This book presents a multi-faceted approach to a case study of a secondary school, the London Technical and Commercial High School, one of the first vocational secondary schools. The authors make a case for tracing the history of classroom and curriculum, using a variety of ways to examine the history, the institutional structures, and everyday life in the school. A major theme is the importance of viewing teachers and administrators as mediating agencies between government and the "outside world" on one hand, and students on the other, whilst retaining their own personal and career agendas. Other central themes are gender and class. Intended audience: Researchers in education, education policy makers, postgraduate and undergraduate education students.
Through the Schoolhouse Door
STUDIES IN PROFESSIONAL LIFE AND WORK
Volume 3

Editor
Ivor Goodson
Education Research Centre, University of Brighton, UK

Editorial Board
J. M. Pancheco, University of Minho, Portugal
David Labaree, Stanford University
Sverker Lindblad, University of Gothenburg
Leslie Siskin, NYU/Steinhardt Institute for Education & Social Policy

Scope
The series will commission books in the broad area of professional life and work. This is a burgeoning area of study now in educational research with more and more books coming out on teachers’ lives and work, on nurses’ life and work, and on the whole interface between professional knowledge and professional lives.

The focus on life and work has been growing rapidly in the last two decades. There are a number of rationales for this. Firstly, there is a methodological impulse: many new studies are adopting a life history approach. The life history tradition aims to understand the interface between people’s life and work and to explore the historical context and the socio-political circumstances in which people’s professional life and work is located. The growth in life history studies demands a series of books which allow people to explore this methodological focus within the context of professional settings.

The second rationale for growth in this area is a huge range of restructuring initiatives taking place throughout the world. There is in fact a world movement to restructure education and health. In most forms this takes the introduction of more targets, tests and tables and increasing accountability and performativity regimes. These initiatives have been introduced at governmental level – in most cases without detailed consultation with the teaching and nursing workforces. As a result there is growing evidence of a clash between people’s professional life and work missions and the restructuring initiatives which aim to transform these missions. One way of exploring this increasingly acute clash of values is through studies of professional life and work. Hence the European Commission, for instance, have begun to commission quite large studies of professional life and work focussing on teachers and nurses. One of these projects – the Professional Knowledge Network project has studied teachers’ and nurses’ life and work in seven countries. There will be a range of books coming out from this project and it is intended to commission the main books on nurses and on teachers for this series.

The series will begin with a number of works which aim to define and delineate the field of professional life and work. One of the first books ‘Investigating the Teacher’s Life and Work’ by Ivor Goodson will attempt to bring together the methodological and substantive approaches in one book. This is something of a ‘how to do’ book in that it looks at how such studies can be undertaken as well as what kind of generic findings might be anticipated.

Future books in the series might expect to look at either the methodological approach of studying professional life and work or provide substantive findings from research projects which aim to investigate professional life and work particularly in education and health settings.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1. Introduction: The Case History of a Case Study</th>
<th>1</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2. Behind the Classroom Door: The Historical Study of the Curriculum</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. F.W Merchant and Technical Classes in London with Ian R. Dowbiggin</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. On Explaining Curriculum Change: H.B. Beal, Organizational Categories and the Rhetoric of Justification</td>
<td>59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Origins and Destinations: Students Sociocultural Characteristics and Educational Experience at the London Technical and Commercial High School, 1913–35</td>
<td>93</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. “Schooldays are the Happiest Days of Your Life”: Voices, Lives and Memories</td>
<td>135</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION: THE CASE HISTORY
OF A CASE STUDY

INTRODUCTION

The volume before you comprises a set of working papers emerging from an ongoing study of the London Technical and Commercial High School (LTCHS), later known - after its founder - as the H.B. Beal Technical and Commercial High School. While each paper attempts to analyze some aspect of the school’s history in terms of differing disciplinary agendas, the book itself is a snapshot of the research process. It documents in many ways the myriad influences which affect any long-term, multi-personnel, scholarly project. This introduction, then, represents more than a summary of what appears in subsequent chapters: it is an attempt to place these papers within the context of the research study’s own history. Here we try to answer Hammersley’s (1983) charge that even the most reflexive of researchers rarely subject their own actions to the intensive analysis to which they subject others.

One primary pattern emerges from this somewhat narcissistic recapitulation: in this collection of studies, we have moved away from sole dependence on conventional history as the way of trying to exhume and reconstruct the institutionalized practices and patterns of a school; in doing so we have moved into engagement with but not full immersion in people’s stories and oral testimonies. All of the latter work is done against the background of the former: while the former is carried out with the latter in mind. Moving backwards and forwards between conventional historiography and oral testimony thereby puts us in a peculiar place of tension from which to try to reconstruct institutionalized practices.

STARTING UP

The biographical influences in this project were perhaps particularly evident during the early days when a research approach was being developed, although a lot of the initial foci chosen were substantially reworked later. Ivor Goodson, the project director, moved to the University of Western Ontario from the University of Sussex in June 1986. At the time, he had been writing a number of studies of schools which focused on exhuming the detailed histories of curriculum practice and curriculum guidelines. His book School Subjects and Curriculum Change (1983) and the sequel The Making of Curriculum (1988), both grew from a long running concern with the history, politics, practices and internal details of school curricula. In formulating the project in the later months of 1986, he was concerned to develop this socio-historical focus as it related to Canadian high school curricula. An application was submitted for a Canada scholarship research grant. This was a
category of research scholarship available at that time through the Social Science and Humanities Research Council - the intention of which was to bring back Canadian scholars working in other countries to focus on indigenous scholarship. As a result, Ian Dowbiggin, then finishing his Ph.D. in History at the University of Rochester and working with Christopher Lasch, came back to join Goodson in the summer of 1987 to work on a study of curriculum history. After a good deal of discussion and a number of false starts, Goodson made contact with H.B. Beal Secondary School which seemed to have an unusually rich history and associated archive base. In the following two years, Goodson and Dowbiggin worked together to develop a historical and contextual background to Beal School. Initially, this involved a fairly conventional historiographic approach: working through archives and a range of school based documentation.

By the end of the two year project, however, Goodson was growing increasingly concerned with the constraints of conventional archival work. Not least it seemed to further cover up, rather than exhume, many of the contradictory practices and assumptions which are often at work within institutionalized sites. Hence, in the final months of this stage of the project, a number of interviews were undertaken with teachers in their eighties and nineties who had been at Beal School in the early days. These oral testimonies provided a database for conceptualizing a project which covered a spectrum from conventional archival sources through to oral testimonies and stories.

The project entered a much more innovative phase with the approval of the SSHRC grant in early 1990. The grant provided money for materials, administrative support and teaching relief for Goodson. It also provided funding for an additional full-time researcher. Christopher Anstead, a traditionally-trained historian, joined the research team in January 1991. Anstead was working on the final drafts of his dissertation, which used insights from the work of Antonio Gramsci (1971) and the “new cultural history” (Hunt, 1989) to understand the social world of Victorian Ontario (Anstead, 1992).

Goodson urged Anstead to bring this sort of approach to bear on the Beal School data and from the beginning argued that methodological diaries be kept to monitor the social processes underpinning the work. He suggested that Anstead start by examining the Report of the Royal Commission on Industrial Training and Technical Education (1913). Four months later, Anstead looked back at the way in which he had undertaken this task, revealing something of his methodological orientation on coming to the project.

As I read through these four volumes, I made notes on information that reflected themes which I had already decided needed investigation, and themes which seemed to be emerging from the source. I spent a lot of time looking at the types of schools in other countries, because I felt it was important to see the nationality of the model chosen in the case of London. I also made notes on the comments of supporters of this kind of education, especially those representing labour or business groups. I outlined the facilities already existing in this field, both in Ontario, and in Canada as a whole.... Looking back now, I can see that all of these interests were external to the “black box”
of the school ... I did not really look at differences in actual curricula being proposed or used in different places (Anstead, Research Diary [ARD], May 1991).

Anstead then moved into the sort of task he had been primarily trained for: a sweeping investigation into the wealth of archival sources available on the history of the LTCHS. He later reflected on his method for handling that task:

In making [notes from these sources], I was making very conscious decisions about what to include or exclude. My basic organizing principle was that I should include anything which seemed to be relevant to the emerging themes of the project. Yet it was the study of the Minutes (as well as conversations with Goodson, and with other colleagues) which was in fact leading to the refinement of older themes and the emergence of new ones....

This then is something of a chicken and egg dilemma: how could I be collecting evidence on themes which were yet to emerge? The quick answer is that I could not, and as new themes came to my attention I had to broaden my collection patterns or go back over the primary material. Yet I did not really do that often. In fact my earliest collection of data was quite similar to later collections. Basically I read every page of the Minutes and then made notes on what struck me as historically relevant. (ARD, May 21–3, 1991).

Anstead also visited other depositories. One of these was the Archives of Ontario, where he sought records describing the relationship between the Beal school and the machinery of the provincial Department

On Tuesday of this week I travelled to the Archives of Ontario in Toronto. It was a disappointing visit. I made contact with the Archivist specifically responsible for the Department of Education. Between us, we determined that the material I need is not at the archives. Apparently, the department weeded through its records before transferring them in the early 1950s. Officials eliminated anything thought to be of no historic value. This included all departmental files on specific vocational schools. Thus there is an empty file folder titled “London Technical and Commercial High School.” A search of various finding aids and indices for other departmental files turned up nothing which seemed relevant. ...

It seems likely that the correspondence I was seeking no longer exists. The project has thus found itself hindered by the “intractable selection of the past” – a selection presumably influenced by the dominant view of history as “Acts and Facts” in the 1950s (ARD, 6 Feb. 1992).

Despite problems like this, archival sources provided the main evidentiary base for four of the papers presented in this volume.

The third paper presented here, “The Origins of Technical Education in London: Context, Concerns and Curriculum, 1910–1915” would stand as the first chapter in a typical institutional history. As the title indicates, it provides a contextual overview of the founding of LTCHS. While the chapter is based firmly in
documentary sources, it raises issues which are dealt with more fully in papers which use other sorts of evidence or methodological approaches. The primary factor of note in this piece is the pre-eminence given to academic training by the various groups which made up the vocational movement.

“F.W. Merchant and Technical Classes in London” links some of our conclusions about the origins of LTCHS to a wider framework. Using the actions of a single individual as a window into the provincial Department of Education, the chapter shows how non-local pressure aided in the consolidation of the school’s position. Yet even officials of the government had to acknowledge other influences on school curricula – in particular, the respect of many external groups for academic subjects, and the professional concerns of the school staff.

An attempted revision of an earlier working paper (Goodson and Dowbiggin, 1989) on gender and course choice at the Beal school led to a completely new paper - “Subject Status and Curriculum Change: Commercial Education in London, Ontario, 1920–1940.” This paper followed the history of the commercial program at LTCHS to demonstrate a relationship between change in student socio-cultural characteristics and curriculum innovation. In this case the feminization and (to a lesser degree) proletarianization of commercial courses led to professional status concerns for teachers of the subject and the principal at LTCHS. They responded by creating new courses aimed at attracting, on one hand, young men, and, on the other, students with higher social class backgrounds.

The decision to highlight the commercial program in “Subject Status” had temporary repercussions throughout the organization of our primary data. “On Explaining Curriculum Change: H.B. Beal, Organizational Categories and the Rhetoric of Justification” originated as a paper centred on the matriculation program, which was then used to point out inconsistencies in Beal’s public statements. Goodson, however, felt that the paper could do more. The revised version now draws on John Meyer’s (1980) work to argue that the inconsistency of rhetoric and actions resulted from Beal’s ability to identify and use symbolic structures important to powerful external constituencies.

While undertaking the writing of the conventional history pieces, we employed a variety of sources to aid our understanding of the school’s past. Over the past three decades, analyzing quantitative evidence has become a standard part of a social historian’s repertoire. In the case of the Beal project, the main funding proposal had stressed the quantitative data available, and Dowbiggin had worked on collecting student data.

The most important quantitative source comprised samples of student record cards. We built a database which represented entering student cohorts at four-year intervals. This data was entered into computer files with as many of the following variables as possible: case number, gender, class entered, address code, birthplace, parent’s occupation, standing at entrance, outcome of the year, career at school, date leaving school, placement occupation, and marks for attendance, conduct and academic average. (We decided to use case numbers instead of names for ethical reasons; it should make it easier for us to allow other researchers access to the data base at some future time.) While several papers in this collection refer to this

Although “Origins and Destinations” is essentially a collection of statistical tables linked by a small amount of text and interpretation, it does tackle an issue long debated by those who have studied vocational education: the relationship between gender or class and educational “streaming.” Using a variety of statistical comparisons, this chapter shows the crucial importance of gender in the choice of courses made by students at LTCHS. While the perpetuation of gender divisions no doubt affected females negatively, given the patriarchal nature of early twentieth century society, young women also gained some benefits. In fact, at an individual level, decisions made by female students at LTCHS were much more successful in raising their social status, than were those of males.

ORAL TESTIMONY

As was mentioned above, a growing focus on oral testimonies developed in the first period of the project. This grew out of a sense of the constraints implicit in relying solely on historical archives in reconstructing the complexities of school life. Such documentation tends to align itself to the conventions and features of organizational life, while oral testimonies move beyond those boundaries to allow exploration of the ambiguities and contradictions which underly and underpin institutional forms. Together historical work of the archival sort and more oral testimony-based work allow the exploration of the multi-faceted nature of life and process’ within the institution of schooling. The ongoing dialogue between these kinds of data and method take us into areas of school life that have not tended to be subject to socio-historical investigation.

Oral history deals with subjects, not written documents, and provides an alternative view of incidents, structures or policies as described in official sources. These can challenge views obtained from official or documentary sources (Nelson, 1992). Because oral history developed outside history departments, some traditional historians felt it did not come up to academic standards, and listed a variety of faults: recall can be simply incorrect, especially in terms of chronological order; memories can be twisted consciously or unconsciously to put the speaker in favourable light; perceptions change between then and now; someone may change their mind on some issue, or their personal values may change; the hindsight of history can lead to interpretations based on evidence or theory not then available. (E.g. dyslexia, sexual harassment); participants had limited view of constraints or actions of others; only a very limited selection of memories can be examined in any interview. (Hodysh and McIntosh, 1989) Some of these concerns showed in our field notes.

While on the topic of oral testimony, I should mention a discussion that I had with one of the teachers at Beal, who had been a student in the 1950s. During the conversation, I mentioned the oral interviews that had already been carried out for the project. This teacher was quite outspoken in his opinion
that one of our informants (a name was mentioned, but I’m not sure it belongs here) was not a “typical” teacher. He said that this teacher was in fact heartily disliked by both staff and students, due to certain autocratic tendencies. This raises some issues about the associated oral testimony. Is there such a thing as a “typical” teacher, and should we seek them out? Should evidence of behaviour deemed inappropriate in the post-war era influence our reading of the oral testimony from an earlier period? Is it possible that a teacher placed in such a defensive position at the end of a long career might present his or her testimony as a self-serving illustration of his or her ultimate good sense? These are just concrete examples of the sort of dilemmas we will face when we move into the oral testimony stage of the project (ARD, Oct. 21, 1991).

While the use of oral sources has become commonplace in historical projects, we soon found ourselves examining the conditions of this use. In most historical work, oral evidence is used like other sources, as discrete bits of information employed to substantiate a longer argument or narrative concerning historical reality. Influenced by what was going on in a wide range of postmodern genres, Goodson was interested in doing more in the way of deconstructing, or at least demystifying, the way in which we told our story.

At first, this meant that we sought a focus which brought this sort of evidence to centre stage. “Structure and Mediation: Glimpses of Everyday Life at the London Technical and Commercial High School, 1920–1940 does this. The paper originated from Anstead’s feelings about the interviews:

I am starting to realize what these interviews are contributing to my understanding of Beal history. For the most part, it seems an incremental process. Though no single interview would give me confidence in my mental reconstruction of the past, the mosaic of new detail and repeated patterns I am finding is allowing me that confidence. In other words, I feel I have a fairly accurate picture of classroom life in the school between the wars. I have images of the teaching styles of many different teachers; I can visualize the sort of projects technical students undertook; I can imagine what the atmosphere in class, or in the halls, was like. But to reach this level of confidence, it was necessary to undertake the fifteen interviews that I have conducted. [Another dozen interviews took place after this.] No subject recalled with sweeping clarity all these things; I probably would not have trusted anyone who did, at least until I verified it. (ARD, March 23, 1992).

In “Structure and Mediation” we provide a description of the day to day schooling experience constructed in a mosaic fashion from the oral evidence of former teachers and students. The account reveals both that school life was highly structured, and how these structures were continually reconstructed by the actions of staff and students. Among students, those with the most control over the conditions of their education were the male students in senior technical classes, suggesting an alternate way of interpreting the historical struggle over vocational education.
As traditionally carried out, oral history could be seen as exploitation, with a raft of hidden ethical pitfalls. The researcher invades the privacy of his or her subject to get something of value, without offering anything in return. The interview situation may lead a subject to reveal something unintentionally, or something which may be regretted later. The process of recalling history can upset some people, and in extreme cases cause a fundamental rethinking of life choices (Cole, 1991; Measer and Sikes, 1992). One of our interviewers reflected on an encounter with this sort of dilemma:

As well as finding pleasure in sharing someone’s memories there were a couple of occasions that weren’t so pleasant. It’s a sad part of life that the people we talked to were so familiar with death, and to hear the loneliness in their voices was sometimes heartbreaking. One instance stands out in my mind in particular. It was the last interview of the day, and we were visiting with a very pleasant lady who had attended the night classes at Beal.... The lady in question tended to be a rambler... It was obvious she was very lonely. [Finally,] we stood up [to leave]. She looked stricken that we hadn’t had any tea, and she had made homemade butter tarts especially for us. Chris and I both felt about two inches high, but we had stayed an hour longer than we really needed to. It came down to the fact that no matter how long we stayed, she wouldn’t have wanted us to leave (Keohan, 1992).

This has led some researchers to a concern with reciprocity; what does the subject get out of the experience, after giving the researcher something at some personal cost (either in time or in more psychological terms)? For many people, especially the elderly, “being listened to” is valuable, and often seen as enough of an exchange. But is it? How much are researchers obliged to reveal of their theory to their subjects? Should a subject have some control over the results and conclusions reached by an academic? On the other hand, does a researcher have an ethical right to challenge a subject when his or her evidence seems to contradict other evidence, or to simply be wrong? Some practitioners have concluded that any historical project which involves interviews has to be thoroughly justified (Lynch, 1979).

TESTIMONY, MEMORY AND REALITY

Our concern with oral testimony incorporated more than these worries over ethics. Like all pieces of evidence, historians subject oral accounts to tests of verification. This, however, raises the issue of the nature of memory and recall, which has a specific impact on anyone's use of oral evidence. This has not always been addressed by historians, as the words of one respected Canadian practitioner reveal:

I have always believed that oral history is largely a matter of common sense and I have never been very impressed by lengthy disquisitions about what purports to be the theory and technique of the subject. (Oliver, 1975–6, p. 13)

As in all historical methodology, facts found in an interview are shaped by a selection process. Interviews are not like other “speech events” - the rules of
conversation differ, with an interviewer typically prodding the speaker to exemplify, analyze or confirm (Ball, 1983; Hodysh and McIntosh, 1989; Scheurich, 1992). The interview, says Ball, “... confronts the interviewee with the necessity to conceptualize and articulate experiences within their common-sense reality that are normally unquestioned and unnoticed features of their everyday life.” (1983, p. 92).

Our project proved no exception:

In interviewing, I have always tried to let the subject lead the discussion as much as possible. In practical terms, this means devoting the first segment of the interview to the memories of the subject with no prompting at all. Most of the people interviewed have spent some time thinking about the school in the weeks since they contacted us. I ask them to share those thoughts, often following the structure of notes they have written down. Yet at some time, I (or we) take over each interview. We ask for clarification, look for verification of our interpretations of their words, or seek to pursue - or avoid, if emotions are involved – particular topics. Thus we are taking an important role in the construction of the account, urging the subjects to express themselves in ways they had never intended to. This is what an oral historian does, and there is nothing wrong with it, as long as the researcher accepts that his or her presence (as well as the presence of tape recorders and witnesses - such as the spouse of the respondent) is changing the subjects’ presentation of the past (ARD, 31 March 1992).

For some or the Interviews, including all those involving female subjects, Karen Keohan accompanied Anstead. Keohan worked as an administrative assistant at RUCCUS, and was familiar with the Beal project. We felt that her presence would make female subjects more relaxed, and possibly bring out information that would otherwise be overlooked. She later summarized her reaction to our request for her company was as follows: “I was first flattered, and then scared... I worried that I would have nothing of value to contribute, and worse still that I would really stick my foot in my mouth!” (Keohan, 1992).

Despite her misgivings, Keohan proved an invaluable part of our interview team, and participated fully in the interviews. Yet, she noticed a difference in the way that she and Anstead were treated by some interviewees:

While interviewing another woman who also worked at the school after graduating, I started to notice how differently Chris and I were treated at times. She was a very attractive lady, and I’m sure in her youth she was a knockout. She told us that while working at the school, she dated a number of teachers, and had a number ask her out. I got the feeling that she was very much a man’s women. Chris and I were seated on either side of her and when she talked to us, she faced Chris. Not only did she direct her comments to him, her knees were always pointed towards him. I found this quite amusing as I was the one doing the majority of the questioning. Another instance where I noticed this phenomenon was when we were talking to a gentleman who had been in the auto mechanics course. Again, Chris and I sat on either side of him and although he gave us equal attention, whenever he answered a
question that dealt specifically with cars, he directed his comments to Chris. To a lesser extent, I noticed that even if I started the interview and gave the impression of being in charge, Chris was often treated as being the one in charge (Keohan, 1992).

In addition, the speaker often has much of his or her life invested in the event or institution described, and its outcome (for instance, school experience led to a specific career for rest of the subject’s life), making them unwilling or even unable to criticize. Some subjects may have romanticized a particular period in their life, particularly their youth (Nelson, p. 171). The following excerpt is unusual only in the interviewer’s persistence; the opinions expressed were frequently encountered.

Teacher: If you wanted to say there was discrimination against women, I don’t think there was really but they were, the promotions were usually you know, the principalship and that, they were men. And rightly so! I still think it’s rightly so because I feel very strongly. You see, there are hardly any single women in the system today and I think to do a decent job, you have to be single and dedicated to your profession. I don’t think a married women can do the job. If she has a husband, that’s her job to stay home and look after him and the children.

[Later in the same interview]

Teacher: ... I think a lot of these people imagine things, they bring it upon themselves.
Interviewer: Like, you are talking about the ideas of say sexual harassment and that sort of thing?
Teacher: Yes, I’ve never heard of such things.
Interviewer: Do you wonder whether you’ve never heard of it or you didn’t know what to call it?
Teacher: Well, there was never anything like that. No I think that the feminists have brought that upon themselves, if there is any. It’s the feminists that are responsible (Interview with Margaret Fallona, 1990).

The use of oral evidence in the Beal project, then, brought issues of memory and reality into the foreground of our methodological concerns. We begin to explore these issues in our final chapter:

Of course some interviews have been more fruitful than others. I tend to divide the interviews into three types. First are those which did not go well. Some former students cannot stay on topic in their reminiscences. Despite a number of attempts by myself, or Karen, they will talk about the present, or totally unconnected past experiences. I have to admit here that my style of interviewing is to go with the subject’s flow, and so I probably do not do enough to force the issue. Even these interviews can produce useful information - it just takes more work to find it. Of the seven interviews done last week, two fell into this category. Yet each did have at least one or two pieces of information which adds immeasurably to the whole picture.
CHAPTER 1

The second type of interview is the norm. In these interviews, the subject stays on topic, answers questions in useful ways, and provides a lot of information to add to our brick by brick reconstruction of “Tech.” In this sort of interview, the schooling experience is invariably presented in rosy tones. Frequently comparison to the present system of education is made, with many negative comments about the latter. The main themes of this sort of interpretation are: students were disciplined and showed respect for their teachers; every teacher - without exception - was good, and many went beyond the call of duty; and all students, whatever their socioeconomic background, were treated the same. The positive view of their school days probably results partly from the selection process; those people who most enjoyed or valued their school experience were most likely to answer our ad. Yet, I would not want to dismiss the positive out of hand; there is probably some truth behind the platitudes.

Finally, the third type of interview is rare. A few former students present more critical or analytical views of their past. Two such interviews took place last week. These students still have a generally positive view of “Tech,” and present their school days as the “best of times.” Yet they are also willing to say that certain teachers were not very good (or even unbalanced in one case). They can point to some types of discrimination, either in the school, or on the part of outsiders describing the school.

There are still large gaps in our understanding of the school. None of the students were aware of any tensions or conflict at the staff level. They tend to think of the principal purely in terms of his responsibility for discipline. So, while the interviews are tremendously helpful in dealing with some of our questions, they leave others completely unanswered (ARD, 23 March 92).

STUDYING MODERNIST INSTITUTIONS

As our work on the Beal project developed intellectual momentum, a number of factors brought a concern with the problem of finding a “usable past” - that is, making our research seem important to those beyond the field of History of Education. Any research takes place in a structured location and that locatedness effects focus and discourse. In our case, the project was funded by a SSHRC grant in Education, was being carried out in an interdisciplinary Research Unit mainly concerned with contemporary classroom issues, located in a Faculty of Education, and was headed by a Professor of Education. These circumstances made some attempt to relate our findings to modern classroom research inevitable.

In “Behind the Classroom Door” we began to argue for a scholarly focus that moved beyond modernist institutional history - the progress of the public school system and its ongoing historical evolution. We nailed against: “Histories of education which fail to analyse the internal nature of schooling and merely accept the school as a ‘black box’ unopened and unanalysed, ignoring the vast potential for internal variety and change.”
In the wider world, modernism unravelled before our eyes and as the research study progressed, we moved further and further away from a focus on the modernist institutional history. Initially our social embeddedness in educational and classroom research forced some dissolution of the institutional focus to look at classroom and curricula complexity.

But another factor was at work: The closer we came to the present the less documentary sources, some of them personal and confidential, were available. Hence, conventional documentary and institutional history was progressively set against oral and personal testimony. We began listening to ‘other voices’ particularly the voices of those long silent in educational history: teachers and students.

These concerns and interests did not emerge in a vacuum; instead they tended to reflect our interest in the debate then raging in the emergent genres of Postmodernism. “Postmodernism,” of course, is a term applied to a range of theoretical positions in a wide variety of disciplines, including urban planning, literary theory, anthropology, history, sociology and cultural studies. Penelope Corfield (1992) identifies some of the common elements: a disbelief in progress as defined by modernists, which borders on cynicism; the belief that the industrial age in the West is over; a sort of disillusioned, restless, and jesting approach to enquiry. The postmodernist (post-industrial) economy, consumer oriented and grounded in the service sector, replaces modernist political concerns such as nation-building or the construction of public sectors and welfare states. Some supporters say it goes further, and challenges the notion of (scientific) reason itself, thus challenging history’s underpinnings - on the basis that reason is simply another expression of power.

In terms of a school-based case study such as this, postmodernism asserts:

Even if there could have been, there cannot now be a single Case Study that represents the life of an institution. Rather, it is a collection composed of narratives formed out of the voices caught in notes or tape recordings, fortuitously, or formalized in interviews; formed from documentation, the formal and the informal, systematically or opportunistically collected; and shaped by the interests, idiosyncrasies and limitations of the researcher-writer.

...What is represented is not a school, but a play of interpretations, sensuous images, expressions out of which representations are made which connect selves to groups, to institutional patterns, to sub-cultural and cultural ‘worlds’ (Schostak, 1992, p. 1).

In the historical profession, debate rages over postmodernism’s epistemological assumptions, as well as over how it has already been used in anthropology and literature theory. The first concern arises from the argument that finding “truth” is simply masking power relations. Postmodernists find many truths - many realities - existing, and privilege none of them. Some, drawing on Derrida, argue that documents can only be interpreted in terms of reader understandings. Words do not signify transcendant facts; readers cannot recover an author’s original intent. In fact, authorship becomes meaningless, meanings change, and only words, as
understood today, are left. Historical enquiry cannot recover these meanings. Moreover, language itself is seen to constitute rather than reflect reality, leading to Foucault’s study of social history through discourse (Harlan, 1991; Joyce, 1991; Kelly and Kelly, 1992). To some:

The return of literature has plunged historical studies into an extended epistemological crisis. It has questioned our belief in a fixed and determinable past, compromised the possibility of historical representation, and undermined our ability to locate ourselves in time (Harlan, 1989, p. 581).

While few historians have embraced all the tenets of postmodernist thought, some have responded to these ideas by advocating quite radical changes to the discipline. For instance, some historians now argue that we should ignore peoples’ experience, and concentrate on studying their consciousness, that is, their perceptions and language. This means focus on individuals who spoke, not on amorphous social groups, since all individuals experience reality differently. (Buhle and Buhle, 1988) Others call for “presentism,” a research paradigm based on the acknowledgement that all historical investigation involves the present interrogating the past. (Harlan, 1989; Ankersmit, 1989) Of course others reject all of this, and maintain history’s traditional strength, an emphasis on context.

One aspect of postmodernism which touches the current project deeply focuses on letting groups that have been silenced speak – hearing and recording their voices. This ties directly to oral history, and in particular to new methodologies which seek to uncover the subjective personal experiences, such as life histories and life stories. A “life story” is the life as described by the person who lived it, without any “external” research. It is generally “taken” in a series of rambling interviews, with the researcher playing a very passive role. A “life history” is based on the life story, but involves other “external” research to triangulate sources, as well as place them in a context. The researcher in this case will ask more probing questions, and may challenge the subject with external evidence (Cole, 1991). Yet in the end, some postmodernists argue that any life story or life history differs from life as experienced, because it is filtered through language and the selection process (Goodson, 1992).

While much of the reaction against postmodernism has come from more conservative elements, opposition also comes from the left. More and more academics are pointing to the seeming coincidence of postmodernism flowering under right-wing democratic regimes. This faction argues that this is not a coincidence, but the direct results of Reagan-Bush, Thatcher-Major social policies. The aims of both postmodernist research and poststructuralist policy seem to converge in a withering attack on large- and medium-scale discourses and institutions, except for those of the state and market. In other words, should postmodernism reign, sites and theory for opposition and criticism beyond the level of the individual or community-out-of-context will not exist. In institutional terms, such structures as schools and local or regional school systems, universities, welfare agencies and most forms of local government find themselves either shedding responsibilities or locked in constant struggle with the state and market.
At the level of theory, the sponsoring of individual “voices” without context or placed in a multiverse of realities might “empower” one individual, but it simultaneously reduces the power available to all individuals in a society. Without the ability to discourses of sufficient breadth to reach through a society, individuals are left as victims of the consumerist impulse celebrated by postmodernism.

In these terms, sponsoring teachers’ voices is something of a contradiction, as the teachers whose voices are legitimated are the very agents being disenfranchised by poststructuralist reforms, justified by postmodern arguments. These debates notwithstanding we have begun to assemble our testimonies into transcripts and accounts.

The last paper in this collection - “Schooldays are the Happiest Days of Your Life’: Voices, Lives and Memories” - provides a view of this tentative mosaic of testimony and touches on some of the complexities. We then argue for a form of educational enquiry which studies not only the history of schools as institutions but as sites of institutionalised practices and particularly settings for the teacher’s life and work. If sponsoring the teacher’s voice sounds too polemical in aspiration, studying the teacher’s life and work in all its complexity certainly holds promise. While much of this paper rests on Beal school evidence, it seeks a broader audience. It is, in fact, a discourse on research methodology, thus closing this collection of working papers as we have opened it.

REFERENCES


CHAPTER 1


CHAPTER 2

BEHIND THE CLASSROOM DOOR

The Historical Study of the Curriculum

In April 1977 a group of educationists gathered at Teachers College, Columbia University, to consider forming an organization concerned with the study of the history of the curriculum. In particular, they wanted to attack “the ahistorical and atheoretical character of curriculum reform efforts.” (Society for the Study of Curriculum History, 1981, p. 1). Yet in the decade and a half that has elapsed, only slow progress has been made in closing the gap that exists between curriculum studies and History of Education.

Any detailed analysis of curriculum stability and change demands an understanding of its history; any action-oriented theoretical enterprise ought first to consult the record of success and failure in the past. Curriculum specialists, however, seem reluctant to examine the past without the training imparted to professional historians. At the same time, the study of the history of education has tended to take an ‘external’ view of curriculum focusing on political and administrative contexts and on general movements in education and schooling. Partly this is a reflection of the documents available, which often relate to central government regulations, edicts or commissions on education and curriculum. This is a long way from curriculum as enacted, transacted, realised and received. Though more social and/or revisionist perspectives have gained in influence, especially in the last two decades, History of Education, as institutionalised, has retained a certain ‘Acts and Facts’ flavour. Histories of education which fail to analyze the internal nature of schooling merely accept the school as a ‘black box’, unopened and unanalysed, ignoring the vast potential for internal variety and change.

The reluctance of historians to look behind the classroom door, and of curriculum specialists to use historical methods, serves as a drag on any attempt to comprehend schools and education. These are tendencies which must be overcome; in fact some writers are already working to do so. In an attempt to exemplify such work, this paper concludes with an overview of one particular study of curriculum in its historical setting. The plentiful sources of historical data discovered in this examination of a Canadian high school should encourage historians of education to make the trip into the classroom more frequently. The rewards of the journey are abundant. This survey also outlines some of the historical methods and procedures used in the investigation - methods and procedures with which curriculum specialists should come to grips. It also raises some methodological problems which accompany such an undertaking, as caution for enthusiastic converts to historicism.
CHAPTER 2

If the historical scrutiny of curriculum and curriculum change is given priority in contemporary studies of education, then a mode of inquiry which focuses on and analyses "internal" issues in their historical context is of paramount importance. Partly the crucial nature of internal factors results from the way education and schooling are structured and relate to the broader economy and society. As Webster (1976) has pointed out: Educational institutions are not as directly nor as essentially concerned with the economic and social welfare of the community as, say, factories or hospitals. They are, therefore, particularly well equipped to weather any crisis that may be going on around them' (pp. 206–207). Though less and less the case as the “free market” spreads its tentacles through the economic and social fabric, this relative autonomy has explained the peculiar force of historical traditions and legacies in curriculum change. As a result as Waring (1975) reminds us it is really not surprising that originality always works within the framework of tradition and that a totally new tradition is ‘is of the most improbable of events’.

Hence developing a sense of history will modify our view of curriculum. Instead of the transcendent expectation of basic change we might look for alteration followed by regression, for change attempted and aborted in one place to emerge unexpectedly elsewhere. Through history we develop a longer view and with it a different timescale of expectations and, presumably, range of strategies. The force of history is physically evident to any student of schooling and curriculum both in syllabuses, textbooks, as well as in school buildings and indeed school teachers – an overlay of generations, a time-lag of views, values and valedictions. Charlton (1968) warned that:

The present problem of curriculum planning is itself shot through with the past and with vestiges of the past, and future solutions however radical will inevitably carry something of the past with them (pp. 70–71).

Likewise Blumer (1969) has drawn attention to the problem when studying large-scale organizations, and argues a need ‘to recognize that joint action is temporarily linked to previous joint action’. He warns that ‘one shuts a major door to understanding any form or instance of joint action if one ignores this connection' (p. 60). If anything the need to understand the past traditions and legacies ‘internal’ to curriculum history is even more pressing in the spate of educational or neo-educational changes of the 1980s and 1990s.

Studies of historical events and periods are required in order to develop a cumulative understanding of the historical contexts in which the contemporary curriculum is embedded. In the last three decades we have seen the painful limitations of a historical or transcendent approaches both at the level of curriculum reform and study. Studies with an action orientation have most often been confined to the view of participants at a moment in time, to the here and now of events. The essential omissions were data on the constraints beyond the lesson, the curricula, the school, the classroom and the participant. Although the human process by which people make their own history does not take place in circumstances of their own choosing - as both men and women and circumstances do vary over time - so too do the potentialities for negotiating reality. Historical study seeks to understand
how thought and action have developed in past social circumstances. Following this development through time to the present affords insights into how those circumstances we experience as contemporary ‘reality’ have been negotiated, constructed and reconstructed over time. Stenhouse (1976) saw this need for history to provide an authenticated context for hypothetical actions’. His concern was also with ‘[w]hat might be termed the contextual inertia within which events are embedded’ (p. 7).

The historical context of course reflects previous patterns of contestation, conflict and power. But this in an inherently dynamic process; it is not sufficient to develop a static notion of the historical contexts and constraints inherited in facto from the past. Contexts and constraints need to be examined in relationship to contemporary action. Moreover we require a dynamic model of how curricula, pedagogy, finance, resources, selection, and the economy all interrelate. We must avoid viewing the curriculum (and its associated historical contexts and constraints) as a bounded system. Williamson (1974) has reflected on the fact ‘that it is not sufficient to be aware only on the fact that the principles governing the selection of transmittable knowledge reflect structures of power. It is essential to move beyond such suspicions to work out the precise connections’ (p. 10). This he argues predicates historical study of curriculum ‘if the aim is to understand power in education’. By placing one aspiration of curriculum history as elucidating the contextual background or immanent constraints on contemporary curriculum a number of conclusions follow. Where possible curriculum history should also aim to scrutinise, test, or contribute to educational theory. It is at the heart of the enterprise to examine curriculum development and transformation over time: such complex undertakings cannot be elucidated by ‘snapshots’ of unique historical events or periods. But the recurrence of events viewed in contemporary profile can help in discerning and examining explanatory frameworks and in understanding the manner in which structure and action interrelate. Curriculum history should be concerned, perhaps above all, with understanding the ‘internal’ process of curriculum definition, action and change.

The study of historical context partly to illuminate contemporary prospect implies a need to develop a dialogue between historians of education and curriculum specialists. It further implies a need for curriculum historians to accept a responsibility wherever possible to relate their work to contemporary situations and, again where possible, develop theoretical insights and studies of internal process. Most certainly it means for any curriculum specialists undertaking the work that they must begin to learn and practise the skills of the historian. Why is it that those already trained in these skills have left this lacuna in the history of education? The answer arises from the historical context of history of education itself. In Britain and North America, the history of education has become institutionalized as “Acts and Facts” (see Goodson, 1988).

In England, teacher training first began systematically in the 1840s with the foundation of training colleges, of ‘Queens Scholarships’ which contributed towards maintenance, and of examination certificates for trained adult teachers. In the beginning the training colleges focused on practice rather than theory. (Judd, 1914)
Whilst practical training predominated a number of the colleges began to teach history of education in the last half of the nineteenth century. The teaching and the textbooks were normally provided by past schoolteachers rather than historical specialists.

From 1890 onward ‘university day training colleges’ were established, following a minority report of the Cross Commission which had recommended not just that teachers be trained in universities, but that faculties of education be established to initiate academic study and research in education. At first the universities provided three year courses where the degree work and training for teaching were carried on alongside each other, merging theory and practice. Later theory and practice were made more separate with work for the academic degree in the first three years and an additional year for practical professional training. Separate university departments of education began to be formed from 1911 onwards.

Similarly, teacher training in Canada and the United States started in the first half of the nineteenth century. At first most teachers took their professional education in Normal schools - which provided an education equivalent to secondary schooling. By the turn of the century, though, teachers’ colleges, offering work beyond secondary level, had become the institutional leaders in the field, eliminating Normal schools completely by 1940. Starting in the last decades of the nineteenth century, and through most of the twentieth century, teacher education became a part of the university system as some universities opened faculties of education, others incorporated existing teachers’ colleges, while many state teachers’ colleges, especially in the American mid-west, became multipurpose state universities (Fiorino, 1978; Altenbaugh and Underwood, 1990; Beatty, 1990).

As teacher educators asserted their place in postsecondary schooling, status concerns arose. At heart stood the theory-practice conundrum. Some teacher educators felt their whole purpose revolved around practical training in the art of teaching, while others - especially at university faculties of education - wished to emphasize theoretical study. Soon the most prestigious institutions - Teachers College, at Columbia, and the Schools of Education at Harvard and the University of Chicago – opted for a complete research orientation, and ceased the training of beginning teachers (Cremin, Shannon and Townsend, 1954; Herbst, 1989). When most schools of education bowed to the pressure to legitimate themselves in the eyes of their academic colleagues, history of education stood as “... the one area of educational research which at the time possessed a thoroughgoing, scholarly method of inquiry ...” (Cremin, Shannon and Townsend, 1954, p. 42).

In Britain and North America, then, history of education became an important part of teacher preparation from the 1890s. But from the beginning these courses focused primarily on the history of educational institutions and systems and the history of educational theories and ideas all taught in strict chronological sequence. Although a number of countertendencies developed in both mainstream history and the history of education, the predominance of "Acts and Facts" courses lasted for a very long time (Seaborne, 1971). Even in North America, where the “social foundations” approach diluted history of education in a problem-solving social scientific framework, what remained of the subject in lectures was still focussed on
external factors (Cohen, 1976 and 1984; Weiner, 1991). The reasons for the dominance of “Acts and Facts” history of education are numerous. Perhaps most important was the carryover from the general mode of historical scholarship and writing at the time that history of education courses were devised and institutionalized in the colleges and university departments. History as a discipline in the universities was growing quite rapidly at this time and was primarily concerned with national constitutional and political matters told in narrative manner (Higham, 1965; Davis, 1981; Berger, 1986).

Though the specific social and political contexts of nineteenth century Britain and North America contributed to this pattern, so did the associated range of documentary evidence on which history has to build its interpretations. Williams (1961) has reminded us that the problem of the ‘selective tradition’ is a general cultural phenomenon, which has a particular potency when practised by historians.

To some extent, the selection begins within the period itself; from the whole body of activities, certain things are selected for value and emphasis. In general this selection will reflect the organisation of the period as a whole, though this does not mean that the values and emphases will later be confirmed. We see this clearly enough in the case of past periods, but we never really believe it about our own (p. 67).

For the historian the effects of contemporary selection and associated documentation are often conclusive. Historians of education who search out new areas of study therefore often collide with the intractable selections of past periods (Andrews, 1983).

These factors join with contemporary definitions of the relative importance of different types of historical problems to maintain History of Education as a discipline which takes an external approach to schools. It is within schools, and, in particular, within classrooms, where the reality of curriculum delivery is negotiated; yet this is the one forum most neglected by historians of education. A few leaders in the field have pointed to this omission. In 1986, Chad Gaffield called on Canadian historians of education to go “back to school” (pp. 187–188), and described the lack of any study of the classroom as “a major weakness in the current historiography of education” (p. 183). Similarly, in early 1992 Harold Silver took American and British educational historians to task. According to Silver, in History of Education as currently practised: “There are no classrooms, no children, no teaching, no learning” (p. 104). He concludes: “We have been writing the history of educational contexts, not of education” (p. 107).

Despite the foregoing, characterising History of Education in the past as predominantly “Acts and Facts” is less than fair; as with any subject History of Education has not been, and is not, monolithic. There have always been different, perhaps broader visions at work within the subject. In seeking to formulate an alternative paradigm for the historical study of education it is intriguing to return to the early work of the first Professors of Education, many of whom brought a conviction that historical studies could deepen an understanding of the educational terrain (Simon, 1966).
The most systematic treatment of the history of the curriculum came from Foster Watson, who was appointed Professor of Education at the University College of Wales, Aberystwyth, in 1894. Watson’s concern was to provide a detailed curriculum history and he argued for both its importance and, for its time, uniqueness:

It will be generally admitted that it is high time that the historical facts with regard to the beginning of the teaching of modern subjects in England were known, and known in connection with the history of the social forces which brought them into the educational curriculum. This is precisely what is now attempted for the first time, as far as the writer knows, within a single volume (Watson, 1909, p. viii).

Regrettably both in the specific case of launching curriculum history and in the general sense of launching a more broadly conceived view of history of education the work of the early Professors was only pursued patchily in the twentieth century.

In the last quarter-century a growing literature, particularly from the USA, has sought to extend or critique this work, drawing inspiration from catalytic changes in mainstream history. Economic and social history have grown rapidly since the inter-war years; oral history and feminist history have developed to try to exhume the ‘invisible armies’ suppressed by selective traditions; the work of Hobsbawm (1959), Thompson (1968), Genovese (1974), Smith-Rosenberg (1985) and many others illustrates how such imposed selections can in fact be transcended, how the lived experiences in our culture can be reconstructed by historians. These tendencies, which have been moulding the practice of history for decades, point to new possibilities for educational history. Perhaps the early promise of history of education courses as glimpsed by the first Professors of Education can at last be retrieved and carried on.

In fact, the last two decades have seen tremendous changes in the practice of History of Education. Since 1970 or so, historians of education have carved out a professional niche for themselves in the academic field of mainstream history. They have linked up with the concerns of the dynamic social historians, leading to useful studies of education in terms of class, gender and ethnicity (Wilson, 1984 and 1990; Gaffield, 1986; Harrigan, 1986; Aldrich, 1987). More recently, historians of education have followed their social history allies in turning away from studies of power structures, in favour of the examination of human responses to such structures, particularly in terms of the family (Wilson, 1984). Yet in their exuberant campaign to make their subject a sub-field of social history, historians of education have distanced themselves from the topics of central concern to most members of education faculties.

There are already, however, a number of influential studies which do take up these concerns, represented in the UK by Waring’s (1979) study of the Nuffield Foundation Science Teaching Project, and Harold Silver’s (1983) essays in Education as History, in the US by Labaree’s (1988) examination of Philadelphia’s Central High School and in Canada, by Rowell and Gaskell’s (1987) study of science curricula. All of this work shares a willingness where possible to develop links with contemporary curriculum and with educational theory and to examine and
analyze ‘internal’ process. In the best of this work we have the painstaking recon-
struction of an historical period and the development of an understanding of the
connections between previous historical struggles and present contexts, actions and
possibilities. We gain insights into the process of curriculum production.

In addition, a few historians of education have examined the actual process of
education as it takes place within the classroom. One particularly fruitful area
seems to be the work presently underway concerning teachers’ lives and teachers’
narratives. While this focus grew out of a concern with the impact of external
forces - such as gender and class relations – on teachers, recent studies have moved
into a broader consideration of the practice of teaching in a specific historical
context. Larry Cuban (1984) deserves special credit here, while recent collections
edited by Prentice and Theobald (1991) and Goodson (1992) point to the strength
of this new focus. A few researchers have gone one step further and looked beyond
the teacher to study the classroom as a whole. Short pieces by Tyack, Lowe and
Hansot (1984) and Sutherland (1986) provide the first glimpses of this approach.

Having made the plea for more such studies, it is time to convince historians
that the trip into the classroom is worthwhile, and to show curriculum specialists
without a background in history how to start reviving the past. An examination in
detail of the methods used by a current study might help to reassure the latter while
showing the former the range of valuable data available.

The case study in question involves an examination of the London Technical
and Commercial High School (LTCHS) sited in London, Ontario, Canada. This
study is not an institutional case history, but a study of school curricula set in
a particular institution, at a particular time (1900–1940). The project examines the
nature of curriculum - its continuities and changes - at three levels. First, it
examines the various course streams available at LTCHS. Second, its overall focus
is on vocational education, which became popular in the Progressive era, and which
in London, Ontario, was synonymous with LTCHS. Finally, it travels through the
classroom door, to discover the ways that teachers and students dealt with the
curriculum as practised. As the study examines these examples of curriculum it
deals with two major influences: professional concerns and external constituencies.
The study also seeks to understand the effect of these curriculum patterns on
students, especially in terms of stratification by class and gender. As an ongoing
research project, the LTCHS study can provide certain insights. In particular, it can
serve as an example of how one research team - originally consisting of Ivor
Goodson and Ian Dowbiggin, and currently consisting of Goodson and Christopher
Anstead - has attempted to use the methodological and evaluatory insights of
historical research to study school subjects.

One major concern of researchers considering a historical study is the availa-
bility of sources; the LTCHS project found a wealth of evidence of different types.
The school itself had maintained (more through inertia and ample storage space
than any conscious plan) a large collection of documents relating to its early history.
These included a complete run of the Minutes of the Advisory Vocational Committee -
the body that supervised the school under the Board of Education. These minutes
contained information on such mundane matters as school maintenance problems.
or the purchase of supplies, as well as information on the hiring, salaries and working conditions of teachers, and of discussions regarding curriculum change in a broad sense. Of greatest value, though, were the long memoranda contributed by H.B. Beal, the school’s principal and prime mover, which often included rhetorical discussion of the purpose of the school and its’ various departments.

Of equal value to the AVC Minutes were an almost complete run of student record cards from 1912 (the year the school opened) to 1935. The early cards listed a student’s name, address, parental name, and after 1919, the course in which the student enrolled. After 1927 the cards included information on religion, date of birth, place of birth, parent’s occupation, the student’s occupational placement or reason for leaving, as well as a complete set of marks for every class taken. The cards allowed for an in depth quantitative analysis to supplement the abundant qualitative sources.

Other official and administrative records available at the school included a scattered series of school mark books, teacher attendance logs, and similar documents. Absent, though, was any information about what went on in the classroom. There were no notes on pedagogical practice or subject content, except in the most general terms.

Of course, any researcher or team is not merely bound by official records kept by the institution in question. In the case of the Beal school, a whole array of unofficial or official external records existed. Official external records included Minutes and Annual Reports of the Board of Education, as well as Annual Reports and other documents from the Ontario Ministry of Education. In written form, the chief unofficial source is the information contained in local newspapers, especially the London Free Press.

Several years ago, a group of teachers at the school decided to celebrate the institution’s 75th anniversary by exploring some of its history. As a result, they established a depository of mementoes - now in virtually forgotten storage. This collection includes over a hundred photographs from the period before 1940, a classroom notebook from a cooking class in 1937, and a scrapbook started by H.B. Beal. The images in the photos, and the notes in the notebook allow a first glimpse into the actual world of the classroom.

Beyond these readily available documents, the research team has decided to actively solicit oral testimony and the loan of written sources from former students and teachers at the school. Sources such as diaries, letters and notebooks which do not normally show up in school archives allow a greater understanding of the school experience. Interviewing surviving teachers and students involves the researchers directly in the creation of new sources of historical evidence. The memories of these witnesses provides further information on classroom culture and pedagogical practice in the period. Of course, this source of information is not available to those studying nineteenth-century schooling.

Finally, one gap in the historical record emphasizes the way in which older selections privileged Acts and Facts history. The Archives of Ontario contain all the material which still remains from the provincial Ministry of Education of this period. Before handing the material over to the Archives, ministerial bureaucrats
sorted through it, and discarded what they considered of little historical interest. Among the material discarded was anything related to the particular case of the LTCHS. While one side of correspondence between school and ministry is preserved in school sources, the other side of the conversation must remain forever silent. This underlines the point Andrews (1983) makes:

Documents have differential survival rates and those which do survive do not always provide all the information required. The fundamental difference between historical research and other forms of social enquiry is the impossibility of ‘going back’ to ask for further explanation and elaboration. This leads to all kinds of problems. The answers to a great many questions are simply not available, since the necessary records either never existed or failed to survive.

To understand the historical sources which do remain, some reliance on the rules of the discipline of history both speeds the process and makes it more defensible. An axiom of historically based research states that evidence is useless without context; despite the critiques of those influenced by extreme postmodernism, this remains central to the interpretation of history. 4 As Mary Waring’s (1975) work has argued:

if we are to understand events, whether of thought or of action, knowledge of background is essential. Knowledge of events is merely the raw material of history: to be an intelligible reconstruction of the past, events must be related to other events, and to the assumptions and practices of the milieu. Hence they must be made the subject of inquiry, their origins as products of particular social and historical circumstance, the manner in which individuals and groups have acted must be identified, and explanations for their actions sought (p. 12).

Historical context consists of at least two dimensions - place and time. To understand what went on in LTCHS in the early twentieth century, the research team has to understand the early twentieth century in general; London, Ontario and Canada in general; and the history of education, especially curriculum, in general.

A different level of context comprises the theoretical expectations a researcher brings to his or her project. While one strong school of thought in historical research argues that a researcher should only address primary data after a survey of the secondary literature has led to the framing of a testable, theory-laden hypothesis, another school finds this approach abhorrent. More traditional historians object that theory-driven research prevents a researcher from approaching evidence with an open mind. This school prefers to start with the evidence, and come up with interpretations out of it.

In the Beal project, we find strengths and weaknesses in each approach; our own methodology comprises an untidy mix of each, but we suspect that such a mix is not uncommon outside the boundaries of theoretical discourse. Thus we have approached the evidence only after reading widely in the literature. This reading has allowed us to pose some specific questions, as well as to keep other areas in mind.
As we go through the evidence, however, we find our interpretation changing, as research questions prove too unrefined, and new areas of interest arise. This has caused data-driven modifications of our original theory-driven research program.

A crucial component of historical studies is the way in which pieces of evidence are addressed. In other words, what is accepted as a close approximation of past reality? Documents and other pieces of evidence originated not so that historians might know what really happened, but for other contemporary purposes. Sometimes the authors of documents faced constraints in the knowledge they had, or time available to check their sources. People make mistakes, they can also exaggerate or misrepresent. Newspapers - often an important source for historical context - are far from error free; even today they privilege speed of communication over accuracy of content. In the past, newspapers also exhibited very blatant political or social biases.

This search for biases, subtexts, and mistakes lies at the core of historical inquiry (see Wineburg, 1991). It is here that the discipline of history makes its second great contribution. Historians are trained repeatedly in the evaluation of evidence. They seek likely biases in the authors or forms of evidence, and then look to internal consistency or external verification with other sources. This process must apply to both qualitative and quantitative evidence. Some researchers tend to accept quantifiable data (such as student record cards) at face value, arguing that no reason exists for bias - a naive, if convenient, rationalization. In the Beal case, the possibility exists that students tended to report a more “respectable” parental occupation, or a more successful placement.

Outright errors are also possible. The use of outside sources can point out some of these things. Of course, some researchers would argue that an expressed occupation, by revealing personal class identification, tells us more about an individual than actual occupation would.

Historians must treat other forms of evidence in the same way. In the case of oral testimony, memories can be coloured by later experiences, or can be simply mistaken. Even photographs must be interrogated: are they posed or candid shots? Did the photographer choose a particularly photogenic background? Are we sure about the purported date or subject of the photograph? Researchers cannot simply dismiss oral and photographic evidence; they provide windows into areas that would otherwise be cast in darkness.

Having proceeded this far, one final screening of the evidence occurs, involving the historian’s own subjective understanding of the past. If evidence fits the researcher’s mental reconstruction of a particular lived reality, and if no reason exists to doubt the evidence on a prima facie grounds, the evidence is accepted as a likely approximation of reality. If, however, evidence and understanding conflict, the historian must re-examine each. Since different researchers have different understandings of reality, this leaves the door open to disagreement, controversy and the sort of debate that can keep a discipline invigorated.

History of Education grew up at a time when history itself was highly constitutional and institutional in focus, when’ Acts and Facts’ were widely supported. Moreover in the educational domain itself it was a time when the organisation, administration
and alteration of educational structures and systems seemed at the heart of attempts to improve schooling. A move towards curriculum history assumes that we now take a different view: that analysis of organizational structure must be linked to a broader analysis of the legacies of status and resources, of curriculum and examination policy, if schooling is to be analyzed and improved. To a point this is merely to echo the obvious - history of education as with any subject has reflected our perceptions of the educational enterprise. At the present time we need a history of education which responds to our new perceptions of the sheer complexity of that enterprise.

The time has come for researchers to step into the classroom of the past. The sources are there to make the trip worthwhile to the historian. The meaning is there to make it necessary to the curriculum specialist.

NOTES

1 For an earlier - and harsher - generation of such criticism, see Bestor (1953) and Bailyn (1960).
2 These studies also build on the work of those researching more contemporary issues. See especially Connelly and Clandinin (1988).
3 Substantive papers arising from this project include Goodson and Dowbiggin (1991) and the papers collected in this volume.
4 On history and postmodernism, see Buhle and Buhle (1988), Ankersmit (1989), and Harlan (1989).
5 The use of arguments from the post modern movement has brought this emphasis on the historian’s subjective role in creating an interpretation of the past to the fore of historical debate.

REFERENCES


