with grading wasn't limited to issues with putting the grades into the computer. From her perspective, quantifying the work of students in the 1st grade was difficult.

To me, it was really hard to give 1st grade kids grades for some [activities or tasks]. I knew how I felt about the students, as far as if they were strong or weak [academically]. As far as giving them points for everything, sometimes it didn't really show the true kid if you just crunched numbers. It just seemed like there needed to be more than just looking at the numbers.

[Prior to assigning scores to student work, the grades we used were] S – satisfactory, E – exceeds expectations or exceptional, N – needs improvement. Those were basically it; there might have been an I for improving. They were grades, but they weren't letter grades that were computed by using a number system. They were a lot of your gut feelings.

Now you have to put a number with every assignment they do, and grade it, and eww. It got to be a lot. I felt a lot better about doing them handwritten, thinking about them, being able to tell you why I gave them the grade that I did, because I didn't think that numbers always told you the true [story]. Maybe you can do that for bigger kids and have it be more accurate grading, but I didn't care for that, personally.

### Technology

Julia spoke more about the impact of technology on her than on her students. Her primary discussion of technology was related to entering students' scores in a computer

program to determine their grades, the difficulties she experienced with this process, and why she thought teachers just entering the field had an easier time using the technology.

I think kids that are starting out in [teaching] don't have as much trouble as somebody who is older because they can adjust; they can pick up the technology faster. I mean, that technology just about killed me. I love email and being able to have access to Internet and all, but as far as the grading [on the computer], it was just a nightmare. I would almost get sick with anxiety [when it came time to enter grades]. Putting grades into the computer for first grade, that just came about in the last five years or so. Every time we did grades, (laughed) I would have to find somebody to help me who knew more about it than I did because I am not a computer person. Then you had to depend on your coworkers. Luckily, there was always somebody that could help; but to me, I got more concerned about getting it done than the information I was putting in because it was so stressful and scary.

It was always changing, and then half the time, our computer programs didn't work. We had a computer program that would do one part of the report card and then we had another computer program that would do another part, and then they would merge the parts to get the final product. A lot of times the product didn't come out like it was supposed to, so it was a real headache and I got to the point where I didn't really care; I just wanted to get them done and that is too bad. Well, you just had to do the best you could.

### Standardized Assessment

Julia supplied her opinion on the amount of assessment that students are required to complete now, even when they are a very young age.

I think there's more [testing] done now, much more. I don't think [testing is] a bad thing, I know you have to do some testing, some pre- and post-testing, but it just seems like the testing for kids now is never-ending. It seems in observing that little kids are being tested constantly. I don't know how teachers have time to teach because they have to test, test, test and have all this [information] that they accumulate and report. That really bothers me. I would see parents or volunteers or associates who would do a lot of the testing with kids in the hall constantly. That would be a good thing to ask a kindergarten teacher because I think it's really gotten to a point where it's a lot, and I just don't know if it's too much or if it is necessary to have as much [testing] as they do.

### Inservices/Professional Development

During the second interview, Julia's responses to questions included reference to inservices conducted at the start of her career and the professional development sessions near the end of her years of teaching, and how they differed.

You had inservices way back when, a lot of times they were a motivational speaker or something like that. Now, it's come from the State down that we have to have more specific professional development. Yet, it's still [somewhat] up to the district to do professional development, and we have had (sigh) a lot of [sessions] that were just stuff that really didn't help in your teaching or help the kids.

Whenever we had to do some kind of a professional development instead of making the professional development [separate, they should have] tied it in with what we were already doing. It seems like we have always made it harder than it needed to be. Instead of doing something for professional development and incorporating it with what you already had to do, it was an added piece on top of everything else.

I can think of a few times where I really felt like I've benefitted and one time that I really thought it was good. (Julia could not recall the formal name of the professional development session.) This was where we talked about teaching techniques, [topics] like active listening, wait time; what you probably really should have learned in college, and maybe you did but you forgot. It was a good review and it made you more aware of active participation, wait time, and even how to set up a lesson and get interest or enthusiasm for it.

We used Bloom's Taxonomy for levels of questions, too. I think that was called advisor/advisee, I'm not absolutely sure. That was something of all the things we did was really helpful and I really used and I think improved my teaching. It was, you had probably not a lot of different people because of the time and the logistics of being able to do it, and who'd cover your class and stuff like that. [You would] schedule it when your kids were at a special you would try to do it and that sort of thing so that you wouldn't miss out on a lot of teaching time. That would be my guess. A lot of times [the training] wasn't the same grade level so that made it different right there. But you could still apply some of the techniques to high school or middle school or whatever. That was the purpose that when you went it was that they were using these certain things, so you definitely did. You had your assigned people and were working on this skill, and when you went to observe you needed to watch for that method.

We had a fellow [for several sessions of professional development]; after a while it was like he said the same things, told the same jokes. I still think some of the things he came to present to us were really, really good had some validity. He started out being a teacher and then got into consulting, maybe he was from an

AEA. I can't remember. I do remember he told a story about going to speak somewhere and changing his pants as he was driving the car. Stuff like that just sticks in your mind; you could just visualize this guy trying to do that.

There were some times when we did [professional development] that I thought was really valuable, but there were a lot more times that we did [sessions] that I felt was busy work to satisfy somebody but didn't really benefit kids much.

I think there probably has been a switch because the State needs more accountability from the districts; and so instead of just being willy-nilly, [districts need to make sure teachers] have x number of inservice hours. Now, [teachers] have got to implement this certain thing. Yet even when it supposedly needs to be implemented, how it's implemented maybe is different from one district to another. There is a fine line...teachers aren't cookie cutters and we can't all do things exactly the same way and sometimes I think that's the problem. They want to [say] "everybody does everything exactly the same from Kindergarten through 12<sup>th</sup> grade." For one thing, teachers aren't all the same, and kids aren't all the same, and it *just doesn't work*. You know, it just doesn't work. Now, I know certain things [must] be done and there have to be guidelines and there has to be accountability, but it just seems like, I don't know, I'm just not sure that how we're doing it is the best way.

Of interest in Julia's commentary is that she could not recall a presenter's name, what the professional development information he presented was called, but she did remember a visual image of a humorous story he told that was unrelated to the training he provided. Also, while Julia said that the "one size fits all" model of professional development was not the best way, she did not propose an alternative except to incorporate the new initiatives to practices that teachers were already required rather than adding more work. Another notable element of this segment was that despite her attempt to make a distinction between the inservices of the past and the current professional development, she reverted back to the use of the term *inservice* when referring to professional development endeavors that she experienced late in her career.

## Families

Changes outside of the school often impacted teachers and the students they worked with were included among the topics of conversation during the interviews. Julia stated that changes within families indicated the school needed to teach some skills that were traditionally the family's responsibility:

Schools have taken over a lot more of teaching [concepts] that used to be taught in the family and are not anymore because families are too busy just trying to make ends meet. I think the family unit has really changed, so now school is teaching character, responsibility, honesty, et cetera, and that used to come from home; I don't think it does as much anymore.

A change that had great impact on a number of students was the greater number of families who live in poverty and the increased amount of movement in and out of the district:

[At the time I retired, there was a lot more mobility; [in the past,] people didn't move around so much. Now we have a lot more "at risk" kids, we have a lot more poverty and home situations that are not conducive to being supportive of a kid.

Oh my goodness, and the ones that move around a lot are many times the kids who *need* to stay in one place. It seemed like we would *just* get something figured out for a kid, like maybe they were finally going to get special ed help and a program and then, "Oh, we're moving." Whether that was to avoid legal [problems] or financial, I don't know. Sometimes people would move and the kid's [school possessions and work] wasn't ever taken. You felt like they moved in the night.

Another change over the years that was related to families was the amount of reading children did at home. Despite the publication of many high-quality or good books each year, Julia reported that the amount of time students read when not at school decreased.

I think kids used to read more because there weren't all these other things to do. And if you get a kid today that really likes to read, they're going to read. But there are just so many other, *easier* things to do, if they don't. I don't know how you

instill it, I have tried all my teaching career, and I'll keep trying. It's easier to plop in front of the TV. and that goes along with bad eating habits too, eat something that's not good for you. You always had reluctant readers, but now we have people who can and don't and that's really sad. I just can't imagine life without reading because I love to read.

Changes in family structure, parental supervision, mobility of families, and poverty were all factors outside of Julia's control that impacted her teaching.

### Students "At Risk"

I asked Julia about her use of the term *at risk*, and she clarified what she meant by that:

At risk could be either educationally, that they have trouble with school, or they don't have good family support, or they are somebody you think is going to have [behavioral] problems somewhere down the road and they probably already are. It can be a lot of different reasons. There always have been [students who are "at risk"] but the number of them [has increased]. For example, when I first started teaching, you might have had one kid from a family where there was a divorce. There were times later in my teaching career where I sat and I went through my [list of] kids and half or more than half of them were not in a two-parent family, where mom and dad got married and stayed married. I would say half or more of them are not [typical].

I don't know if there is such a thing anymore as typical because what you used to think of typical is much more in the minority as far as how things are today. It would be interesting to [compare] a class or two, I did that a number of years and it was like, wow! A lot of times, the years where you did have a better class were years you had less divorce, less *three last names in one family* [emphasis added] and that sort of thing. There was more stability; not always, but a lot of times that was pretty telling. We always said there was this correlation between how many people ordered books from book clubs and how your class was. If you had a lot of book orders and people spent a lot of money, a lot of times you had a better class that year; it seemed like that was the case. It wasn't always that [families who bought a lot of books] had a lot of money, but they really believed reading and education were valuable and important and that did make a difference.

Julia also discussed the concept of typical in another comment related to lack of preparation to successfully work with students who presented challenging behavior in the classroom:

[My teacher preparation program] didn't emphasize [how to deal with problem behavior] when I was in school, but there is a definite need for it because there are so many more behavior problems than there used to be. There have always been kids that have problems but it could be that back a long time ago, the kids that had really severe problems were never seen by the school system. There were always behavior problems but it would be maybe one [student]; it's like the divorced kid family. Because of the changes in family and parents, what kids come to school with is so different today. I can remember one principal saying, "Eventually it's going to get to where the normal kids are mainstreamed into the special ed kids." And do you know what? It was starting to get that way. Where there are *so* many kids and *so many* problems; not every year but boy, there were some years that were just (sigh), it was just survival. It was just survival. Hard to teach.

While there have always been students who were at risk according to Julia's multifaceted definition, the numbers of students experiencing difficulty increased, so much that a student who would have been considered typical at the start of Julia's career – from a two-parent family, well behaved, etc. – was more of the exception in her final years of teaching.

#### Physical Contact with Students

The three elementary teachers in this study discussed physical contact with students. While Florence and Jane discussed physical contact with students as punishment or for disciplinary reasons in addition to giving students hugs, Julia expressed her feelings about the importance of teachers being able to give a student a hug:

There have been some concerns about even being able to touch kids. You know, that you had to be careful about that, and I think to me, that was the beginning of the end. I thought, you know, if I can't give a kid a hug, then I've got to get out of

here because I can't be around kids and not hug them, especially kids that need hugs. I walk into the building to this day and kids that I didn't even [teach or weren't in classrooms where I volunteer] sometimes walk up and need to be hugged. And I think that is an important part of teaching.

[The policy on physical contact with students] seemed like it depended on your principal. There was a time when there was a fellow that taught in the middle school, where there might have been some improper touching going on...then it makes everybody all nervous and then it kind of waters down to "I can't touch kids" and that sort of thing. There definitely have been times when we were made to feel like you shouldn't touch kids. Whenever something like that happened, particularly if it was close to home like in our own district, then for a while, people were real nervous about it and then it would get to where people would kind of settle down about it again and not be so bad.

Principals and occurrences related to allegations of a faculty member touching a student inappropriately were factors in the school's policy about physical contact with students.

### Special Education

Near the end of the second interview, Julia brought up the topic of special education as she was trying to recall what one initiative was called; she suggested that a special education teacher would remember it. Julia continued, "Bertha has been on the ground floor of changes in special ed and probably there has been nobody who has seen more change. Aside from not having the patience to do it, I would not ever want to be a special ed teacher because of the amount of paperwork that they have to do. It's just gotten really, really big."

When I asked Julia to recall what she heard initially about special education, she said,

It seemed like there have been times when there were kids that had a really, really hard time that could not get help because they weren't "low enough" and so then after a few years they would be low enough and then they'd get help. It always [made me ask,] "Why couldn't we help kids? Why couldn't we be more proactive?" That's probably one thing about special ed; we have swung from having them completely taken out of the classroom and just being in the



classroom for specials (e.g., music, art, etc.), to the other extreme now where they are in the classroom and not all of them are really functioning very well. Probably my biggest frustration was if I had kids that I felt needed the extra help and I couldn't give it to them because I didn't have the time to do what they needed. Probably my best experience with special ed was when I had kids, a child or more than one, in my room where there was an associate with them to help them when they had trouble.

Julia declared that in order to better remember the time after the Education of All Handicapped Children Act (EAHCA) was passed in 1975, she would need to think of students she had taught back then, and to assist her recall, she produced a scrapbook that contained most of her class photos. As Julia looked at the photos, she said, "I think I'm missing one class. There's 1976 and this little girl had a really rough time." Next, Julia said, "There weren't any kids in this class that were really, really low. But also I didn't have as many tools in my toolbox then as I do now. I mean, I probably didn't know what to do with them."

After looking at another photo, she commented, "But this one I remember because it was a big class and a big, big range. This kid was really, really low but his parents were not willing to have him get special ed help." I asked if she recalled what led to that decision by the parents. Julia replied, "The AEA, probably the school psychologist, did some testing. He shared it with parents, but it was not nearly as cut and dried as it is now. I just remember the parents coming in and us talking to them, and [they were] unwilling...no, he was not going to get extra help and all that sort of thing." Julia said of the remainder of that year, her fourth as a teacher:

It was hard because I was fairly young...I can't remember what I did with him. I probably had to get things from kindergarten or make up stuff for him to do because he couldn't do what the other kids could. You had to make quite an

adjustment to curriculum, but to me, that is just good teaching. When you have so many kids, it is really hard to do that.”

Julia did not know what happened to this student after she moved to Prairie Crossing.

It would be interesting to know what happened to him. There were some other kids – not so much academics, really, but more the oddities – that I would really like to know what happened to them. There was a kid I had in second grade who was really different. And when I was back, someone said, “That kid is still around and is still being kind of weird, never really got over being weird.”

Julia told the story of another student who was in her class and had atypical behavior:

There have been so many kids that were, maybe they weren't special ed in any diagnosis or any documentation, but they were special ed in their behavior as far as they were not the normal kids. I just ran into a teacher that has a little girl that I had in first grade, and she told me that they have her now in special ed or identified or whatever because of her behavior. It wasn't that she wasn't a bright kid, but she was so out there as far as how she acted. [The teacher] said they're just going to eat her alive next year; so they've got some stuff in place and thank goodness, because this kid was just, she wrote in the toilet bowl with a pencil or something. I mean she did things that were just weird. That was her refuge; whenever she'd get in trouble, she'd run to the bathroom and just stay in there and not come out.

I got to the point where I would have to go in and block the bathroom and I would say, “Now Barbie, you cannot live in the bathroom. You have to be out here with us.” That was how she escaped, and that is how she dealt with [situations]. There are just so many, I do not know what they did in the old days as far as all these kids that you see now that have problems and have issues and stuff like that. I don't know, did they not go to school? Were they kept at home? I am talking *way* back because for a long time everybody has tried to get [every child] at school. It just seems like there are so many more disturbed kids, kids with issues, whether it is ADHD or autism. I think it is partly [due to] parenting, part of it is the food that we eat, but there are a lot more kids who have problems. That is one of the big reasons why [teachers] are so busy. They are always putting out fires. I felt as a teacher I was doing plate spinning that you used to see on Ed Sullivan or one of those [shows]; where the [performer] had all these [plates spinning on sticks] and the person had to go around [to each one and keep the plates all spinning at the same time]. That is how teaching felt a lot of times.

Julia's perception of the purpose of special education was "to help children reach their potential, to learn what they can, to help them survive in life. Special education is programming for kids who need a different kind of learning situation." She reported that she thought special education was needed and was beneficial for students who received those services. However, Julia was not surprised that students who have Individualized Educational Programs (IEPs) do not score as well on standardized assessments as peers who do not receive special education services. "How can [their test scores] be; if the kid has a disability, they aren't going to be able to score up [to that level] if they are mentally disabled. There wouldn't be any way that could happen, I would not think."

Julia mentioned students with learning disabilities and defined that term: "visual difficulties, dyslexic, or that sort of thing. Or even an auditory processing difficulty. There is such a big variety. And we had a good dose of hyperactivity along the way; that always made your life *real* interesting!" She elaborated on the last point:

I don't know if [it was] every year, but quite often you had one or more kids who absolutely couldn't sit still. It used to be that there weren't very many like that, so you just dealt with the ones that you had. But *now* there are a lot more kids that have attention and focus problems and can't sit still. Where you used to have a few, now you have a lot more. Not a majority, but a lot more medication [is taken by] kids that exhibit those kinds of difficulties, and sometimes there were a few more who had trouble [who you thought should have taken medication]. Maybe you didn't know any other way to deal with [students who had difficulty paying attention]; it was just so hard to teach the class because of a child or two who had those kind of issues. I don't know if it is because of what they are eating, how they are growing up, lack of structure in their home, watching too much TV, being over stimulated, or not enough sleep.

While Julia listed several challenges that impacted her students' learning, the accommodations she listed were more for students who exhibited such characteristics of attention deficit hyperactivity disorder.

You just had to have a different set of rules for them. You may not have required them to sit down when they did their work or you gave them tasks and said, “After you finish this much, you can go get a drink,” or [other] opportunities to move around to get some of that energy expended. You knew they just couldn’t sit there and do whatever for x amount of time; you just changed the expectations for that kid. I would even schedule “wobble breaks” in my lesson plans, when I would play music or do exercises or something because I knew *I* couldn’t sit still for that long; I don’t know a kid who could.

I don’t know if I wrote [accommodations into lesson plans], but you always had to think about accommodations, about what this kid or that kid needed to be able to function,. That really got to be the name of the game in my last years of teaching, making accommodations; and they would just be numerous, numerous, numerous. Where they sit in the room, having a buddy to help them find the page, just a lot of different things. A paper that everybody else has to do all of it, fold the paper in half or a fourth, if you know that this kid can do addition [yet] has problems sitting and getting [an entire page of problems] done. They can do it, they don’t have to do the whole page to prove it. [Sometimes,] I would take [students] out in the hall and give them all the directions, have one kid on one side and another kid on the other side, and just keep them going, to get something done. Being in the room, they just couldn’t [focus].

You have to make a lot of adjustments, flexibility to not have the same expectations for every kid. At the end [of my career], when I was teaching in the classroom, usually it was the kids that had a hard time getting their work done that were the low kids, although sometimes you wondered which came first, “the chicken or the egg.”

Julia attributed her flexibility and knowledge regarding how to support students who “couldn’t sit still” or needed accommodations for other reasons to her years of experience teaching remedial and Title I reading and to her many years of working with children in elementary school.

Collaboration with special education teachers occurred frequently when students who received special education services spent part of the day in Julia’s class, but unless one of her students spent part of the day in the special education teacher’s room, they didn’t commonly have professional interaction, “although I always was friends with those people and visited with them and stuff like that.” Julia had many positive interactions

with special education teachers and paraeducators, but she had some negative experiences with colleagues in special education as well.

Julia appreciated when a special education teacher or paraeducator could work with a student “who I didn’t feel like I could work with quite as well. That can happen easily because you don’t always have good rapport or connect with everybody. When you do have [a colleague in special education] that you work well with, that really helps a lot.” Julia also described unhelpful observations of and interactions with special education colleagues.

I would say that some [special education] teachers were better communicators, just better teachers than others, so that made it a different kind of experience. There were teachers who delegated a lot to their associates to do; I think those weren’t always the best teachers. There were teachers who walked down the hall with a cup of coffee or a cup of tea all the time and I thought, “When do you teach?” and others that you didn’t see because they were doing what they thought they needed to do all the time.

Julia thought of a time when a boy who received special education services was in her classroom.

I was only responsible for science for this little guy and everything else was done in that special ed room. But you have to have more contact with [special education teachers] when you have a youngster that they have in their room, too. You have to make sure if there are benchmarks that the youngster needs to pass that you communicate that to them.

These comments indicated that Julia did not consider approaching her special education colleagues if she had questions about how to accommodate students’ individual needs unless the student also spent time in the special education classroom.

I think that if classroom teachers have a lot to do, people who do special ed have even more [work], more paperwork. Oh, I definitely would not have ever wanted to teach special ed. It’s not that I don’t care about kids with special needs and kids

like that, but a big part of it is just (sighed) the paperwork, the IEPs; oh my goodness.

Bertha has tried forever to get out of special ed; she never did. Because once you get into special ed, a lot of times it's a lot harder to find those people, which is too bad, because I think people might be happier if they were allowed to make some changes.

I asked Julia if she thought many teachers who asked for a change in teaching assignment but they did not get it would leave teaching in order to experience a desired or needed change. She replied,

No, probably not, because [the more years you teach,] you get so much invested in [the retirement program]. There are people that leave teaching but most of the time it's fairly early on, and the ones that leave later in life, I'm surprised, but I have a lot of respect for them because I think that really takes guts.

#### No Child Left Behind (NCLB)

When I brought up the topic of NCLB, Julia did not even let me finish my sentence. She interjected,

That is the *stupidest* thing, to think that you're going to be able to have everybody be at a certain place at a certain time. *People aren't made that way*. When I heard that...a third grade teacher made a really good point about that. By the end of third grade, she was supposed to have every child at a certain point. If a kid comes to her at first grade level, if she can help that child make a year's growth, that's *awesome*. There is *no way* really that you could bring a kid that was first grade level coming in [at the beginning of the year] to third grade level by the end of the year unless some miraculous thing happened. A year's growth is *good* because it's a *year*. And there is a reason why that child came in at first grade level; it is that they aren't equipped the same as everybody else? Probably. Maybe it was because of a poor teacher, but if it was just a poor teacher, then a kid could probably make up to grade level. That whole business of everybody [at a certain level,] people are not all the same, they don't have the same ability to learn with their gray matter. All kids making progress, yes, but having all kids at a certain level by a certain time, no. No Child Left Behind was stupid, stupid, and it was so poorly funded. To say we are going to do it is one thing, but to say we are going to do it and then not giving any funds towards accomplishing it is another.

Julia did not believe it was important for all students to be working on mandated standards and benchmarks.

If a person is mentally disabled, expecting every kid in the class to go through all the same *work*, that's stupid, because if the purpose is just that they get it done, and they don't understand, that's not very valuable. And there are teachers that do that, "This is second grade, this is second grade work, and you are going to do it." No! That work is meaningless for that kid. It would be a lot more meaningful to have him working on something on his level, which is going to keep him moving up as far as he can educationally. But to put everybody through the same work is dumb.

### Cooperative Learning

One of the changes in education that has been written about extensively is cooperative learning. Julia eventually brought this topic up during the final interview, which took place after the participant meeting. While cooperative learning was not uppermost in her mind when she thought of changes that had taken place during her career, Julia did use it in her classroom. Julia described how she implemented cooperative learning and how some students reacted:

Working on science discovery, [for example,] or even just having kids of different levels read together, where one can support the other one and that sort of thing, but you have to have somebody that's willing to be patient with that other [student]. You can hear them saying [to their partners the same] prompts that you use. Some kids are just amazing; they're just naturals. They will probably end up being teachers some day.

### Implementation of Changes

When I asked how other changes were introduced and implemented (Julia had already told me about the implementation of guided reading at Chens), for example, with technology, Julia informed me that often, professional development sessions were teachers' first exposure to changes.

Usually, meetings [were held] about the computer or technology; if you used it a lot, you would have this particular section to learn about it or if you didn't know much about it you'd go [to a different session]. It didn't always really help you because you didn't have time to *practice* it. That's still true, you are expected to do [new strategies or use new technology] and you don't always have time to get a good handle on it because you don't have the time to practice.

This quote illustrated that there was some differentiation for teachers with their professional development in the Prairie Crossing School District, at least with technology-related changes. It also indicated that adequate opportunities to practice what was learned in the sessions were not provided. I asked what Julia did if she had questions about the changes that had been implemented; her response was, "There wasn't a lot of leeway. You were told in so many words that's what you have to do." Additionally, she said,

[If a change didn't work for you,] I don't think you really had any options. You just had to keep on trying to make it work, although I think what happens is people, at least some of them, just don't do it. I can think of a high school teacher, and this person's a good teacher; he said, "I just can't teach that way because every year is different, and my kids are different, and this year I might do this way and next year I might do that way." Maybe if that guy had a heart attack and died, somebody else might come in and there would be nothing there for them [to follow]. If it wasn't written down, to me that's a problem. Like I said, this guy's a good teacher, but he just didn't really want to do it the way we were being told that we had to do it.

Julia's report of her conversation with the high school teacher was an example of a mandated change that was at the policy and teacher discourse level but was not implemented in her colleague's classroom.

### Retirement

Julia shared the main reason she decided to retire:

Teaching is a wonderful, wonderful profession. I loved so many aspects of it, but I just got overwhelmed, overwhelmed by all the stuff I had to do.



Overwhelmed. Overwhelmed. That's probably one of the reasons I retired. It was to the point where [I thought,], "How can you get it all *done*?" Plus it seemed like we were required to do stuff in our district that a lot of other people weren't having to do, and maybe that's wrong, maybe [my perception is] incorrect.

When you talked to other people in other districts and asked, "Do you have to do this, do you have to do that?" [and they said,] "No, we don't have to do this or that." It's like somebody here really likes the paper trail, and so we had to do more of it than was required by other districts,

As I sat in Julia's kitchen one final time, the phone rang at least six times during our interview.

I'm really happy with where I'm at in life, really happy. I'll come home some days and look at the [answering] machine and see no messages. Then other days, I mean today is like, whoa! It's all stuff that people want me to do. People want your time. And the people who are bored [after they retire], there's no reason to be bored. I think [I do a lot] probably because my mom and dad [volunteered,] that is the example that I saw, and every time it was involvement in community service.

#### Recommendations

Julia shared several recommendations for teachers who are just entering the profession and ways to keep good teachers in the profession.

One thing to tell people getting into teaching is ask for help, talk to people, get support. Don't be afraid to say "I don't know what to do with them" because a lot of times the people that are experienced have [ideas that can help]. I do think it's also a lot more okay to ask for help now. I don't know why I didn't feel like I could do that [when I first started teaching,] because I think there were people there that probably would have helped me; but, oh, I just will never forget [how I felt].

Julia expressed concern with the rate at which good teachers leave the profession.

We really do need good teachers. I think that we have lost so many because it doesn't pay as much [as some other professions] and it is so much harder. I just talked to a gal, Ms. B. We were at the dinner theater working together the one night. She said her sister went to school to be a teacher, too, and she said now her sister is working for [a large company] and she's making all this money and doesn't have nearly the stress and the work load that Ms. B has. She said, "It is really hard; I just have to let that go." I'm sure it is really hard, because Ms. B is

the kind of person who is very dedicated; she was also working on her Masters degree in her first year of her job with us. She had [classes for her Masters] *and* a really rough class. It is scary [to think] that people are going to leave [teaching] because there is such a need for good teachers, but I can certainly understand.

She again recalled that during her first five years, she would have left the profession if there had been anything else she thought she could have done instead.

When I asked Julia what could be done to alleviate the workload of teachers, she responded:

[Keep] associates. Having people that can help you, whether it be [working with the] kids or cutting [pieces for a project]. We were lucky because we have a really good volunteer system in place. A volunteer cannot come in [to a class] and take over generally, although I get to do that when I volunteer. I go in during the guided reading group time. I am in charge of everybody the teacher is [not reading with] in the room. I had [a similar arrangement] for years and I think that that is so much better than trying to teach this small group and trying to manage [the rest of the class, too]. Now I am the one that manages [most of the class]; I read them a story and then they have a paper to do and then they go to their centers. I think every [teacher] could have somebody like that in her room all day long and make use of [the help]. When I had a one-on-one associate, with a special ed kid, if I wasn't right there, she could lean over and say, "Steve, what are you supposed to be doing?"

It is so nice to have somebody that you "click with" in your room to help. There was one year that I ran into a parent that volunteered at school in other rooms and she said, "How are you doing?" and I said, "I'm ready to lose my mind." She came in, and just having her be in there helped me so much. For one thing, she could lighten me up a little bit and when she saw [a student] going off or whatever, she could deal with it because I had a hard time; once I got upset, it was difficult to get back to normal.

The topic of having paraeducators available to provide additional support in the general education classroom was also brought up in the participant meeting; additional information on this topic is presented in the next chapter.

### Summary

Julia spoke of changes the other three participants had not mentioned. Five she discussed during the interviews were Reading Recovery, grading, inservices and professional development, and cooperative learning. Her experience as a reading teacher may have been one reason that contributed to her unique perspective. Clearly, Julia felt strongly that teachers need to do more than deliver the curriculum; they also need to care for and nurture their students, and teach ideas and skills that had traditionally been taught in the home in the past. Despite reporting a love for her profession, she spoke several times of the overwhelming nature of her career.

## CHAPTER 9

## THE PARTICIPANT MEETING

As evidenced in the four preceding data chapters, Charli, Florence, Jane, and Julia had much information to share during their individual interviews about changes they had experienced and they also commented about special education. When the four retired teachers were seated around the dining room table at my home (see Figure 1) on the day after Barack Obama was inaugurated as President of the United States, I looked at the four women and marveled at their combined 123 years of teaching experience; each had taught between 25 and 34 years. After introductions had occurred, they responded in turn to my opening comment, “All of you seemed to say, ‘I don’t know what interesting or important things I would have to say.’ Tell me about that. Why is it that you don’t think you have anything interesting or important to say about your lives as teachers?”

Jane responded that she viewed herself as “just an average worker,” and as she said this, I silently noted that she had many interesting, valuable experiences to share during our one-on-one time together about special education and other changes throughout her tenure. Julia stated, “You’re so busy when you’re teaching, a secondary thing is to think about is when things happened. So that was my big concern, could I remember enough about when things happened and what they were exactly?” What came to mind as she said this was that when Julia and I were conducting interviews in her kitchen, she remembered quite a bit about the many changes that occurred during her teaching career. Charli said, “I wasn’t sure I would have information or experiences that were interesting in regard to special education,” yet she had told me of a reading software

package that had particularly been a benefit for students who received special education services. Florence's reply was,

I never did teach in a resource room or anything to keep track of laws that were passed that specifically dealt with handicapped children. At different teachers' meetings, we were made aware of the things we needed to be extra careful about: confidentiality, including people with special needs more in our classroom...we were told that would be part of the process.

I wondered if I was really hearing her words, because during an interview she had already shared with me the powerful story of Jeff's successful inclusion in her Kindergarten classroom. In many ways, these four women saw their work as unrelated to special education.

In this chapter, data from the participant meeting and information that related to topics discussed in the participant meeting from the final interviews with each participant are presented. The data from these sources are additional pieces to the jigsaw puzzle. Regardless of the participants' disclosed uncertainty of the value of their input during the opening discussion, many important topics were discussed during the meeting; some that had been discussed during the individual interviews and some that had not. Information gathered during this joint session, in addition to related insights the participants shared during the final individual interviews, was organized by whether or not the theme had been discussed in interviews prior to the participant meeting. In addition, the data are primarily presented in the order of discussion while the group was at my home. The majority of the topics discussed in the participant meeting had been covered in at least one participant's individual interview prior to the gathering.

Participant Meeting Topics That Had Been Discussed During Individual Interviews

Charli, Florence, Jane, and Julia spent time at the participant meeting discussing many topics, including special education, the process to determine student eligibility for special education, paraeducators, and rewards. Other topics that are presented are NCLB, testing, looping, differentiated instruction, and support for novice teachers.

Special Education

Special education was discussed at some level by each of the participants in the individual interviews. Jane started the first interview by asking me to refresh her memory about special education law and seemed to discuss topics related to special education more than the other participants. This may have been because she had earned her Master's degree in "Learning Disabilities," or because she was aware that special education was a primary interest for me. Topics discussed in the participant meeting related to special education included impact of the Education for All Handicapped Children Act, paraeducators and volunteers, rewards, full inclusion, and identification processes to determine student eligibility for special education services.

I introduced the first conversation starter once Charli, Florence, Jane, Julia, and I were situated at my dining room table (See Figure 1), introductions had taken place, and they each had explained why they were initially unsure of their ability to contribute to this project.

Janine      I was thinking about change from my perspective, of course I wasn't there, but I was thinking, that law changed in 1975, and they said all kids had to go to school; that must have been a big change for people, and maybe it wasn't for you.

Charli      Well, I think we're too young. (Laughter)

- Jane Most kids were already in school. The big change was when they started integrating them more into the regular classroom. My experience as I remember was all of a sudden they're there and not for a while, for a few years, did we get real guidance or help. Maybe had an associate who was an untrained person being overseen by a trained person or sometimes, like the learning disability changed from pulling them out into a private room to going in and helping the child within the room; not pulling them out as much but coming in and trying, maybe helping other children and not point out this one child as being [disabled], and putting labels on.
- Charli I haven't done a lot of subbing but I have subbed in the resource room and I have followed two little junior high students. Some of the day they are in the resource room and some of the day they're in the classroom; but Jane, the comment you made about not singling them out - they just hate it, they just hate it because everyone in the classroom knows that the resource aide, the person I sub for, is there for the two of them. They don't want to acknowledge you, they won't look at you, they won't ask you for a question. And I think, well what am I doing here? It's social studies, and I don't know that the teacher knows exactly how to use the aide. He's certainly come up with some good strategies. He gives the aide the answers to a quiz and then in the afternoon, you can go over the quiz with them. It just seems like I'm standing out and pointing out that these two kids need help even more and I'm not sure what I'm doing in that room to help them.
- Julia It seems like something hasn't been done that should be done.
- Charli Right. There's a missing link. There's a link in there.
- Julia So that they could receive your help but you could also help other kids. I think ideally that's how it should be. Yes, you want to help them but you aren't *just* helping them, you're helping whoever needs help so they don't stand out. It seems like something hasn't been done that needed to be done.
- Charli It's in the science class, too. So these two are in the regular classroom at least for those, I don't know about the rest of their day
- Julia Do they act the same way in that?
- Charli Yes.

- Julia        Probably the age that they are is a big part of it. Sometimes when they're younger they
- Charli       They don't, you're just there, you're part of it.
- Julia        And they accept the help and maybe even get a little dependent on the help but I was just thinking, I've seen both extremes. I've seen where the kids are all in a room with the teacher and maybe an aide or two and they're getting everything in there. Then I've seen the other extreme where all of a sudden, boomp, they're dropped in your classroom like out of the sky you have no clue as to really know how to help them and the time, and if they're really serious, they might have an associate with them. That, for the most part, has been a really good experience for me because I had associates that I felt real comfortable with and that worked better. But the kids that weren't severe enough to have that associate were there and a lot of times you spent all of your time trying to help that kid or a lot of your time trying to help that kid. It was very, very hard and it was hard not to be resentful that here I've got this kid that I'm supposed to have in my room but I've got all these others that you can't really help because you have to do so much for this one. I remember years ago, a principal said to me, "You know it's going to get to the point where it's more like the normal kids are mainstreamed into the special kids." Toward the end of my teaching it was starting to feel that way. There were so many kids that had problems and maybe they weren't identified but it just got to be harder and harder.

The conversation about special education continued, with a segue to rewards given to students who received special education services.

Rewards given to students who received special education services. Jane mentioned in her individual interviews that students who went to a resource room to receive special education assistance would sometimes get what others who remained in the general education setting would not. These rewards could be problematic, as indicated by the continuing conversation during the participant meeting:

- Florence    As far as the attitude for lower elementary children, where we were, services were not really offered very easily for Kindergarten age [students]. We didn't get much help at all there. I would say in the



primary grades like first through third or so, I think a lot of the time the children came back elated from leaving their room because the teachers that were working with them in special classrooms would reward them for their good work and their time spent there, so they'd come back with fancy pencils and maybe a little candy bar and so it got to be where everybody wanted to go to special ed and come back with treats. I didn't feel like in the primary grades children really resented spending time in a different setting. I don't see them having the feelings of being separated so much.

- Julia           Stigma in junior high is so
- Florence       In junior high they are very conscientious of what everybody thinks of them and being different, possibly, but, did you see it that way?
- Jane            Yes, the kids wanted to go because of the prizes. I just would meet the kids at the door on one of the first days – fortunately, the coats were hanging outside the classroom – and say, if you get something, you put it in your backpack and that's where it stays, okay? Because the other kids want to also have the rewards and they wanted to go so they could get these *neat things*. The [students who went to special education] would come back at Christmas with these big presents and the other kids didn't get it and they really did resent that.

Florence referred to this exchange in her final interview:

Like we were saying, a lot of my students wanted to go for special help just because little treats were given. Everybody wanted to go because they heard it was a wonderful, fun thing and they got a little, fun treat, so I never saw that they were pulled out of the room to be a big problem. Everybody likes individual attention.

Full inclusion. At one point, the group was discussing full inclusion. Charli stated, “the underlying philosophical assumption is the best position for the student is in the regular classroom. You've got to go all the way back to that first philosophical assumption and see if research supports it and you agree with it.” While she articulated that philosophy, she was not convinced that the general education setting was the least

restrictive environment for all students, even after Florence described her positive experience with full inclusion.

As she had shared with me in our individual interview, Florence also related her experience with Jeff to the group. He was the boy who received special education services, was designated “Level 2,” and was included in her Kindergarten classroom one year with paraeducator support.

Florence In my little individual interview earlier, I shared two views, and so it can be looked at both ways. One is the viewpoint of a relative of mine that had a Down Syndrome child and then I shared an experience of a student that had severe learning disabilities that ended up in my classroom and we were amazed at what he could do. You just don’t know what potential is there.

Julia There’s not one answer.

Florence There isn’t. You can’t just make a blanket statement.

Charli This is what the Federal Government wants to do.

Julia Make everybody the same.

Jane To me these kids that are behind –

Florence It’s important to give them the chance.

Jane ...lack the coordination, too, so they’re the last one picked for every game.

Florence Well, but still.

Jane Yes, from my experience, too many of them were the last one and it’s another defeat.

Charli Then you don’t set it up so they’re picking teams. You manage the class; you don’t set it up that way. You put the blue eyes and the brown eyes [on teams]; or if you have red on you’re on this team, if you have blue on today you’re on this team, but you don’t let kids pick teams.

Florence Every other person.

Charli Every other person, or if your birthday's in January to June you're on this team, if your birthday's in July to December you're on this team. *Anything* but letting the kids; even in high school, don't let them pick teams.

Janine Florence, you make a really interesting point. Children need to be given the chance and sometimes we make some assumptions based on a label that a student has. The situation you were talking about was successful because the support was there.

Julia It might not have been successful if you hadn't had the attitude you had and done what you did with it.

Charli And how much time it took from you.

Florence It was really rewarding for me.

Florence brought up this exchange during her final individual interview:

One thing I was going to say, I felt kind of bad about when I started to share about Jeff in my classroom. I told you a lot more than I told the group; I didn't want to sound like somebody who was bragging about what she'd done with a student. Just after I'd shared a little bit about "well you never know what's possible unless you let these children come in the room and work with them," someone said, "But it took a lot of your time." I don't know what the exact thing was, a lot of work, and I think I came up with some stupid thing, I don't even remember what I said, but [it was something like] "I guess that's why I'm a teacher."

That's my job was what I meant to say, but I said something about the rewards. I meant that, too. It was kind of an awkward thing to talk about. I get the feeling that everybody in the room was for taking those children out of the room, so I felt like I was the only one in the room that was for [inclusion]. Yet I didn't want them to think, "She's blowing her horn here, she thinks she's done something great," so it was kind of awkward.

At that point in the interview, I interjected empathetically:

[At that time in the meeting,] I was thinking, "Hooray for Florence for speaking up here." Unfortunately, in a lot of instances, until someone knows first-hand how it can be done, they don't necessarily have the vision... Often people are used to thinking what their experience has been and they can't necessarily envision a

different way; [they think,] “well, it’s always been done that way and that’s okay.”

Florence continued:

Or see that it can be done a different way. Or it can be good, you just don’t know what you can do with a child. Okay, in the car on the way home [from the participant meeting], Charli was talking. I am going to tell you why I feel this way. She goes in [as a substitute] and works with a boy in junior high and she said he can’t even copy a sentence from the board. She said, “Can you imagine the frustration of that child having to go through the day when he can do next to nothing? I think he should be in a special class where they can work with him. I feel my whole day is wasted as a sub to go around with him.”

I think the person who is normally with him just writes it for him. And she said, “What good is that? He hasn’t written it.” I don’t know, I guess unless you work with a child, it’s hard for me to even comment on it because I don’t know what’s been tried.

[With Jeff,] I just saw the parents wanting him to have the chance and I thought, okay, I’ll just try it. Not that it’s anything great, but, I mean, (paused) it could be something as simple, too, as maybe [the student’s and teacher’s] personalities mesh. Maybe it’s not that you’re doing anything more or different than anyone else would do. Who knows what it is? Well, maybe it is nice to have more than one teacher per grade so that you do have a chance for children to have different circumstances for learning with different teaching styles and attitudes. [For students who aren’t successful in school,] we haven’t found the key for them.

I was just going to tell you it was kind of uncomfortable because I knew the other people at the table were thinking, “Get them out.” And in all honesty, it made me a little upset (laughed) because they don’t think like I do. That’s pretty bad.

I explained that at times when people disagree with my position on various topics, I try not to judge since I am not aware of their previous experiences and instead hope that by sharing my perspective, they may see another way to look at the issue and change their position. Florence responded, “I guess I can think of it that way, then, but I just thought, ‘Can’t you just give them the chance?’ Yeah. Okay, I see that now.”

Florence’s discussion with the group was an important real-life illustration of the theoretical debate about full inclusion. When Florence described Jeff in the individual

interview, she said that she “never worked with anyone more severe than he was,” yet she stated during the group meeting that Jeff had a learning disability, which may have implied that his difference was less substantial. Possibly without intending to, Florence, in her quiet way, taught the others about her perspective on inclusion and demonstrated that inclusion can work to the benefit of all involved.

Paraeducators and volunteers. The topic of paraeducators and volunteers entered the discussion several times as the conversation continued around the table. The participants frequently referred to paraeducators as *associates* or *aides* when referring to these support staff members; this illustrates a shift in job titles that had occurred over the years. Jane mentioned in one interview that referring to them as *aides* discontinued after society more commonly began to talk about the acquired immune deficiency syndrome (AIDS) epidemic. In this excerpt, the valuable role of paraeducators was illustrated; also, while volunteers provide valuable service, they should not be viewed as an alternative for trained paraeducators:

- |        |   |
|--------|---|
| Jane   | The other thing that I like that I’ve seen now that I’ve been subbing is in Eagle River, they have one associate for every classroom. Therefore, she’s always in the classroom and yes she’s there for probably for one or two students and she spends a lot of time with them, but also she helps everybody else and has other jobs like Reading Naturally or something like that. She’s the one that sits and listens or if they have any questions during reading time, she’s the one that takes care [of them], which I think is a nice move. |
| Julia  | How wonderful to have. Wow. Because we never had that, but I would have volunteers that would work in that capacity a lot of times, especially during guided reading time. They would come in and answer the questions and that sort of thing. That’s a lot better.   |
| Charli | But preparing for volunteers is hard, too. It takes time to get ready   |

for the volunteers.

Florence You can't always count on them.

Julia To train them and all that sort of thing. Some people are better at it and are more reliable than others. I was lucky because I had a retired teacher that was an excellent teacher and she came in; actually I had two retired teachers that came in, and they supervised the centers while I taught guided reading. That really helped a lot.

Florence I think early childhood money is funding a lot of that so I did have a wonderful aide in Kindergarten that initially she was hired to help with a severely, um

Julia Disabled

Florence handicapped, disabled (chuckled) student and so that was how I was able to initially get [the paraeducator] in my room. She just ended up going along with him through a couple of grades and then wanted to return to Kindergarten after she decided she was ready for a change. So that is wonderful, like you say, to have one other person in the room. So many times, [the students] need, there are distractions, especially if you are young and then if you have a disability that you might not be able to concentrate very well with many things going on around you. I think that's basically why a lot of children were brought to another room; where it was a quieter setting, where there weren't things to distract them, and you could work pretty much one-on-one with a child. They felt they were getting the support in their learning and encouragement immediately, whereas a teacher would have 20 to 25 students that you need to share the time with, with them speaking then encouraging them with positive responses for their answers. They were getting immediate feedback for their answers and felt good about it in a setting away from the classroom. Because aides aren't (hesitated).

Florence was not able to complete her sentence, because her hesitation provided an opportunity for another participant to begin discussing identification of children who need special education services in Kindergarten.

Processes to determine student eligibility for special education services. Julia, Jane, and Charli discussed the process by which students were identified to receive special education services.

Julia I think you're right about kindergarten, though. A lot of times kindergarten kids weren't identified because you had to have that

Jane So many years

Julia range, right, to prove that they really needed it. A lot of times (chuckled), they'd come to first grade and it was already really obvious that they weren't getting it. Sometimes the process takes so long to get a kid help that you just think, "If we could just be more proactive" but I don't know how you do that. That definitely is a problem, that they can't get the extra help until they fail, basically. A lot of times as a teacher you could see in kindergarten or first grade that this child really needed it and it's too bad that we have to wait until they get so far behind before we can do anything to help them.

Charli I thought some of the situations as I think back over kids that we were setting them up for failure. I think the legislation and the recommendations were such that before we even put them into place I said well, that child can't do it and we know it and why are we doing this? When we're just setting this child up to say one more time, "You're a dummy and you can't do this, you don't know this." Same thing with the testing. To say before they go into it, they're going to do poorly and then yep, you did poorly. You don't know this stuff. What a ridiculous waste of everybody's time. And how far back have we set some of these kids? I felt with some of the individuals that taking them out of the class and working with them individually, they saw progress. And I thought some of the times when we were trying our hardest to put them into the classroom, we were really setting them up for failure.

Janine Was it because there wasn't the needed support within that classroom, and what do you think would?

Charli They were so far behind, their skill level, the difference was so great, it must not have been great enough to keep them in the resource room (laughed). There was no way in the world that they could do the work that we were doing.

- Janine        So what if you had the one-on-one kind of assistance in the classroom. Would that work?
- Charli        If I certainly had it all the time. I mean
- Julia         Not if they were that far behind. No.
- Charli        In a high school it's so different. I have got to cover content, too. I am supposed to do so much of this, so much of that.
- Jane         I still think we need some classrooms for those kids that are *way* behind, because they're getting constant help and they have to go in. They don't fit in with the other kids, because they're not able to do anything because maybe they're in fourth grade but they're working at a first grade level; well, how can they possibly?
- Charli        The research shows if they're more than two years behind that you're never going to catch them up in the regular class

Charli did not share the author(s), title(s), or journal(s) of the research she had read and reported that found children would not catch up to peers in the general education setting. However, Charli did agree that if a paraeducator was in the classroom for support all of the time, her students could possibly keep up with the amount of content she was expected to cover.

In another portion of the meeting, I asked if the participants were asked to conduct and document interventions with students in the general education setting, in accordance with Iowa's response to intervention model. By nodding her head, Julia indicated that she had been required to document intervention results for students in her classroom, so I asked her when.

- Julia        I know it wasn't in my first five years of teaching. Then I started classroom teaching in 1981. It seems like [we started doing interventions] maybe in the 1990s, I don't know. You had to prove that you tried this, and this, and this, and this and this and *then* you



might get some help, maybe. (chuckled)

Jane Did any of you have what we called TAT? Teachers assisting teachers. Teams. And you had a group of teachers and if you had a problem student, you'd write up what you had done and it had to be taken to that group and they would *try* then to think of *other* ways you could help this child and you had to go through so many steps. But that kind of died by the wayside, that didn't last real long.

Julia We had that, too. I can remember.

Jane I think a lot of it came because things changed and a lot of this probably came because AEA [consultants] demanded it: we're not going to come in just because you say you want us to see this child, or we're not going to come in and start testing until you've done this, this, and this. I'm not sure when that happened but that's when we really, and even the last years as you taught longer, the last years, [it] was emphasized; you had to keep track of every time you contacted the parents and what happened and if they responded and if you sent home a note and you just had to keep a regular diary, practically, of what you did.

Florence I kind of remember that time period as maybe like the year 2000 or sort of around there when it started

Jane Heavier

Florence More for me. And we had teacher assistance teams going around that time also. And it seemed like some of those meetings just lasted very, very long.

Janine Did you have anything like that at the high school, Charli?

Charli No. but when the child was in trouble, what did they call that? I know the teachers would come together and it wasn't to help the teacher but in reality it was.

Julia When you say the kid was in trouble, was it academically?

Charli Yes, yes. And then you would come up with strategies to, but it would be just the teachers that had [that student in class]. So it wasn't a team that was in place, but what did they, it had an acronym.

- Florence Was it STAT?
- Charli Student assistance team. It wasn't teacher assistance, it was student assistance. That's what it was.
- Janine And that was something you did more toward the end of your career or all the way through?
- Charli No. Just the last. In fact, not even the last couple of years, it was five, ten years ago.
- Florence Yes.
- Janine Was that something you continued to do [until you retired]?
- Charli Yes, because you could ask for one at any time. So if I'm an English teacher said I'm really concerned about so and so, then the principal said we'll call in all those teachers who had that student. There was good discussion of what was working in other classrooms: does he work with another person? Does he work well with praise? Does he work well with the assignment cut in half?
- Janine I'm curious; when were those meetings?
- Charli Before and after school. A lot of times before school because we had so many coaches.
- Janine One of the reasons I asked that was [related to] time, because everybody said time was a concern.
- Julia There was never enough of it. (Everyone laughed.) It wasn't good to have a meeting before school because you were so nervous, thinking about getting ready for school. Then by the end of the day, if you had a meeting you were so pooped out you couldn't think straight so (chuckled) I don't know. That was always hard.
- Jane Yeah, because I think when we had meetings before school, they would last; the kids might even beat you in the room. I always felt I was behind already. I couldn't be there to meet my class and say morning, help them or anything. It was kind of like (sharp intake of breath) "I'm already behind and now what am I going to do?" and just could never get caught up again, but when else were you going to do it? Especially with this Reading First and No Child

Left Behind; those meetings were all after school because at that time we [the two districts] were not merged, we were only [grade] sharing.

Charli      Ours were always before school because of all the coaching conflicts.

While none of the participants had mentioned responsibility for interventions in detail during their individual interviews, the topic surfaced when the four were together. It was apparent that Julia, Jane, and Charli believed the general education interventions and the identification process were of a “wait to fail” nature, rather than an attempt to identify strategies and supports that helped a child be academically, emotionally, socially, and behaviorally successful in the general education classroom and to avoid incorrectly identifying a student to be eligible to receive special education services. They described it as a series of steps to go through prior to being able to get help for the teacher and the student involved.

The teachers encountered challenges in scheduling the meetings to discuss students who were having difficulty in their classrooms. Jane cited other required meetings as barriers to scheduling the meetings, and Charli shared that meeting times were limited due to the coaching responsibilities of some of her colleagues.

It was also notable that Florence was not part of the discussion; this may have been because she did not have anything more to contribute at that point, or possibly because she was not able to find an opening in the conversation when she could express her point of view on the identification process.

No Child Left Behind (NCLB)

The discussion turned to NCLB and the requirement for all students to perform at a proficient level by the year 2014. Part of the conversation involved ways to help students increase skills, such as the Reading First Program and teachers completing coursework in special education during their teacher preparation programs.

Julia        The whole premise of No Child Left Behind I just think is so laughable to think you can get every kid up to grade level. There's no way that you're ever going to be able to do that.

Jane         It's never happened.

Julia        And a third grade teacher who I think is an excellent teacher in Prairie Crossing said if she gets a kid and she can get that kid a year of growth during the year she has them, she feels good. And I think, yes, that's wonderful. But if this kid comes in and they're in third grade and they're at first grade level and you think you're going to take them from first grade level to third grade level, *forget it*. Plus, you know, the whole No Child Left Behind thing was so underfunded that it's laughable. That people in the political arena thought that they could mandate that. Crazy.

Jane        I am also wondering, I talk to a lot of new teachers who are just coming out of college and they are taking some special ed classes and I'm wondering if that better prepares [them]. [Recently,] I was in a classroom with a teacher that was just starting to teach. I don't know if she took any of these classes, but she really didn't know what to do with this kid, either. She didn't know how to adjust or didn't have time.

I'm guessing our school district was a little bit different than the others in that we were right away identified as a school in need. Let me tell you, the money poured in there. It was nice because we updated our library, we got a new reading series, we had books in our rooms galore.

Julia        So you could fix those kids that weren't

Jane        No, I don't know that we necessarily fixed them, but one nice thing is, those kids wanted to read that stuff, it was there for them. Like the gifted and some of those we neglected even though they're

basically special ed (Charli laughed). There were a lot of kids that wanted to know this animal or that animal or had a real interest and you could meet that interest better [with the new books we got through the grant.]

Charli So did you get off the school in need of assistance list?

Jane Well, we lost the grant.

Charli You lost the money. (laughed)

Jane Well, we had it for two or three years. And it was very nice, because we got paid to go out of the classroom and do testing. We got paid to take the training. We got paid to stay after school and work to get things [done], because when you get the read alouds and think alouds. I don't know if you any of you were in on that stuff.

Julia Oh yes.

Charli Even at the high school.

Jane The final thing that pushed me into retiring was all that bookwork. You had to fill out three forms every time you did one of those things [read alouds, think alouds, and talk alouds]. And it was the bookwork that you couldn't keep up on, which was the idea of staying after school and finding the material you needed to teach the skill you were trying to teach. I really think kids responded fairly positively to that.

Charli Sounds like that funding should have been for everybody.

Julia Oh yes.

Charli When you say it [NCLB] was underfunded, that's the kind of stuff we thought we would all be getting.

Jane [The AEA] was very good about helping to get the grant written, and yes the kids did show overall improvement. The only thing is, you know, we gave the same test, the same form, beginning and end of the year and by the time you got to fifth or sixth grade, if you started in Kindergarten or first grade, you [would] read some of those stories umpteen times. We thought a lot of the questions, shoot anybody would know that; it wasn't necessarily from that story. But they had read these same stories over and over and over again.

- Julia        That seems faulty.
- Jane        Yes, because there are other forms.
- Charli      That has probably changed now.
- Jane        Yes, because they've lost the funding; they can't afford [it]. Every teacher was given two and a half days to do all the testing and subs were put in the classroom, but now they've lost that. They have gone to DIBELS (Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills) which I think South River Falls uses.

Jane described the Reading First Program, which was implemented because Eagle View was identified as a school in need of assistance (SINA), which is another way to refer to "school improvement status" as written in NCLB (2002). None of the other three teachers taught in schools that were identified with this status, but still they identified as using the think aloud, read aloud, and talk aloud strategies. While others stated the premise of having all children achieve at a proficient level was faulty, which implied a negative response to NCLB, Jane's perspective was that Reading First had a positive impact, in that it provided the school with additional books that were engaging students. It also provided funding for teachers to be trained and to prepare for lessons and complete the excessive paperwork was required for the program. Jane did not directly respond to Charli's question; instead of stating the school remained or was no longer on the school in need of assistance list, she stated that the funding for the Reading First program did not continue.

Again, Florence's voice was absent during this portion of the conversation.

### Teacher Preparation and Support for Novice Teachers

The conversation revisited a topic that the participants had described to me during the individual interviews, their teacher preparation programs. In addition, the teachers discussed the need for ongoing support for educators just entering the field to assure retention of high-quality teachers.

- Julia I'm glad that kids that are in education now are hopefully getting a better education than [we did] before they become teachers. I wish that we all, that everybody had that support because teachers just work so hard to do their jobs. I know that in every district you have a few people that don't [work hard], but for the most part I think teachers work so hard and are not compensated nearly what they should be for the amount of time they put in doing it.
- Charli And not enough support. like you were saying; the early teacher not having enough time. I can remember my first couple of years of teaching, being there until 5 or 6 every night just getting ready for the next day, much less [dealing with] any special needs or special problems. You're scared to death. You don't have the volumes of stuff we threw [away] (laughed) when we retired. You were just trying to stay with your head above water.
- Jane Survive.
- Julia I remember, it might have been the second year that I taught second grade in the district where I was, and I remember I'd go in practically at 6 o'clock in the morning, but you know, I didn't know what to do when I got there. And I was afraid. I'm glad that [the profession] is more open to mentoring and that sort of thing because I was afraid to say, "I don't know what to do with these kids."
- Charli Yes.
- Julia And I don't know if the gal before me took [all her materials] with her or if she was a veteran teacher so she had so much up in her head that she knew what to do with them, but I didn't know what to do with them. And I remember thinking, if there's anything I could do to quit and get out of this, I would. But I knew I couldn't.

- Charli But the statistics show the kids are just leaving in droves from education.
- Julia And why wouldn't they?
- Charli They've spent all that time and all that money to get
- Julia When it's so hard, why wouldn't you?
- Charli Ohhh, Yes.
- Julia To be compensated more, better, and do something easier.
- Jane Don't you think every teacher needs to, as if we need more classes, (Charli laughed) every teacher but especially the [new] teachers coming out in the field should have to take a class, "How do I change and adapt?" Obviously, at least I haven't been back to college to know how to adjust.
- Julia My daughter is at UNI and she just decided over Thanksgiving vacation that she's going to be an elementary teacher. I know I have thought, oh, you have the personality for it, you're so caring, you like kids, but when she told me, I kind of had a sick feeling in my stomach because I thought, "What are you setting yourself up for?" When people would say they want to go into education, if I ever said anything negative, my husband would get angry with me that I would discourage them, but I know how hard it is and I'm kind of concerned about the fact that she's going into it but I do hope and pray that she's getting better prepared, that she's being compensated better. I did see in the paper recently that Iowa [raised] salaries a little bit.
- Charli [Up] eight positions.
- Jane Really?
- Julia That's wonderful. I hope that [they learn] all the technical stuff, you know the computers. I'm not a computer person and it got to the point where towards the end, we had to do our grades on the computer, and whatever program we had you didn't just go in and put in your input. We had a program where you put one thing here, you put one thing here, and then it merged. Half the time it didn't merge right and it was screwed up. I got to the point where all I cared about was getting my grades and my report cards done and I



didn't really care what they said because I was so relieved to have it done and that's *wrong*. I think it was a lot better back in the old days when I would sit and write it by hand. I know you have to use numbers with kids, as far as the older they get you have to keep track of their scores and that sort of thing, but as an elementary teacher, you know how they are doing even without numbers to back it up. All that business of having everything scored and numbered.

Charli      And now that's going to get worse.

Julia        Probably.

Charli      Because they're going to tie teachers' salaries to kids' test scores.

Julia        And that's just nuts.

Jane        You're going to teach to the test which destroys everything.

Julia        And there are already a lot of places that do that, but that's so goofy because how can you hold a teacher accountable? She doesn't get to pick the kids she has.

Charli      That's exactly right.

This exchange contained not only support for higher salaries for teachers and high-quality teacher preparation, especially in the area of technology, but also a recommendation for a class to help teachers adjust to the changes that are encountered during their careers. Julia, Charli, and Jane did not voice support for "pay for performance" methods that meant student test scores would be tied to teacher's pay increases.

### Standardized Assessment

One example of the conversation related to standardized assessment, or testing as they commonly referred to it, follows. In this section, Florence returned to the topic of time and described how funding limitations impacted their completion of a required

assessment with their students. This excerpt demonstrates that they implemented this required change, rather than the change stalling at the policy or teacher discourse level.

Florence Getting back to time...DIBELS testing. That's just a little time thing. To begin with, [we were shown] how to do the tests. The first couple of years, someone was hired to teach our class so we could give the test. What I hear now is no one is hired to teach; those teachers are expected to [give all the DIBELS tests] during recess.

Charli (Gasped)

Florence Recess is a...

Charli Restroom break? (laughed)

Florence Maybe bathroom, a little preparation, clean up and get ready for when the children come [back to the classroom]. But there's no one hired anymore. So there's a time element there.

Janine So there were increasing demands on the very limited time you had.

Julia That's right.

Florence It was only one day they hired someone to come in to give the tests. That was what the school required we do.

Janine Because the State required it.

Florence Yeah, and we did it. Now [my teaching partner] is doing it so they're having the aides manage the children while the teacher is giving the tests. And [the paraeducators] don't have degrees.

Charli And they have every [student] instead of two [adults] in the room.

Florence They have everybody minus one student. (Laughed.)

Charli Minus one student.

Janine So you used that DIBELS data? It wasn't that you just collected it?

Florence No, we did it.

Janine Do you think it would make more sense for the aides to do the DIBELS, or is it more helpful for the teachers? Would it make more sense because then the teachers actually heard what the students were saying and the errors that they were making?

Florence I think as a teacher you got a little better picture of where they were functioning also. You can look at test scores but you don't actually see how long [a student] struggled. (To Jane) You mentioned that when someone else does the test, you don't see the stress on their face (laughed).

Julia It seems better if the teacher would do it and they hire a sub for the classroom.

Florence That's the way it was initially set up.

Jane I know I used to put little notes in along the side, but actually I found the reading and answering the questions was less helpful to me. I can't think of what the other test was but we did one where they did the sounds and recognized the alphabet and all that. I could see exactly what sounds some kids were struggling with and I could kind of make a notation this child needs extra work in this sound. Then there were some the whole class did not know yet, one that I knew was coming [later in the curriculum]. I felt I got more out of that than actually sitting down and listening to them read and answer the questions. You got some [information], but I thought it was more valuable information with the sounds.

Florence I think ideally, it's best for the teacher to give the test.

Jane I do, too.

Both Florence and Jane reported that not only did they implement the assessment that was required, but also they used the information gained from these tests to make educational decisions. Budgetary constraints left teachers without substitutes to provide instruction to their classes so the required individual assessment could be completed during the course of a day; in order to conduct the assessments, they opted to either give

the tests to students during recess or to have the paraeducator provide coverage for the class while the teacher completed the assessments with the children individually.

The topic of large scale standardized assessment was reported in the excerpt immediately preceding this one; the consensus was that many in the profession may have been “teaching to the test” and that under a “pay for performance” system, many more teachers would resort to “teaching to the test” to increase students’ test scores; the participants seemed to agree that this would be detrimental to the students. Florence did not report her experience for one year in the 1970s when the small district she worked in tried a merit pay system; I do not know if she chose not to share the story or if she did not have the opportunity to interject her experience into the conversation.

### Looping

During her individual interview and also in the participant meeting, Charli brought up the practice of looping, where a teacher taught the same students two years in a row. Crossing grade boundaries and then school consolidation also entered the conversation at my home:

- Charli     What I was particularly excited about is maybe, if we don’t go to year round school, this whole idea of looping, that you stay with the kids. I couldn’t believe the difference. If I had them as freshman and sophomores, I couldn’t *believe* the difference. You know exactly where every kid is and you just start and they know you. It takes about a month for them to know you.
- Julia     We’ve got some people doing [looping at Prairie Crossing] and I think they really like it.
- Charli     It’s fabulous. It’s even stronger at the elementary level. I got, it was so terrific at the high school level, I can’t imagine what it would be like at the elementary.

Julia The only thing, I think it's kind of weird that they did this, I was talking to the mother of a little girl in one of these classes and she's the only one that wasn't in it last year, so she feels like they're talking a different language sometimes. I don't know why they would put one kid in [a class] like that. When I talk to the teacher sometime in the future, I'm going to [tell him] it might be good to put two or three [students] in so at least they have each other.

Charli I think that would be a solution to a lot of problems. Being able to go across grades, you know, they're not ready for seventh grade math but then that's it – you're in seventh grade math. You're not ready for eighth grade English, but what do we offer? Eighth grade English, so there you are.

Julia Do some of the schools in other countries do it more like that? I don't know if you call it tracking.

Florence There are schools in Minnesota that do that.

Julia You know it seems like that would be a good way to go.

Florence Well, to cross grade lines you'd have to get the parents on board, you'd have to get your administration on board and your staff. That's a big project to get all of them to agree.

Charli Buying into it.

Florence Buying into it, agreeing that that's what you want to do. And to me in the elementary, the reading is such a key element to everything that they do, the reading, all of the reading skills. I just see reading as being something that [would be an area where it would be beneficial to do cross-grade grouping]. You wouldn't have to tie up your whole day with kids shuffling from one room to another, but reading, or maybe reading and math if you could pull that off.

Charli In the high school, junior high, the bigger you are the easier it is to handle that problem because if you're huge, you have 29 eighth grade English classes. I think one of the problems as we've gotten smaller and smaller, in the junior high and high school level, is the terrific number of preps that teachers have now and no choice for the kids. That's almost, we have just reached the stage where it's almost criminal, that our high school

kids, there's not enough teachers, there aren't enough offerings. You know when you offer just the bare minimum, they have no choice.

Florence brought up a challenge related to crossing grade lines that applies to any change that is proposed: gaining the support of administration, staff, and parents. While this portion of the meeting began with a discussion of the benefits of looping, which was implemented as a result of declining enrollment, Charli's comment illustrated the consequences of declining enrollment at the secondary level: the limited course offerings and greater number of courses for each teacher to prepare and deliver. This piece of the puzzle may be viewed in either a positive or a negative way, and the same might be said for the other pieces presented so far.

### Differentiated Instruction

Differentiated instruction was brought into the conversation that took place around the dining room table. All of the participants agreed that there was a need for teachers to know how to differentiate instruction.

- Florence One teacher trying to meet everybody's needs.
- Janine So is it unrealistic that the educational system asks you to do that?
- ? Yes.
- Julia Well, it would not be unrealistic if we had help doing it, if they understood what we were doing and if we were paid halfway decently for what we do but I'd say none of that exists, unless maybe it does someplace, but...
- Janine From what I heard you say, none of you were taught how to do things differently for students in your teacher preparation.
- Julia I don't really remember it.

- Charli You have to remember how long ago our teacher preparation was (all laughed). We took history of education... (laughed)
- Jane I think that came more as inservice type activities probably 10, 15 years after I started teaching, I think that was something offered later as an inservice so you get hit one day and try to go back and do that, yeah, it sounds good but pllcch, again, I'm sorry, but *time* to get that set up just isn't there.
- Julia I really do hope that kids getting education to be teachers right now are having some of that kind of instruction so that they know what to do with kids that are at different levels within a [classroom], you know to individualize, or
- Charli Differentiated learning.
- Julia Yes, differentiated.
- Florence I think they are. In fact, a lot of materials that come from companies and textbooks give you suggestions for different, students that are achieving at a higher level or achieving at a lower level. There's some flexibility in the material.
- Charli The high school textbooks were.

During her final interview, Jane described how textbooks changed to help teachers differentiate instruction for students: "Books became [differentiated]. They would tell you that if you have a student who is interested in this area, have them do this. They offered different levels: there was a challenge level, there was a level for most of the kids, and there was a reteaching level for lower-level kids. But there wasn't always time to do that with every lesson." Even with textbooks providing suggestions for teachers to differentiate instruction for the diverse students in the classroom, Jane reported that there wasn't sufficient time for all lessons to be differentiated.

When I asked Jane why she had not spontaneously brought up differentiating instruction in her first two individual interviews, she replied:

Differentiation was mentioned to us, but it was more gradual. It wasn't totally new. It just didn't come to my mind right away.

Now I'm not sure there is a lot of that, but when I subbed in a new teachers' room, they were working with this child who was way behind. They said that she did not know how to adjust [the curriculum and her instruction to meet the student's needs]. You know, you just sort of do it. You got used to it. It just didn't seem like it. You realized that when all the kids were doing something, this child wasn't going to be able to do it. Once you got into kids fitting in certain places in academics, you just knew you were going to have to adjust for a specific [student]. It was common sense that you were going to adjust and make it different. And there were some kids that were interested in this or that, and you changed things a little bit for them, to meet their needs. I guess I didn't think of it as a whole program. It was just something that you did.

[There] was a push [to differentiate], and over the years I probably did become more aware of it. That's the way I look at some of these [changes]: you were kind of doing it all along, but maybe not to the extent you should be, so you became aware of it and tried to work that in more.

Jane's generalization of some of the changes experienced was that over time, a teacher gained skills or incorporated strategies and methods into her teaching without being fully aware of the changes.

During the meeting, the participants also discussed how time spent writing individual district standards and benchmarks could possibly have been better utilized, by furthering teachers' knowledge and skills so instruction could be differentiated for students instead. Julia responded to my question for clarification about the group's consensus that instead of developing standards and benchmarks at the district level and not having mandated statewide standards, it would have been a better use of teachers' time to participate in additional professional development on differentiated instruction. "Well, [teachers] have had some, but if you're a good teacher you know about it; maybe you don't call it differentiated instruction but you know this kid can't do such and such so



you fold the paper in half [and other strategies]. If you're worth your salt, you know how to do that in a lot of different ways.”

### Globalization

In the individual interviews, Charli brought up the series in the Des Moines Register that reported about education in other countries that are viewed to be in competition with the United States. Charli also brought this topic into the conversation during the participants' meeting.

- Charli     In Finland and Japan, the entire school week is organized around teacher preparation time. I think we have a lot to learn in our country.
- Julia       What do you mean?
- Charli     The whole week is organized around teacher preparation time.
- Janine     They have time each day?
- Charli     Yes. They meet in teams the very first thing in the morning. School doesn't start until a certain time because there's across the curriculum team meetings, there's built in time during the day where they have other people come in and they will take [over the teaching of] classes. But the staff is large enough, it's not like I'm taking Florence's class; it is this is the rotation from 2 o'clock. I mean the whole week is built around the amount of time that is taken for professional development. The Des Moines Register did a huge [series].
- Janine     On Finland? Did they do one on Japan?
- Charli     On Canada, too. They did huge stories on them. A whole different approach to education in other countries. Well, we could learn from [them]. So there are countries doing it and they are scoring better than we are.

In the context of global competition, I asked during the final interview with Julia, “What’s it going to take us to do to keep our schools staffed with quality people?” Julia replied,

[People here and in other countries] talk about that we’re doing it all wrong and we haven’t changed in I don’t know how many years. And I’m thinking, “What do we need to do differently?” I mean, I don’t [think education here is all bad.] There is a lot that is good. I think what’s changed a lot is the kids and the families. We can’t do it the way we were doing it because our population is different, society is so different as far as how families have changed. People don’t put enough importance on education and that’s too bad because the kids today are going to be the leaders tomorrow and boy when I look at some of the kids today, oooohhhh, it scares the heck out of me, but there are a lot of really wonderful, capable kids...

Julia’s position on this topic was not to stop doing what was working, but she acknowledged that due to familial and societal changes, education in the United States needed to change. While Charli believed that educators in the United States could learn much by studying how other countries educate their children, Julia thought schools in this country could improve by more quickly adapting to changes in society, especially the family. However, in addition to this change, Julia also stated that a lot of what happens in schools is positive.

### School Consolidation

Looping was one topic already presented that was related to consolidation.

Consolidation was often a measure that was undertaken to save money; however, the four teachers discussed the expenses that were incurred when school districts merged:

Jane        I know with ours, we spent more money than we had.

Charli      First of all, that first year you need all new band uniforms, all new every sport uniform, every sign that’s a mascot or every letterhead. The first year or two it’s astounding how much cost [is

involved].

Florence And to share a superintendent sometimes. They do that to share [costs]. Some people think that's a good thing to do. Well, I've been on the end of that with my husband being a shared superintendent and he would end up doing two jobs. He really didn't look at the money but just as far as what [toll] it takes on you personally.

This excerpt demonstrates that these participants' experiences with consolidation did not yield the expected cost savings, at least not initially. In addition, the potential non-monetary cost of the personal toll taken on a district employee such as a superintendent was illustrated.

#### Topics That Had Not Been Discussed During Individual Interviews

Of the many potential topics to be covered in the participant meeting, the discussion flowed according to participants' interest and thought processes. One example of a topic that was discussed during lunch but not in the first two individual interviews was year-round school; others are not reported here.

#### Year-round School

While I was getting food set out for lunch with Florence's help, Charli, Jane, and Julia remained at the table, talking, and the recorder continued to capture the conversation that took place. After a few topics were discussed, the conversation turned to year-round school, after Jane mentioned that the school district her son teaches in was considering changing the school district's calendar:

Julia I know a lot of my other friends that are teachers would strangle me when I said this, but I think year round school is the way to go.

Jane I think I would enjoy it; maybe not with a family. When I first heard about it, their idea is you teach one quarter, and you get a week off

and then you teach [until] the end of the semester, which for most people is Christmas break, and you get two weeks off. Right now, they have spring break so you'd get that and it would extend [school] into June. You would get out more at the end of June, and you'd have July and part of August and then start [back to school]. The parents voted it down, so what they're doing now is just having more inservices and longer vacations to stretch it into year-round school.

Julia I think the advantage is that kids don't have that time to forget so you don't have to go back at the beginning of the next year and do all that review.

Julia, in her final interview, said that Prairie Crossing is considering implementation of year-round school for elementary students only. Her thoughts on this were:

Prairie Crossing is talking about [year-round school. Maybe not] next year; Administration is looking at it in the not-too-distant future for elementary [students], but not for everybody. Now how they will work vacations and all that sort of thing, I don't know, but I very much am in support of it. We spend so much time reviewing at the beginning of the year because kids have had too much time off. I think everybody would benefit from year-round school, even teachers, although I'm sure that if you asked them a lot of them would say, "No, I want my summers off." If you had more breaks periodically throughout the year without the length of this current summer vacation, it would be a win-win situation.

I really supported it back even when I taught because it was really hard for me to change gears; by the time I had adjusted to being out of school, it was time to turn around and go back. It was kind of like I lost my identity during the summer, because what I was during the school year was Mrs. Ogalvie, the first grade or Reading Recovery teacher and I was consumed with it. Then during the summer, [there was] no routine, no schedule, and I did not handle that well. It would have been better for me but I definitely think it has been proven that it's better for kids. It will be a hard sell. I don't know that parents will always embrace [changes] for the right reasons. If [year-round school] means having their kids need less child care, I do think that a lot of parents will embrace it. I do think year-round school makes a lot of sense.

This quote indicated that Julia was in favor of a proposed change that she believed would be beneficial for both students and teachers alike, and that it might even make childcare

arrangements easier for parents to arrange, but that such a change would likely require significant efforts to convince all stakeholders of the value.

### Participant Recommendations

At the end of the participant meeting, I asked the participants about recommendations they would make to improve teachers' and students' experiences in schools. They suggested ideas to improve the classroom environment and the work load. They also discussed the benefits of smaller class sizes and agreed that 18 students in a classroom at any grade would be optimum, and that each teacher would have a paraeducator assigned so more students' individual needs could be met. Other recommendations discussed were a longer period of time in the student teaching placement(s) and the inclusion of teacher voices when policies are made at the local, State, and National levels.

One recommendation proposed at the participant meeting was for a full year of student teaching experience. As part of that discussion, the participants had advice for policymakers and shared their thoughts about staying in touch with their profession.

- Florence Can some of these [preservice] teachers test out of some of these college classes that they are requiring them to take and then spend their senior year student teaching?
- Janine That's an interesting thought.
- Florence You know they have to pay for all these classes like *freshman English* and all that stuff. Maybe they could test them out and then use that money toward the practical end of preparing for their career.
- Jane Well can't they test out now? But they still have to take a course to fit those hours.

Florence I don't know.

Jane If you want to take a more advanced class?

Florence I just think...

Julia They don't all need to...

Charli And the beginning [of a teacher's career], particularly at the elementary, is so different. when you are teaching them and your classroom management [is different, too]. Those kids that come in to student teach second semester, you've already got [the members of your class] seated and got them in line and you've already got them going to lunch and all of the things an elementary teacher does at the beginning of the year. I'm just overwhelmed [thinking about it], I could never be an elementary teacher.

Jane I think that's part of it; we have people who aren't in education saying what you need to do. Maybe they need to create a special group of people who are actually in education or have been in education that recommends what should be done.

Janine Like a task force of retired teachers?

Jane Well, I think you need some teachers.

Julia Just don't sign any of us up (laughed).

Charli Don't you feel how fast you've lost contact? I'm just amazed how quickly I don't know what the newest research is. I'm not getting an English journal, I'm not getting [material] from the AEA, I'm not getting the rigor and relevance research. I just think, boy, you're out of it fast.

Jane Although I think I'm kind of staying with it because of subbing.

Florence's inquiry about lengthening the period for student teaching illuminated benefits of a longer student teaching experience, as well as a relatively static teacher preparation program. Jane's comment indicated that her voice, teacher's voices, were not heard when policymakers, who may not be from the field of education, at the State and National

levels make laws and decisions about education. The final piece of this conversation indicated the fast pace at which changes in education can occur, which made Charli feel as though she was already out of the loop after being retired fewer than five years.

### Summary

The conversation at the meeting included information that was covered in the first two individual interviews and topics that were not previously mentioned by the individual participants. Among the changes the four retired teachers discussed at their meeting were special education, the process to determine student eligibility for special education, paraeducators and volunteers, rewards for students, and inclusion. Other topics that were considered were NCLB, testing, looping, differentiated instruction, globalization, support for novice teachers, consolidation, and increased teacher salaries.

## CHAPTER 10

### INTERPRETATION

When conducting a search of existing literature to locate what has been written about the perspectives of retired teachers, the results were limited (e.g., Cowdery, 2003). Rather than documentation of their thoughts about education in general or more specifically special education and school reforms, most often I found articles about retired teachers that related to the actual act of retiring, the timing of such decisions, and personal issues after retirement (e.g., financial, employment, volunteerism, etc.). Because I did not find that teachers' perspectives about change in general and special education were well documented in the existing literature, I chose to undertake this project.

This study of change and special education helped me understand the viewpoint of four teachers who retired after serving a great number of years in rural schools. Of the many aspects of their lives as educators, the participants shared how school reforms and special education were presented to them over the span of their careers and the pivotal role of the principals in the change process. The teachers' perceptions of the reforms, the challenges they faced when expected to implement the changes, their thoughts and actions, and the support they received during these periods were illuminated.

As I interpreted the data, I began to view the change in education as a puzzle to be solved. Why did the changes happen? What influenced the changes? Who instigated the changes? When did the changes occur? Where did the changes occur? Did change happen in some districts and not others? The image of a jigsaw puzzle came to mind; each piece



of the puzzle represented a factor or idea related to education including the various reform movements. The pieces of the puzzle may not fully interlock, some pieces may be misplaced for a short time, or others may be missing altogether.

Each teacher's career may also be viewed as a puzzle. At various points during a teacher's tenure, the puzzle may look different. It may be for the novice teacher that there was one large wooden piece that fit into a single, slightly larger space in a base. Over the years, the puzzle changed; with additional experience and knowledge, the puzzle grew more complex. Perhaps the pieces were not fully interlocking, additional pieces were added to the puzzle, some pieces may have been removed from the picture because they never really fit or were found to be from a completely different puzzle, and still others may not ever have been included. It may even have been the case that a teacher may have retired without ever locating a piece she thought was missing.

Pieces of a teacher's individual puzzle may include personal factors, including upbringing, current or past marital status, parenting, financial status, as well as other stressors and supports. Pieces that are related to the professional portion of their lives may include teacher preparation program; stage of career cycle; administrator(s); collegial relationships; teaching responsibilities, lesson planning, and workload; innovations; and student population.

The four participants in this study were veteran teachers who retired after many years of service in public schools in the United States. Throughout their careers, which ranged from 25 to 34 years of teaching, they witnessed many changes in schools and the families of children who attended those schools. These women discussed many topics

related to the two questions posed during this study, namely what are teachers' perceptions and experiences related to special education and other changes that occurred in the educational system in the United States since 1975, and what do their perceptions and experiences reveal about the impact of these changes on the teachers, the system, and the students they served.

The participants verbally identified changes they perceived to be the most significant by making statements such as Charli's summary, "Well, I am coming up with some major things. I think No Child Left Behind had a major impact on education, I think this rigor and relevance did, for me this homework change, the strategies, and technology; for me, technology was huge." It may be noted that what may be just as important are the changes they did not discuss and why those initiatives were not included in their responses.

Charli, Florence, Jane, and Julia provided an amazing amount of data about their careers, teaching elementary and secondary students in rural schools in Iowa. What follows is a distillation of their words into six primary topics. The themes that emerged from the analysis of this study of change and special education included responsibilities, curriculum, technology, law/accountability, factors outside school, and preparation and professional development. A discussion of the similarities and differences in the participants' experiences related to each of these themes follows, organized first by change and then by special education.

### Change

Charli, Florence, Jane, and Julia all described how they experienced and felt about change. They also discussed their views of administrators and the separation between general and special education. Change was a part of each participant's professional life, although each experienced change differently. Charli sought change; without it she would have left the teaching profession. Florence seemed to enjoy change, but did not have to seek it early in her career; change presented itself each time her husband advanced in his profession. However, late in her teaching experience when her husband was at the pinnacle of his career in a long-term superintendency, she would have liked a change, to teach a grade other than kindergarten. However, the opportunity did not present itself. Jane was frequently directed to change by administrators, and she occasionally requested changes that were not granted. While she went along with most changes, Jane retained elements of prior practices in her teaching that she believed were beneficial for students. Julia experienced changes due to declining enrollment, which resulted in financial decisions to close schools and battles to eliminate programs:

I made changes [in teaching assignments in the Prairie Crossing School District] not because I wanted to but because I had to. Schools closed so it was like well, if you want a job you can do this. It always worked out and I always found that I liked it; but I wasn't one to seek out challenge, something different, but if people want something different, it's too bad that they can't.

With few exceptions, the four teachers did not report a great deal of detail about how the changes they discussed were introduced, and all indicated there were more changes that occurred during their careers that they did not recall.

### Responsibilities

Each participant explained that her roles and responsibilities changed over the course of their years of service. That they taught students did not change; what did change was how they taught and additional duties that the teachers were expected to complete. One example of this was the number of courses that Charli taught; as enrollment declined, she taught two sections of 9<sup>th</sup> grade English instead of 3, which meant she needed to teach another course. While an additional course was added to the workload, additional planning time was not allocated within the typical five school days each week. The retired teachers frequently were asked to do more, yet had the same 24 hours within each day in which to accomplish everything. In addition, Charli stated that earlier in her career she would have said her role was to teach students; while she did not directly say it, this implied that at the end of her career she was expected to teach curriculum or the content.

It was apparent that these four women identified very strongly as teachers; their comments indicated that even after retirement, even if they no longer served as substitute teachers, they *viewed themselves as teachers*. Of the participants, Julia was the most vocal about how hard it is to be a teacher and may have expressed the most negative feelings about the conditions of teaching and some of the changes, yet she and the others remained optimistic that the educational system, which has many positive aspects, can be revamped and improved.

## Curriculum

The teachers reported that later in their careers, they were no longer able to choose what to teach in their classrooms because district standards and benchmarks were implemented and annual standardized tests were measures of students' proficiencies. As Charli asked, should she be an English teacher if she could not get the students to perform well on those standardized tests? She told me that the way to get secondary students to perform well on standardized assessments was to be a caring teacher, to have an individual relationship with them, and to know their families. Charli did not mention the curriculum when discussing how the students might be able to perform better on the assessments.

Reported changes in curriculum were in both academic and non-academic areas. Each teacher included information that illustrated the need for teachers to provide instruction in areas that were typically addressed by the parents and families of the students earlier in their careers. For example, Julia had at least two students she described who had unusual behavior; she began to teach them not only what the expected behavior was but also why it was important for the children to follow classroom rules and the guidelines and expectations of the teacher, school, and society.

Early in Charli's career, cross-curricular projects "did not develop." Later in her teaching, Charli and her three colleagues conducted many cross-curricular projects; she stated that Mrs. Granite was the other key player in those collaborations. What made this novice teacher and the other two veterans open to collaborating with colleagues? Was it the Mrs. Granite's experiences in her teacher preparation program, her personal

characteristics and beliefs, or a combination? My interpretation is that both were factors, along with the three veteran teachers and their characteristics and beliefs.

When the participants reported that successful collaboration occurred – Florence with her Kindergarten teaching partner, Julia and Mrs. Lean who shared the first grade classroom and Reading Recovery – I noted that all of the collaborators were general education teachers working together. Additional connections will be outlined during the discussion of curriculum in the Special Education section of this paper.

A contradiction arose related to curriculum and grouping students across grades. The participants agreed that in the elementary schools, grouping arrangements for math or reading would be beneficial. However, they did not believe that their districts would be able to support a practice that allowed advanced students in rural high schools to enroll in classes with older students, which might allow them to move ahead to more advanced courses or to be on a fast track to meet all requirements and graduate early.

### Technology

Technology was another change that all of the retired teachers experienced, and they each had different encounters with it. The most striking difference in the teachers' accounts of changes in technology was between the three elementary teachers and the high school teacher. Florence, Jane, and Julia, as elementary teachers, implemented the use of computers and other technology in the classroom on a more limited basis than Charli did with her secondary students. The impact of technology in their experiences was primarily for email and grading; for Julia, the use of the computer for grading purposes was very stressful and caused her to complete the grading with a focus on

getting it done, rather than providing meaningful feedback to her first grade students and their families. One potential reason for the lack of emphasis on curricular uses of technology for students might have been due to students having scheduled time to attend sessions in the computer lab each week.

Charli, in contrast, told of many activities she implemented in the classroom where students used computers and other technology, such as explorations of bogus sites on the Internet after it first became available in her school. Other technology incorporated in various curricular activities included video cameras and the classroom performance system “clickers” that enabled her and the students to check for understanding.

#### Law/Accountability

Charli, Florence, Jane, and Julia each addressed No Child Left Behind in interviews and it was also discussed in the participant meeting. They primarily indicated that NCLB was negative and the impact on students and teachers was undesirable. However, Jane provided an example of both a positive and negative outcome based on her experience. Eagle View was required to be part of and received grant funding for the Reading First program under this law; teachers were expected to learn to conduct standardized assessments and reading strategies such as the Picture Word Inductive Model (PWIM), use the strategies in the classroom, document their implementation, gather data on students’ educational progress, and use that data to make educational decisions. Jane appreciated that the grant covered the salaries of substitute teachers so that she and her colleagues could be released from teaching responsibilities to conduct the individual assessments during the school day. The grant also provided stipends for

teachers to attend regularly scheduled professional development and planning sessions after school concluded for the day.

Grant funding was also used to increase the holdings in the school library and individual teachers' classrooms. Jane made it clear that without that source of funds, the new books could not have been purchased. There was a small amount of discussion about another positive aspect of the law that was not related to funding, the benefit of the mandated increase in accountability for helping every student to succeed. While the funding enabled Eagle View to purchase books and support teachers' professional development, it was only available for a period of three years. At the end of that time period, the funding ceased and the district was supposed to be able to continue to fund the activities on its own.

Along with the short-term availability of funding, all members discussed another of the negatives associated with NCLB, the increased pressure related to testing. Charli shared that schools in the United States were not like those in Garrison Kiellor's Lake Wobegon; in South River Falls and other districts, not all students were average. When a school did not meet the Annual Yearly Progress (AYP) target, the school was labeled as being in need of improvement, as Eagle View had been. This put a lot of pressure on the students and their teachers.

Not only were the standardized test data being reported to determine if a school was "failing" or not, Jane discussed the additional assessment and paperwork associated with the Reading First Program. Teachers took a great deal of time to gather, score, and compile student data to defend the practices they were mandated to implement and much



pressure was placed on the students to perform well on the assessments. Despite the benefits discussed, all of the participants believed NCLB needed to be changed in at least two ways: (a) to fully fund initiatives for the long-term and (b) to change the method of determining if a school was “failing.”

The conversations did not relate to any other specific legislation, with the exception of mandatory reporting of abuse that was brought up briefly in an interview by Jane.

#### Factors Outside School

A wide range of topics were brought up that did not fit in the other categories but had the common thread of happening or being related to factors outside of school. Some changes were related to families like dynamics, mobility, and poverty, while others seemed random (e.g., superintendents that were in charge of all districts within a county during the very earliest years of teaching). I noted that the participants each discussed some of these factors, as if they acknowledged them but believed that they and the school in general could do nothing to change the situations.

#### Preparation and Professional Development

The preparation for the four teachers to enter their teaching careers was conducted at different locations. Florence and Jane first attended two year teacher certification programs and then completed two additional years of education in order to earn Bachelor’s Degrees. Julia received her teaching certification after completing her course of study at a State University. Charli earned a Master’s Degree in Education prior to

teaching in a high school and Jane's earned her degree in special education, "Learning Disabilities," while she was teaching in the elementary school.

### Special Education

Recollections specifically about special education varied by participant; for example, Jane began the first interview by asking about the law that was passed in 1975, The Education for All Handicapped Children Act, while the other participants discussed special education later in the interviews. Comments related to special education also fit into the themes of responsibilities, curriculum, technology, law/accountability, factors outside school, and preparation and professional development.

### Responsibilities

The four general education teachers did not report much responsibility for students who received special education services, except when they were mainstreamed into their classrooms. Of course, during the years Jane was teaching special education, she had responsibility for her students who received special education services, but as a general education teacher, she claimed responsibility for the students who received special education only when they were in her classroom or when the special education teacher did not provide them with work that Jane believed challenged them. Charli had responsibility to teach her students who received special education services, but the students typically went to the resource room to complete assignments and take tests. Charli did report that many secondary students were reluctant to take advantage of the services available to them because of the stigma involved. When the group discussed this topic in the participant meeting, the teachers agreed that at the secondary level, the stigma

is more evident than it is at the elementary level, where many rewards were used with students who were removed from the general education setting to receive special education services. They also discussed Charli's story about Mike, who was included in the general education setting and with whom she sat when subbing as a paraprofessional. They determined that in Mike's situation, something was not right because he did not want the paraeducator to be near him. The missing piece may have been that the paraeducator was assigned to work only with him, instead of having the paraeducator in the room primarily to assist Mike but also to help other students. This arrangement should help all of the students in the class understand that everyone needs help with some task at some point in their lives, and that there is nothing wrong with asking for or receiving help. The school could also have worked with the boy to help him understand the paraeducator's role.

Also related to paraeducators is the language used by the four retired teachers; it was indicative of their training and societal beliefs during their careers. One example is the use of specific gender pronouns when referring to different employee job titles; gender stereotypes were pervasive. Most often, the participants used masculine pronouns when referring to principals; however, Florence and Julia had worked with female principals. Florence referred to paraprofessionals using feminine pronouns, likely because the only paraprofessionals she had worked with were female.

### Curriculum

The majority of the students who received special education services who spent a portion of their days in the four teachers' classrooms over the years had two curricula, the

general education curriculum and the special education curriculum. Most often, the special education curriculum was delivered in the designated special education room; however, in Charli's classroom, students received the same instruction that the other students received and were provided special education support during study halls in the resource room.

Jane recalled her collaboration with one special education teacher that was unsatisfactory. The students who received special education services were in her classroom for part of the day, and Jane believed that the special education teacher's lessons were not meeting the students' educational needs, so she designed her own lessons for them. This is an example of the participants' preservice training, professional development, and practice perpetuating the structure of the school as maintaining two separate systems, general education and special education. This will be addressed further in the Professional Development section.

### Technology

The elementary teachers did not report that changes in technology were a factor for them related to special education. However, Charli was insistent that she needed to include information on the use of a computerized reading program that had a significant impact on her students, especially those students who received special education services in the area of reading. The students were required to spend time completing activities through the web-based program each week, and Charli required the students to complete the MAP test for reading to monitor and report students' increases in reading scores on

that measure. Charli believed the computerized reading program was beneficial for those students who utilized it.

#### Law/Accountability

Of the four educators who participated in this study of change and special education, Jane was the only one who had earned a degree in and had taught special education for any period of time. I was surprised that Jane started the first interview by asking me to remind her about special education law; since Jane had taken coursework in special education and the other participants had not, I expected her to have the most knowledge of the topic. Upon further reflection, however, since it had been a number of years since she had taught special education, I could understand that her memory of the details of the law were sketchy. Charli, Florence, and Julia all admitted that they did not have any knowledge of special education laws. There was no other mention of specific laws related to special education.

#### Factors Outside School

None of the changes that the four participants shared with me specifically related to special education at first glance. However, upon closer examination, changes in family dynamics and mobility and those living in poverty, as well as student work ethic, could all potentially be explanations for why a child was not performing well in school. While students who are found eligible to receive special education services may be labeled as having a disability, the explanation regarding why they need assistance may be one or more of the changes in this category instead.

### Preparation and Professional Development

The four teachers had been trained that two systems, general education and special education, were separate; and that students who were not as successful in the classroom as their peers could not have their needs met in this setting and should be sent to the specially trained teachers who could help them learn. These teacher's stories are evidence that some teachers do not believe full inclusion is what should happen, despite a concrete example where inclusion is a school policy and a student like Florence's Jeff was successfully included in the general education setting when provided with supports and services that met the student's needs.

The level of implementation of inclusion varied within the South River Falls school district after the announced beginning of the inclusion policy. Since both Charli and Florence taught in the same district, I pondered what it was that made Charli's position on inclusion differ from Florence's "give them a chance" attitude. It may have been due to the different grade levels at which they taught, life experiences, or beliefs and dispositions; it was likely a combination of these and other factors.

Jane was not convinced that inclusion was beneficial for the students who received special education services and whose academic and social skills were significantly delayed. Jane's descriptions did not seem to indicate that the teachers were provided with sufficient training and support to assure the students' success in the general education setting.

Another pattern of language used was related to students who were labeled with a disability and who received special education services. The participants and their

colleagues heard and used the terms “handicapped,” “behavior disorder or BD,” “special needs,” “educable,” etc. throughout their years of teaching. Despite the Iowa Department of Education’s mandate for a noncategorical system for special education and the Person-First language movement, these retired teachers still used the antiquated language and did not utilize terminology such as “a student labeled with a cognitive disability.”

A contradiction that was evident related to inclusion was Julia’s stated position that children need to feel good about themselves. However, the pull-out model of providing special education services commonly used in the three school districts in the study may be contrary to this position. It may also send a conflicting message to students based on long-held stereotypes: students who perform two years or more below grade level expectations are not worthy of being in the general education classroom with their peers, and they need to earn the right to be educated alongside these typically-developing students. Also consider that the pull-out model may send a conflicting message to teachers, again based on a faulty premise; general education teachers do not have sufficient knowledge and skills to teach all students in their classrooms. Having general education and special education teachers collaborating and coteaching is a more beneficial arrangement for the students, and some would say for the teachers involved, too.

I noted one final contradiction, this one also related to special education practice and inclusion. It was interesting to note that among the participants, there seemed to be justification for a pull-out model for special education students because each school district reported that pull-out services were provided to students labeled as gifted as well.

They seemed not to fully understand the tenets of inclusion and a social justice perspective. These include that all students benefit from being included in the classroom and that any time a student is removed from the classroom, attention is called to the student and stigma is attached. In addition, once a student is removed from the classroom community, the group is missing a valuable member. The systems in place focused on deficits and did not appear to recognize and build on the students' strengths. This would apply to students who receive special education services and students labeled as gifted; any child removed from the classroom is likely to experience feelings of exclusion.

#### Administrators' Impact on Change

Hall and Hord (2006) wrote in detail about implementation of change; in educational change, the administrator typically has a lot of power related to what changes are selected for implementation and sustained efforts to maintain them. Charli, Florence, Jane, and Julia described both positive and negative relationships with their many administrators. The four participants valued administrators who supported them, and were highly critical of those whose leadership skills were weak and those who did not treat them with respect. They appreciated principals who communicated well and honestly, even when the teachers disagreed with decisions that were made. Each of them experienced many administrators over the course of their careers, and they reported that changes, at times radical, occurred when new principals were employed in their school districts.

Burden (1982) described different management styles that principals should use at the three stages of a teacher's career: directive at the survival stage, collaborative at the



adjustment stage, and non-directive during the mature stage. Florence's example of the principal who also taught fifth grade, for whom she taught physical education, illustrated an instance of the directive nature of supervision for a novice teacher. That principal told Florence to get the student with challenging behavior into special education to get him out of her classroom, but Florence disregarded this advice. Florence' story of Jeff, whom she included in her classroom, indicated that she wanted to "give him a chance." This appeared to be an established pattern throughout Florence's career: she didn't want to give up on students; and she respected her supervisors, yet disagreed with them on occasion and did not always follow every directive she was given.

Many of Charli's comments indicated that her principals were collaborative or non-directive, in line with Burden's (1982) description of supervision levels when teachers were at the adjustment or mature stages of their careers. She stated that the principals in her school "backed her up" with students and their parents and she trusted the principals to support her when she was having difficulty with a student.

While Charli and Florence reported that their interactions with their supervisors over the years were primarily positive and supportive, Jane and Julia described incidents where principals seemed abusive to members of the faculty. These included Julia's story about her perception of Underwood's superior attitude and lack of acknowledgement or greeting of staff and faculty when he passed them in the hall, as well as Jane's report of the principal who was her neighbor who she suspected listened in on their telephone party line.

When teachers are taught one philosophy and believe based on their training and experiences that one position is true or valid, they may be resistant to new ideas even if presented with evidence that should make them question their original position. They may remain non-users (Hall & Hord, 2006) if the innovations do not fit with their experiences and beliefs. Also, it may be that the participants discontinued implementation if they did not believe the innovation was beneficial or there was a large amount of work involved, or if they perceived that the work required was redundant. Implementation of a change that did not completely match their prior experiences or beliefs occurred when the change was mandated and they perceived they had no choice, perhaps due to law requirements and/or extensive documentation requirements.

#### Social Justice

During the course of this study, social justice issues were chronicled for the participants' students and the teachers themselves. One issue, the inclusion of students with challenging educational needs in the general education setting was a topic about which Florence was especially passionate. This may be expanded to assuring that the classroom is a welcoming, supportive, and challenging environment which provides educational opportunities that meet *all* individual students' needs. As we consider the examples of Florence's student, Jeff; Charli's "late bloomers" and students who attended the alternative high school; and Jane's and Julia's students whose characteristics made them stand out and be unsuccessful in the general education setting without the necessary support, it is clear that the "one size fits all" classroom, instruction, and curricula of the past are not sufficient. The increased focus on content knowledge that leaves less time for

a focus on individual student' social and emotional development was evidenced in Julia's descriptions of how challenging it was to make sure the content was learned and students left a teacher's classroom at the end of the school year feeling good about themselves.

The teachers reported and discussed changes that were made for financial reasons that were not always in the best interest of or beneficial to students. For example, Florence reported schedule changes for classes like art, physical education, and music were made at South River Falls for budgetary reasons. In this time of financial crises, administrators and teachers must work together to find creative alternatives to reducing physical education and fine arts classes and continue to provide opportunities for all students, regardless of ability, socioeconomic status, and so on, to experience rich, diverse curriculum.

Social justice topics related to teachers were also mentioned, including Jane's and Julia's stories of their treatment by autocratic and unsupportive administrators, a few of whom may be described as bullies, and all participants' accounts of comparatively low pay, especially in light of additional demands on a teacher's time during the school day and afterward.

#### Change Agents or Victims?

Charlie, Florence, Jane, and Julia did not describe their teaching as good when they were novices; over the course of their careers, each of the four each had gained knowledge and skills, pieces of their individual puzzles, that made them better teachers by the time they exited the profession.

When reexamining their careers, each of the four retired teachers had their own measures by which to judge their success as teachers. Charli believed that she maximized students' learning in the 180 days she had them in her classroom in a given year, even though she felt other teachers were more caring than she was. Florence wanted to be able to give each child a chance, as was evidenced in her story. Jane said it took a lot of work to help her students learn, and describing herself as an average worker. Julia felt that as long as her students left her classroom feeling good about themselves, she was content, even if she may not have been the best at teaching the curriculum.

Overall, these retired teachers had noted only a few changes that they believed were written into school policies, but were aware of the many changes they talked about and implemented over the years. During the careers of these four teachers, nearly all changes were imposed upon them. Very infrequently did they have a voice in the implementation of innovations; the participants recalled being told of changes during teacher meetings and professional development sessions.

The most notable exception was Charli, who occasionally had the opportunity to influence some of the changes that were made at South River Falls High School. Her implementation of the rigor and relevance framework and work in cross curricular projects with colleagues in science, health, and media were examples. While Charli was a change agent in regard to use of rigor and relevance in her own classroom, not all of her colleagues implemented the change at the same level as she did. Also, she saw her colleague, Mrs. Granite, as the agent of change with the cross curricular projects.

Julia and her colleague, Mrs. Lean, submitted a proposal to the principal for them to attend training for Guided Reading. The request was granted, they attended the training, and began using Guided Reading with their own students. However, the entire school did not implement the program right away; an explanation was not given for the delay. After a new administrator, Mrs. George, was hired two years later, Julia and Mrs. Lean offered to help with the implementation of the program, but the new administrator did not utilize the two experienced teachers in the training and implementation phases of the process. Instead, the district hired an outside consultant and did not capitalize on the knowledge of Julia and Mrs. Lean. This is one example of how teachers' experiences may not be valued by a principal. Most commonly in this study, the participants only occasionally sought change or did not seek change at all, and may be viewed as victims of change rather than change agents.

### Implications

This study of how four retired teachers from rural schools in Iowa experienced change and special education yielded a large amount of data. Based on my analysis of each participants' three individual interviews and the participant meeting, there are important implications for administrators, teachers, parents, and students, as well as professors in teacher preparation programs and those who design professional development programs for teachers and administrators.

Greater attention to recruitment and retention efforts may lead to fewer administrative changes; the four participants' stories make a strong case for administrators to observe the practices at a school where he or she has been newly hired

to see how the change process unfolds. Teachers and administrators who read Charli's, Florence's, Jane's, and Julia's stories are likely to look at change in a different light and make and sustain positive reforms in the school. Recalling Charli's comments about how, prior to her teaching career, male teachers often began teaching in small districts such as South River Falls and after a few years would move to a larger district that paid higher salaries; similar situations may have been and continue to be the case with administrators. It is important for school boards to carefully proceed through the recruitment process to assure principals are hired whose change facilitator style and behaviors (Hall & Hord, 2006) will provide opportunities for continuous improvement along a well structured and positive path rather than drastic upheaval with an unclear or tacit plan. A priority should be the retention of the principals who lead efforts of meaningful, positive change that benefit students. These principals should also support faculty members and assist their development throughout their career cycles, offering differentiated professional development plans based on each teacher's individual needs and stage in the career cycle. In the event an ineffective principal is hired, action must be taken in a timely manner in order to maintain the moral of faculty, staff, and students, and minimize negative impacts that result from administrative change.

The final theme that emerged from this study, teacher preparation and professional development, is related to each of the other themes: responsibilities, curriculum, technology, law/accountability, and factors outside school. Teacher preparation programs provide the foundational knowledge related to these themes that prepare future educators to teach students. Professional development provides options for

teachers to expand their existing knowledge and skills to meet the educational needs of students. Both teacher preparation and professional development are critical pieces of each teacher's puzzle.

Recalling Jane's discussion of how she applied what she learned during her Master's program in Learning Disabilities when she returned to teaching in the general education classroom, perhaps all teachers would benefit from additional information about special education strategies. These may be implemented with more students than just those who receive special education services in the general education setting. Implementation of a five-year post-secondary teacher preparation program that includes dual certification for general and special education could be beneficial to the future teachers as well as the students they serve.

Expanding the student teaching experience to cover a full academic year would be another potentially beneficial and positive change for teachers entering the profession. Experiencing an apprenticeship for an entire year with a veteran teacher may allow the novice to experience all periods of the school year under supervision, and allow the student teacher more time to gather additional pieces of the educational puzzle. This first-year experience would allow a new teacher more opportunities for professional development, to further refine his or her skills in the areas of technology, curriculum, law/accountability, and handling situations involving factors outside of school that affect students. A full year may also provide greater opportunity to witness change and how it is handled. This would provide a model for the novice teacher to refer to when innovations are presented during the course of his or her future career.

As the participants in this study suggested, additional inservice training may be needed to increase teachers' ability to implement differentiated instruction to meet the diverse learning needs of the students in their classes. It is also important to incorporate the participants' comments about professional development for novice and veteran teachers and the teacher career cycle literature in designing flexible, meaningful professional development opportunities that are beneficial to teachers at all stages of the career cycle. For example, Julia recommended linking new initiatives with what is already being done in order to avoid an increase to an already challenging and sometimes overwhelming workload that teachers have, Charli benefitted from the professional associations she developed during her process of becoming nationally certified, and they all voiced support for strong mentoring programs.

After examining the stories of these four teachers, it is clear that a teacher's responsibilities, curriculum, technology, law/accountability, factors outside of school, and preparation and professional development all affect student achievement and have changed dramatically over the years. When looking to the future, I surmise that all of these areas will continue to evolve. Faculty in teacher preparation programs will need to help their students prepare for an ever-changing career in education; these teacher educators must assist preservice teachers as they begin to acquire the pieces of the educational puzzle. Administrators will likely find more success with implementation of changes if they provide faculty and staff with adequate training and ongoing support; these differentiated professional development experiences will allow teachers to acquire



additional pieces of the puzzle. All of this is done with the goal of improving educational outcomes for students,

Given the increasing costs associated with higher education, lengthening the time of teacher preparation is likely not an option that many would consider feasible. With the current economic situation, school districts are required to significantly cut budgets, so these beneficial professional development and ongoing support also may not be considered reasonable at this time. Rather than shrink from these responsibilities, educators really must learn from these teachers' experiences in order to improve the educational opportunities provided to students and the working environment of the teachers.

#### Summary

Within the data gathered for this project lies an answer to the two research questions posed, one way that the jigsaw puzzle may be pieced together as I journey toward an understanding of teachers' experiences. The first question posed was, "What are teachers' perceptions and experiences related to special education and other changes that occurred in the educational system in the United States since 1975?" Florence, Jane, and Julia provided education to students at the elementary level and Charli taught students in a high school, and Florence and Charli taught in the same district. Their perceptions and experiences related to change were diverse yet similar in many ways. Their similarities included reports of the evolution of teacher preparation programs and professional development offerings; technological and curricular changes; passage of laws such as No Child Left Behind; and alterations in societal expectations, family

configuration and dynamics, and the responsibilities of a teacher. Most often, the reported changes in these categories were different, and a few changes outside of these categories were also included in the discussion. For example, Charli informed me of the implementation of the rigor and relevance framework (Daggett, 2000, 2005) at the high school level, and no mention was made of the framework by the elementary teachers. Of course, this may be expected since the State had begun the professional development on rigor and relevance at the secondary level and the elementary teachers had not received the training prior to their retirement.

Their perceptions of changes were different as well; for example, as described earlier, cooperative learning is a much researched and commonly used set of strategies in classrooms across the United States. Florence perceived that students in Kindergarten were not able to successfully work in cooperative groups. This was why she did not spontaneously mention that as a change during the interviews. Jane reported that cooperative learning was not emphasized in the Eagle View District. Ultimately, my interpretation of the answer to this question is that the perceptions and experiences of teachers in this country are different yet similar in some ways. In addition, their perceptions and experiences are impacted by many factors, which may or may not be controllable, including socioeconomic status and many other personal and professional characteristics, as indicated in Fessler's (1985) Teacher Career Cycle Model (TCCM). Depending on the perceptions and experiences a teacher has, he or she may not be as flexible and willing or able to successfully implement the various reforms that schools undertake. One teacher may also recall different changes than other colleagues who

perceive events in a distinctive manner and/or have had dissimilar personal and professional experiences.

An answer to the second question, “What do their perceptions and experiences reveal about the impact of these changes on the teachers, the system, and the students they served?” may also be found within the stories that the four teachers shared with me. The changes the four retired teachers reported experiencing during their careers are likely the changes that have had the greatest impact on them, their students, and the school systems in which they taught. NCLB was an example of a recent reform that had a great impact on all of the participants in this study. The mandate for additional accountability, presumably a positive outcome, brought with it negatives for teachers and students alike – more standardized assessments that may be stressful for the students, and additional work and worry about whether the students will perform at a proficient level so the school avoids the designation of school in need of assistance.

Not all changes went beyond the policy and teacher discourse levels to implementation (Tyack & Cuban, 1995). Lack of implementation in the participants’ classrooms occurred for many reasons, including insufficient training and ongoing support, administrative replacements with different perceptions about a given innovation, and so on. Not even all mandated reforms were implemented fully, and there were some innovations that were rescinded, parts of which were retained in the teacher’s practice because the individual teacher deemed it was beneficial to the students.

### Conclusion

As I progressed through this research project, I often thought – and even said to Florence, “I listen to the stories these people have shared. My students need to know this; other people need to know this.” I see this project as my own personal jigsaw puzzle that depicts my journey; I listened to and learned about teachers experiences over their long careers. I am piecing together my own knowledge about change that has occurred in education and am constructing my understanding of how to assist future and current teachers navigate the unknown changes that will be presented to them in the years ahead.

Many events occurred in the lives of each of the participants during their careers; there were a large number of pieces to their puzzles. I believe that Charli, Florence, Jane, and Julia recalled and shared what was important and meaningful to them given the framework of this project. As Florence stated during her third interview, “there are so many things you could talk about, I guess maybe you just get started in one vein and you expand on that.” Some readers may believe this is a limitation of this study; I view it as a strength. The experiences and perceptions these four women chose to describe give us insight into their lives as teachers and as individuals.

Perhaps some may view none of this as new information; however, in looking at these possibly commonplace occurrences related to change recalled by these teachers, there is value in making the familiar strange. There is much to be learned from individuals’ experiences related to school climate (for students and teachers alike) and professional development for faculty in order to support and retain highly skilled teachers. It is also important to closely examine the perceptions and experiences of these

and other retired teachers to learn from them to better prepare teachers for the unpredictable changes that are certain to occur in their careers. One example is the rapid pace of change in the area of technology alone. It is imperative that teachers understand that change will likely always be a piece of each educator's puzzle.

It is my hope that the information gathered as part of this inquiry may help strengthen the experiences that preservice teachers receive as they prepare to enter the complex context of the education profession. What has been learned may help educators assure that future changes have a positive impact on students, teachers, and the school systems. It will be increasingly necessary to avoid pitfalls of providing "one shot" professional development sessions and to creatively allocate funds to assure adequate training and ongoing support for initiatives, especially for teachers who have been exposed to new technology and are not confident in their technology skills. As Hall and Hord's (2006) seventh change principle stated, "Administrator leadership is essential to long-term change success" (p. 10). I would add to this that in addition to leadership, also essential are administrator consistency, longevity, and ability to include teachers' voices and provide scaffolding for those who serve children so they are able to envision the change and understand its relevance to the students, the teachers themselves, and to the system.

It is imperative that we find ways to challenge educators' and future educators' long-held beliefs about school and the students in them. The challenge is to:

1. help educators make moral, just choices in a system that may not always support those choices, often due to funding and time constraints;

2. to take strong stands on antiquated, depersonalizing language and practices that are not student-centered when they may find themselves being the only ones who hold the belief that the changes must be made for the greater good; and
3. work to eliminate stereotypes based on disability, socioeconomic status, etc., and always presume competence in order to provide students with a more level playing field.

Each reader may take the pieces presented here and put them together to come to his or her own conclusions. Each educator is presented with a multi-faceted challenge: to assemble the jigsaw puzzle in such a manner to assure changes are introduced in schools that positively support and benefit all students, and that these innovations progress beyond the policy and teacher discourse levels. An additional component is to present these positive changes in a way that considers teachers' voices and personal and professional contexts, and fits with the teachers' needs at the various stages of their careers. A final element is to support all teachers as they fully implement innovations in classrooms for the benefit of all learners. One way to provide support is by giving teachers time to engage in professional development activities and professional collaborative conversations and partnerships. Another is to find creative ways to allocate funds for the important work of providing meaningful, high quality education to all children living in this country, including students labeled with disabilities and others who experience oppression as they pursue the American Dream.

The jigsaw puzzle that I view education to be has (at least) two sides. Most people do not consider the reverse of a jigsaw puzzle, which is characteristically brown or gray in color. While puzzles differ in shape, size, and cut of the pieces, typically the reverse is vastly different from the top. When considering each piece of a puzzle, most people will turn the colorful side up and attempt to fit the pieces together in this manner, but a few might choose to take the more difficult path and assemble the puzzle using the brown-gray side. Many critics of the educational system in the United States may be viewing education as the brown-gray reverse of the puzzle and possess a gloomy outlook on the state of education. I prefer to look at the colorful side, no matter how many pieces it contains and how difficult it is to piece together. The picture includes the many excellent practices and highly-skilled, compassionate teachers (including Charli, Florence, Jane, and Julia) that are present in contemporary schools, as well as future teachers filled with strong skills, new ideas, hope, and promise. By working together in assembling the puzzle, finding the missing pieces, and being creative and brave enough to attempt to place a piece where at first glance it may not appear to fit, the playing field will be more level for students and teachers alike, tinkering with the educational system in the United States may lessen, and we may complete a picture of the educational system that is just, effective, and valued.

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APPENDIX A  
POTENTIAL PARTICIPANT CONTACT LETTER

(Date)

Dear (name of potential participant),

I hope this letter finds you well. I am writing in regard to my proposed dissertation research. As you may know, I am a doctoral candidate at The University of Northern Iowa. I am seeking retired teachers to participate in a research project for my dissertation. The study is about special education and other changes introduced in schools since 1975.

The project is designed to include the participation of four retired teachers. The participants will be chosen based on the following criteria:

- the number of years taught, with preference given to those who began their teaching careers during or prior to 1975
- teaching experience in rural schools in Iowa, with preference given to those who taught in such locations throughout their tenure
- teaching experiences in the general education setting
- retirement after 2001.

Because I know that you meet one or more of these criteria, I am inviting you to consider becoming a participant in this research project.

A series of three interviews, approximately one hour in length, will be conducted. In addition, I will provide a recording device or notebook to allow you to express your thoughts related to the research project between interviews. Later in the study, if a face-

to-face meeting between you and the other participants seems like it will be beneficial to further explore the emerging themes as a group, I will attempt to facilitate such a gathering only with the participants who agree and if this is possible given the physical location and schedules of you and the other participants. It is anticipated that the period during which data is collected will not exceed three months.

There will be no direct benefit to you for your participation in this study. However, it is anticipated that the results of this study may be beneficial to currently-practicing and future teachers, administrators, college and university teacher preparation program faculty, and the students they serve.

If, after reading this information, you have any questions or you feel you fit the criteria and are interested in participating in my dissertation research project, please contact me at your earliest convenience. If I do not hear from you within five (5) business days of the date on this letter, I will contact you via telephone.

I will look forward to speaking with you about this opportunity.

Sincerely,

Janine Kane, Ed.S.

Doctoral Candidate, Special Education

University of Northern Iowa

(cell) 563/599-3230

janine.kane@loras.edu

APPENDIX B  
TELEPHONE CONTACT SCRIPT

Hello (name of potential participant).

This is Janine Kane and I am calling in regard to my recent letter about my proposed dissertation research. Did you receive it?

As stated in the letter, I am conducting the research to fulfill the requirements for my doctoral degree. The study will involve meeting with me in a mutually agreed-upon, comfortable location where I will conduct a series of individual interviews. An initial introductory session will be conducted with you at a neutral location (e.g. coffee shop, public library, etc.), during which the project will be explained in detail and any questions you have will be answered.

Three interviews with you will be conducted over a period of approximately three months. In addition, I will provide a recording device or notebook to allow you to express your thoughts related to the research project between interviews. Later in the study, if a face-to-face meeting between you and the other participants seems like it will be beneficial to further explore the emerging themes as a group, I will attempt to facilitate such a gathering only with the participants who agree and if this is possible given the physical location and schedules of you and the other participants.

Do you have any questions? (I will answer any questions.)

Are you interested in being a participant in this research project?

(If interest is indicated) When and where can we schedule a meeting so that I may obtain your informed consent for participation in my research project?



(After a meeting date, time, and location has been chosen) Thank you very much.  
I will look forward to meeting you and begin the research on (date and time). Goodbye.

OR

(If interest is not indicated) Thank you for your time and consideration of this  
project. If you reconsider and desire to be a part of the study, please contact me at  
563/599-3230. Goodbye.

APPENDIX C  
UNIVERSITY OF NORTHERN IOWA  
HUMAN PARTICIPANTS REVIEW  
INFORMED CONSENT

Project Title: Teachers' Perspectives on Changes in General and Special Education

Name of Investigator(s): Janine Kane

You are invited to participate in a research project conducted through the University of Northern Iowa. The University requires that you give your signed agreement to participate in this project. The following information is provided to help you made an informed decision about whether or not to participate.

**Nature and Purpose:** This research is being conducted to understand the changes that have occurred in a few rural schools in Iowa as a result of special education legislation and other educational initiatives since 1975.

**Explanation of Procedures:** An initial introductory session will be conducted with each participant at a neutral location (e.g. coffee shop, public library, etc.), during which the project will be explained in detail and any questions the participant has will be answered. The number of interviews will not be preordained; it will be necessary to have at least several contacts with each participant over a period of approximately three months or less.

Interviews will be conducted until the participants' stories are shared. The interviews will be conducted in a comfortable environment agreed upon by the participant and the researcher, and will be recorded using audio and/or digital video

equipment. Other methods of data collection may be used; these may include, but are not limited to, written or other artifacts from the participants' teaching experience or that are produced during the study. For example, I may provide the participants with a small voice recorder to allow them to record any recollections or thoughts related to the study between scheduled interviews. In the event that the themes identified based on the data collected indicate a face-to-face meeting of the participants may be beneficial to further explore themes as a group, I will attempt to facilitate such a gathering only if the participants agree and if this is possible given the physical location and schedules of the participants.

Recordings of the interviews will be transcribed; the recordings and transcripts will be viewed only by the researcher and her advisors. Excerpts of the transcripts may be included in academic articles or scholarly presentations. I may refer to the data collected for this research project when conducting future related research.

It is not anticipated that your participation in this research would be ended without your consent.

**Discomfort and Risks:** Risks to participation are similar to those experienced in day-to-day life.

**Benefits and Compensation:** Participants may be provided with food and/or beverages during the course of the interviews. While there are no direct benefits for the participants, it is anticipated that the results of this study may be beneficial to currently-practicing and future teachers, administrators, college and university teacher preparation program faculty, and the students they serve.

Information obtained during this study which could identify you will be kept confidential. The summarized findings with no identifying information may be published in an academic journal or presented at a scholarly conference.

Your participation is completely voluntary. You are free to withdraw from participation at any time or to choose not to participate at all, and by doing so, you will not be penalized or lose benefits to which you are otherwise entitled.

If you have questions about the study or desire information regarding your participation or the study, you can contact Janine Kane, Ed. S. at 563-599-3230 or her faculty advisors: Dr. John Henning at the Department of Educational Psychology and Foundations, University of Northern Iowa, 319-273-7488 or Dr. Frank Kohler at the Department of Special Education, University of Northern Iowa, 319-273-7484. You can also contact the office of the IRB Administrator, University of Northern Iowa, at 319-273-6148, for answers to questions about rights of research participants and the participant review process.

**Agreement:**

I am fully aware of the nature and extent of my participation in this project as stated above and the possible risks arising from it. I hereby agree to participate in this project. I acknowledge that I have received a copy of this consent statement. I am 18 years of age or older.

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**(Signature of Participant)**

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**(Date)**

---

**(Printed Name of Participant)**

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**(Signature of Investigator)**

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**(Date)**

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**(Signature of Faculty Advisor)**

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**(Date)**

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**(Signature of Faculty Advisor)**

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**(Date)**

## APPENDIX D

## POTENTIAL INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

*Demographic Information*

Please tell me the following: your age, the teacher preparation program from which you received your degree, number of years taught, the year you were hired and when you retired.

Did you have any gaps in employment?

Please tell me about your family.

*Opening Question*

Has education changed since you began teaching? If so, how?

*Questions Related to Research Question 1**Characteristics of School(s) and District(s)*

How many districts did you teach in? Please describe the district(s) – size, location, public or private, school configuration, enrollment characteristics, etc,

Please describe community's/communities' characteristics.

*Administrator(s)*

How many different administrators did you have over the years? Describe each of them. How did they handle teacher induction, professional development, and supervision? Mandates? Change efforts?

*Teachers*

Describe your view of the role and responsibilities of a teacher. Related to students? Related to society? (If having difficulty responding, ask what social

responsibility a teacher has – for example, is it a teacher’s role to try to help with issues that occur in a child’s life outside the classroom? Why or why not? If so, when and what issues? Is a teacher responsible to learn about the students’ contexts in the family, community? Is a teacher’s role to know about state and federal regulations regarding education? Special education law? Is the teacher’s role to know about each individual student? Why or why not? What if the teacher has over 100 students in class each day? Is a teacher’s responsibility to “teach to the average student” or to individualize instruction? Does the responsibility differ at any time?)

You’ve had the opportunity to work with many teachers over the course of your career. How would you describe the “ideal” teacher? What characteristics does a “good teacher” need to have?

*Important events in their lives as teachers, including political and societal developments*

What were the important events in your life as a teacher?

Over the decades, describe political climate – local, state, and national. Include who was president, governor, etc. What were the prevailing societal values and events? What was your experience with civil rights?

Construct a timeline or collage or draw a graphic organizer if that is helpful.

*A list and description of educational changes that occurred during the participants’ tenures as teachers, including special education*

Please list the changes that occurred during your tenure as a teacher.

Regarding the changes in education you listed earlier: Please define the following terms: Change - Innovation – Reform (if the participants use other related terms, I will also ask them how to define them as well).

*The purpose of these changes and which level(s) (policy, teacher discourse, classroom implementation) each attained*

Describe the changes that were introduced during your years of teaching. When/how was (insert the name of a change or new teaching strategy here) introduced to you? What was the purpose of such changes? What reasons were given for the changes? Describe your experiences with it/them. Address each change or strategy that is mentioned.

How pervasive were the changes in your school(s)? Were they present in teachers' discourse? In written policies? In implementation in the classrooms in your school(s)? (Tyack & Cuban, 1995) Your classroom? Your observation of other teachers? Please describe and elaborate on factors you believe were involved.

*How special education and education changes were introduced and received*

How was each change introduced? Describe training/support that was provided (see Eisner, 1998, p. 12). Describe how the educational change was supported over time. Which of these changes involved students with different learning needs? Were there differences between how changes were introduced to you and how they were implemented?



If you implemented changes, what barriers, if any, did you encounter? What supports for your efforts existed, if any? If you did not, describe the circumstances, and include what barriers and/or supports existed.

*Beliefs, experiences, and dispositions related to special education and educational changes*

What are your beliefs related to the changes? How would you rate the outcome of the changes? Why?

What impact did the change(s) have on you? Your colleagues? The school? The community?

*Special Education (If not mentioned as a change prior to this point.)*

Please define special education. Tell me what you know about special education. Describe your experience with special education. (When/how was special education introduced to you? What is your understanding of the purpose of special education? What are your beliefs related to special education? Over the years, how have students in your classroom been identified to receive special education services?) Describe your knowledge of laws related to special education.

From your perspective, what benefits or drawbacks did special education provide for students who received these services?

*Questions Related to Research Question 2*

*Impact of Changes on Students*

Describe a few of your students who come to mind. For each, please describe their learning, emotional, and physical needs. Was an educational change movement(s) happening at that time? If so, did you implement the change? Did colleagues?

Did change(s) (discuss each individually) you witnessed impact education for the children you taught? If so, what was the impact of the change movement on the students? On you? Did you view the impact of the change as positive or negative? Why? If change(s) did not impact students, why not?

Do you believe students' opportunities remained the same or became less equal or more equal during your time as a teacher?

Would you say the changes were successful or unsuccessful? Why? Are there ways you think outcomes for students could have been improved? If so, what are they? (If not previously answered) Did the changes that were implemented impact the achievement or social mobility of any of your students? Please elaborate on your response.

If not previously answered: What effect/impact did special education and other changes you described have on students in your classroom?

*Impact of Changes on Colleagues, Self*

What effect/impact did special education and other changes you described have on you? Your colleagues? The school? The community? Please elaborate on your response.

*Other Questions*

I would ask these remaining questions last, if the participants had not previously discussed these topics. These interview questions fall under the realm of the first research question, “What are teachers’ perceptions and experiences related to special education and other changes that occurred in the educational system in the United States since 1975?”

*Recent Changes in Iowa*

Please tell me what (if anything) you know about the Iowa Core Curriculum. Do you support this movement or not? Why or why not? What recommendations would you have for the governor, State Department of Education, Area Education Agencies, and school administrators?

What do you see are the advantages and disadvantages of efforts to provide equal access to high quality curriculum and instruction that meets individual learners’ needs? What are the challenges?

*Suggested Improvements*

If you could have waved a magic wand during your career, what changes or improvements would you have implemented? Why?

Based on your teaching experience, if you could give every teacher some advice about special education and educational change, what would it be?

If you could give every administrator some advice based on your teaching experience related to special education and educational change, what would it be?

If you could give those who design teacher preparation programs some advice based on your teaching experiences with special education and educational change, what would it be?

*Specific Topic Questions*

Have you heard of the term differentiated instruction/curriculum? When in your career did you hear of it? Tell me what you know. Do you believe differentiated instruction/curriculum is important? Is it needed? Why or why not?

What changes would you recommend be included in NCLB?

How would you define social justice? Was there an emphasis on social justice issues in the schools in which you taught? If there was, please give examples. If there was not, do you think it is important to consider social justice issues in schools? Please describe why or why not.

Is there anything else you would like to tell me?

*At the end of each session:* If you have any additional thoughts after this interview, please use the recording device to record your ideas so we can listen to them together at the next interview (or if it is the last scheduled interview: ...and call me so we can set up a time to discuss your ideas.)