

# TEACHERS AND CURRICULUM POLICY: CONTRASTING PERSPECTIVES OF A SUBJECT SPECIALIST AND A GENERALIST TEACHERS' ORGANIZATION<sup>1</sup>

*P. James Gaskell*  
*Patricia M. Rowell*

## Introduction

In the 1960s and 1970s there was a widespread effort in most western societies to transform school curricula. Canada was no exception to this trend.<sup>2</sup> During the same period, the central role of the teacher in curriculum development was increasingly recognized. Teachers were involved on curriculum development projects, on Ministry of Education curriculum committees, and as interpreters at the classroom level of curriculum guidelines and packages. However, teachers were mainly involved in these activities as individuals and not as accountable representatives of the organized teacher groups to which they belonged. Teacher associations were active in the curriculum area but their attempts to influence curriculum policy by having formal representation on curriculum committees were largely unsuccessful. Their interest in curriculum policy may be seen as an effort to establish curriculum as a specialized area of knowledge in which, by virtue of their training and experience, teachers have special expertise. Such claims to professional expertise contribute to the perception of teaching as a profession and strengthen the broader efforts of teacher associations to establish control over their occupation.<sup>3</sup>

- 
1. The support of the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada for funding the work reported is gratefully acknowledged.
  2. G.S. Tomkins, *A Common Countenance* (Scarborough, Ont.: Prentice-Hall Canada, 1986).
  3. See T.J. Johnson, *Professions and Power* (London: Macmillan, 1972) for a fuller discussion of the assertion of professionalism as a means of controlling an occupa-

There are few studies analyzing the work of teachers' organizations in the curriculum arena. Layton's history of the Association for Science Education in England provides a detailed example of how one group of subject-specific teachers tried to gain advantage for its members through exercising control over the curriculum.<sup>4</sup> In his discussion of the growth of the ASE from a group of amateurs to professionals, Layton points to

the explicit acknowledgement of power as the end in view—power, that is, in the sense of controlling an occupation—in specific terms, of making the ASE an institution for the collegiate determination of what counts as valid teaching of science in schools.<sup>5</sup>

In this process, some versions of the subject area are seen to be more useful in the pursuit of power than others. Goodson and Dowbiggin<sup>6</sup> have argued that a study of the social history of British secondary school subjects provides evidence that, in the competition between different factions of teachers within a subject grouping, those factions promoting a decontextualized, scholarly version of the school subject compatible to that produced in universities will gain influence over factions promoting a more utilitarian version of the subject. They point to evidence which

suggests that the trend towards more academic qualities is animated by the professional desire to acquire the mystique of specialization which assures a monopoly of power, resources, and prerogatives in a specific sphere of occupational practice.<sup>7</sup>

An examination of the social history of the physics curriculum in British Columbia during the 1960s and 1970s indicates that similar forces were at work in Canada.<sup>8</sup> While teachers organized around a specific school subject may see

---

tion.

4. D. Layton, *Interpreters of Science: A History of the Association for Science Education* (London: John Murray, 1984).
5. *Ibid.*, 281.
6. I.F. Goodson and I. Dowbiggin, "Curriculum History, Professionalization, and the Social Organization of Knowledge," in *Qualitative Educational Research Studies: Methodologies in Transition, RUCCUS Occasional Papers, Volume 1*, ed. I.F. Goodson and J.M. Mangan (London, Ont.: Faculty of Education, University of Western Ontario, 1991).
7. *Ibid.*, 253.
8. P. Rowell and P.J. Gaskell, "Tensions and Realignments: School Physics in British Columbia 1955-1980," in *International Perspectives in Curriculum History*, ed. I.F. Goodson (London: Croom Helm, 1987).

their interests tied to establishing curriculum control in their subject area, what stance is a teachers' organization encompassing all school subjects likely to take? Indeed, how important is curriculum policy to their overall strategy? Traditionally these teachers' associations have been primarily concerned with the pursuit of material improvements such as salaries, pensions, job security, and other benefits for their members.<sup>9</sup> For generalist teacher organizations, the 1960s and the 1970s constituted a period of rapid growth and of a change in strategy from consultation to confrontation with Ministries of Education and local school boards.<sup>10</sup> During this period economic issues remained dominant although concern for attaining professional recognition was also strong.<sup>11</sup> While curriculum policy in Canada is the legal responsibility of the various provincial governments, there still exists a variety of means for teachers' organizations to influence it.

Broad teachers' organizations represent many identities, values, and interests that struggle with one another. Differences in values and interests among teachers become evident when one looks at teachers' efforts to achieve greater control over curriculum policy and practice. In particular, the interests of teachers of one subject can conflict with the interests of teachers of another. At the same time, generalist teachers' associations must represent the interests of teachers as a whole—however they are defined.

Little has been written about the activities of generalist teacher organizations in the curriculum field. Tomkins, in his major study of the history of Canadian curriculum, comments only briefly at the end that teachers' federations had a direct input to curriculum policy-making, mainly through the representatives of their provincial subject-specialist organizations on provincial committees, and that, less formally, they sought to influence the curriculum through professional development programmes.<sup>12</sup> But are the interests of a subject-specialist organization and of a generalist teachers' organization always similar in the area of curriculum?

We will explore the different approaches to curriculum policy during the 1960s and 1970s espoused by two teacher organizations: one, a subject-specialist organization, the British Columbia Science Teachers' Association [BCScTA]; and the other, a generalist teachers' organization, the British Columbia Teachers' Federation [BCTF]. The BCTF is a federation of seventy-six local teacher

- 
9. W.J. Urban, *Why Teachers Organized* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1982).
  10. A. Lockhart, *Schoolteaching in Canada* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1991). See esp. chap. 5, "Teacher Associations."
  11. *Ibid.* See also J. Harp and G. Betcherman, "Contradictory Class Locations and Class Action: The Case of School Teachers' Organizations in Ontario and Quebec," *Canadian Journal of Sociology* 5, 2 (1980): 145-62.
  12. Tomkins, *A Common Countenance*, 432.

associations organized by geographical area. Membership is compulsory for all teachers in the public schools of British Columbia.<sup>13</sup> The Federation is the organized voice of teachers in representations to the provincial Ministry of Education. The BCScTA is a voluntary organization of British Columbia science teachers. It was formed in 1959 from the Science Section of the BCTF, an informal group of teachers within the Federation. The BCScTA is one of twenty-eight Provincial Specialist Associations [PSAs] within the BCTF—sub-associations of the larger group interested in particular subject areas of the curriculum or in particular groups of children such as primary or intermediate. Each PSA has its own constitution, by-laws, and administrative officers. However, as sub-sections of the BCTF, they do not have autonomy in making representations to influence Ministry of Education policies and practices in areas such as curriculum and school programmes. Communications and initiatives in these areas must first be authorized by the BCTF.<sup>14</sup> This hierarchical structure makes the BCScTA less independent than, for example, the Science Teachers' Association of Ontario, the National Science Teachers' Association in the USA, and the Association for Science Education in England. The need for the BCScTA to work through the BCTF on curriculum-policy issues creates the potential for conflict. The need for the two organizations to pay attention to each other creates a series of resolutions, memoranda, and papers which are a source of data for analyzing the perspectives of the two groups.

A study of these two related but distinct organizations reveals two different strategies for pursuing curriculum control. One strategy, taken up by the subject-specialist organization, emphasizes collective control by teachers over the content and methods of the curriculum. In this strategy, the standards for the subject and, therefore, the status of the teachers, are established through the development of a standardized curriculum prescribed for all teachers of the same subject and written by selected experts in the field. The second strategy, taken up by the generalist teacher organization, emphasizes control of the curriculum by individual teachers making judgements in the context of a particular community and students. These individual judgements would be made within broad curriculum frameworks developed by the Federation. Professional status would be justified by emphasizing the expertise of individual teachers in developing defensible decisions at the classroom level.

It is our contention that, while not all subject specialist and generalist teachers' organizations develop strategies similar to the two studied, generalist organizations are likely to be more open to emphasizing the individual autonomy

---

13. Until 1987, membership was compulsory by legislation. In 1987, the British Columbia College of Teachers was established and teachers were given the option of forming local unions. All chose to unionize, and all except one negotiated contract language requiring compulsory membership as a condition of employment.

14. BCTF, *Members Guide to the BCTF, 1990-1991*, 90.

of teachers and subject-specialist organizations are likely to be more open to emphasizing collective control over a standardized curriculum. Different teacher organizations define their interests in different ways depending on the context and the type of teachers they represent.

This essay will examine the contrasting perspectives of the BCTF and the BCScTA to curriculum over three time periods beginning in the 1950s and ending in the 1980s. In each period we will focus on two curriculum-related aspects of the activities of the two teacher organizations: their commitment to a subject focus, and their choice of an individual versus a collective approach to curriculum decision-making.

### 1955-65

The post-war period was a time of rapid expansion and stress for the education system in Canada. Critiques of progressive education and concerns about Canada's economic prospects and the scientific-technological gap between the Soviet Union and North America were widespread. In the late 1950s and early 1960s, numerous royal commissions were established across Canada to examine and make recommendations about the state of elementary and secondary schooling. The British Columbia provincial Royal Commission on Education (RCE) was established in 1958 and chaired by S.N.F. Chant, the Dean of Arts at the University of British Columbia. The Commission was charged with assessing and reporting on, amongst other things, "in the light of world conditions the adequacy of the basic educational philosophy of the British Columbia educational system; the curriculum and courses of study..."<sup>15</sup>

A significant concern for both the BCScTA and the BCTF during this period was gaining greater control over the official curriculum. However, there was little friction between them over curriculum matters even while there were differences in emphasis. The justification for increased teacher influence over the definition of school subjects was teachers' specialized knowledge of the subject fields. The submissions of the two organizations to the RCE, and other curriculum-related activities, illustrate their respective positions.

The preparation of a submission to the RCE was one of the last acts of the Science Section of the BCTF before it was reconstituted as the BCScTA. In the submission, the science teachers argued that a revision of all science courses from grades one to twelve was needed.<sup>16</sup> They felt that it was important that the

---

15. British Columbia, *Report of the Royal Commission on Education* (Victoria: Queen's Printer, 1960).

16. Science Teachers' Section of the British Columbia Teachers' Federation, "High

revisions be done during the summer by experienced teachers who would be paid a "substantial honorarium and expenses."<sup>17</sup> University scientists who had participated in previous revisions could act as consultants but would not actually produce the new curriculum. These recommendations assumed that practising science teachers should have the final say in deciding the scope and sequence of science curricula for the province. In the highly centralized system of education existing in British Columbia at that time, what such a group of teachers produced would become a prescription for all other science teachers.

The focus of the BCScTA was on increasing the university-oriented, academic nature of science in the schools. The science teachers' submission recommended that the high school courses continue the trend begun in the revision of 1953 to reduce the amount of general science in favour of greater specialization of the disciplines and to extend the amount of specialized science taken by university-bound students. In 1953, a grade eleven general science course had been eliminated. In this 1959 brief, it was argued that the compulsory grade ten general science course should also be eliminated from the university programme and that each of the existing one-year courses in physics, chemistry, and biology, available as electives to students in the senior grades, be extended to two years. All university-programme students should then be required to take one science discipline for two years or two science disciplines for one year each. Science majors in high school would be required to take two disciplines for two years. In return for this extension of territory for science amongst university-bound students, the brief's authors were prepared to make the existing required grade nine general science course for general programme students an elective. At a time when there was a perceived shortage of teachers trained in science, the science teachers recommended that science teachers "be conserved to teach only those students who are capable of, and interested in, more advanced study in science."<sup>18</sup>

Following its submission to the RCE, the first committee established by the new Science Teachers' Association was the Curriculum Committee. This committee began to solicit the views of the Association membership, publish reports of research, texts on methods, classroom texts, and magazine articles pertinent to curriculum matters, and to "develop a curriculum policy in a methodical manner."<sup>19</sup> At its Annual General Meeting in 1961, the Association passed a resolution reiterating the stand that had been taken in the brief to the RCE in opposition to "the present practice of appointing revision committees from

---

School Science," in BCTF, *Brief Presented to the Royal Commission on Education* (Vancouver: BCTF, 1959), 164.

17. *Ibid.*

18. *Ibid.*, 165.

19. *BCScTA Newsletter* 1, 1 (1960): 3.

among teachers carrying a full teaching load.”<sup>20</sup> However, at the same meeting the Association also rejected a motion that teachers withdraw from curriculum committees unless they were relieved from teaching duties with pay. It was felt that under these conditions the Association would have no voice whatever on course revision and those teachers who did such a “yeoman service under adverse conditions” would feel they had been criticized.<sup>21</sup>

The first hints of a disagreement between the BCScTA and the BCTF arise in the minutes of the 1961 AGM. A resolution was passed voicing opposition to the BCTF’s policy of opposing the appointment of a Director of Science Education by the government. The Association’s view reflected “the growing concern among science teachers regarding the difficulty of obtaining a sympathetic hearing regarding problems in science teaching. It was felt that the appointment of such a Director would strengthen the position of the science teachers in the province.”<sup>22</sup>

While active in presenting its view of what science curricula should stress, who should teach it, and how the process of revision should take place, the BCScTA was, in fact, limited in its ability to establish the control it wished to exercise during this period. The Department of Education was unwilling to make science teachers on its revision committees representatives of, and accountable to, the BCScTA. It ignored the urgings of the BCScTA to begin revision of the secondary curriculum at the grade eight level and to have extensive piloting of the new courses. The desire of the Association for a provincial director of science education was not supported either by the Department or by the BCTF. Although the course revisions that actually took place were in line with the BCScTA’s ideas, their direct influence on the process was limited. Implicit in the Association’s position, however, was the notion that science curriculum policy should lay out common topics, methods, and standards for the subject for the province and that the role of the Association in that process should be to act as a gatherer of the wishes of its members as to what topics, methods, and standards should be. To this end, it instituted a number of questionnaires amongst its members to collect reactions to the many new courses that began to appear in 1964.

The BCTF, as an umbrella group representing all teachers in the province, was also interested in gaining greater control over the curriculum. However, it also had to contend with the competing interests of its various subject-specialist subgroups. In its submissions to the RCE, the science teacher group was not alone amongst the various subject teacher groups in asking for an extension of the territory and resources allotted to it. The BCTF chose not to take sides in

---

20. *BCScTA Newsletter* 2, 4 (1961): 2.

21. *Ibid.*

22. *Ibid.*

deciding which of the claims of its various subject subgroups should be given priority. In its own brief it simply commented wryly that "the Royal Commission will note conflicting requests, in a few instances, between one provincial association and another."<sup>23</sup> The BCTF was not committed to a focus on subjects for their own sake. While the Federation acknowledged that the main function of schools was the teaching of basic skills and the transmission of a body of knowledge, it stressed that the development of curricula should take into account the needs of pupils, not just the academic organization of the subject.

The major concern of the BCTF at this time was not so much what was taught but who determined what was to be taught. The BCTF argued it should have official representation on provincial curriculum committees. This effort to gain official representation on curriculum committees was part of a larger effort to increase the professional status of teachers. As one paper put it, "an active role in curriculum construction by teachers as members of the federation could be equated with full professional status."<sup>24</sup> At the time, the BCTF had little control over which of its members would be appointed to the various Department of Education committees and those who were appointed were not accountable to the BCTF; in fact, the Federation had difficulty in getting information on the direction of curriculum development within the committees. Committee deliberations were considered confidential. Individual committee members were accountable to themselves and to the Department, not to the BCTF. Neither the Federation as a whole nor the various subject subgroups felt they had much power to control events and they became increasingly frustrated with their position.

The Federation worked to change this situation. It organized a series of summer curriculum workshops between 1960 and 1963 in order to acquaint delegates with the "philosophy, techniques and various procedures involved in curriculum construction, appraisal and revision" and to consider how the "Federation might be able to increase its role in influencing and even shaping the curriculum."<sup>25</sup> In a letter to the guest speaker at the 1961 workshop, an Executive Assistant of the Federation explained that "the Federation, as the professional organization of the teachers, should have more part in the determination of curriculum policies and in the actual revision of courses of study in this province."<sup>26</sup>

On the whole, delegates to these summer curriculum workshops were representatives of the PSAs since it was the intent of the BCTF to involve teachers

---

23. BCTF, *Brief to RCE*, 150.

24. J.S. Young, "Teachers Should Work on Curriculum Problems," *The B.C. Teacher* 40, 2 (1960): 77-78.

25. BCTF, *Report to the Executive Committee on the Curriculum Seminar at Vernon*, August 20-25, 1961.

26. W.V. Allester, letter to Dr. D.T. Oviatt, Dean of Instruction, San Fernando Valley College, 21 June 1961.



in curriculum development through the activities of PSAs. Historically, curriculum construction had been guided by the structure of disciplinary knowledge and, as the Chairman of the Curriculum Committee in 1960 noted, "Our strength in the field of curriculum lies in our ability to handle specific problems in subject fields and to work together as a strong provincial organization to take a stand on major issues."<sup>27</sup> The views of the BCScTA and the BCTF with respect to the place of subjects in the school curriculum were similar at this time.

However, later summer workshops presented some challenges to the view that subjects should be the focus for the organization of curriculum. For instance, in the 1962 summer workshop in Vernon a series of twelve basic curriculum principles was drafted and subsequently endorsed as official Federation policy.<sup>28</sup> The Vernon principles stressed the need to construct curriculum in response to the needs of individuals rather than the needs of a larger society. The principles included statements such as, "A course should be organized and taught because of the intrinsic value of the course in serving the needs of the pupils," and "No single course or general subject area or particular grade or particular procedure at a particular time must be permitted to serve as a special qualifying procedure."<sup>29</sup> By 1965, the idea that curriculum could be defined not just in terms of course content, but as "the sum total of experiences that are planned and promoted by an education system for its students,"<sup>30</sup> was being promoted by the BCTF staff. Rather than being imparters of knowledge, teachers would be organizers of learning, providing for individual student differences by adapting the curriculum, selecting materials, and grouping students.

By 1965 there was some evidence that the BCTF's attentions to curriculum were beginning to pay off. At the initiative of the BCTF, the Department of Education and the BCTF created a committee to review and revise the elementary science curriculum. Members of the committee were jointly selected by both agencies. The BCTF credited its direct participation in the curriculum revision with the committee's resistance to pressures to conform to a traditional textbook approach, and the production of a "resource" course of multiple units for teacher development. More importantly, in participating with the Department as an equal partner on the project, the BCTF felt it had undermined the commonly held notion that curriculum revision was the sole prerogative and responsibility of the Department.<sup>31</sup>

---

27. Young, "Teachers *Should* Work on Curriculum Problems," 77-78.

28. BCTF. Annual General Meeting Minutes, 1963, Recommendation No. 9.

29. *Ibid.*

30. W.V. Allester, "Curriculum Should be OUR Business," *The B.C. Teacher* 45, 1 (1965): 64-66.

31. BCTF, Report of the Division of Professional Development to the Executive Committee, 29/30 May 1965.

However, the BCTF was disappointed that the pattern of work established in the elementary science committee did not become a precedent for work in other revision committees. Moreover, despite the fact that the provincial Professional Committee on the Elementary Curriculum gave official approval of the programme, a whole year passed before the Minister of Education gave the go-ahead for partial implementation. This impressed upon the BCTF that "curriculum revision is merely the introductory phase in effecting change."<sup>32</sup> The experience of the elementary science revision did not produce a "strong wish on the part of the BCTF to participate directly in another provincial revision" and, instead, contributed to a redirecting of the BCTF's efforts toward "working where the educational action is—in schools, in classrooms, and in any other learning centre."<sup>33</sup>

During this period, both the BCScTA and the BCTF were concerned about gaining more influence over the provincially authorized curriculum but their strategies for achieving this goal were diverging. The BCTF was becoming increasingly frustrated by the reluctance of the provincial Department of Education to accept the teachers on its curriculum committees as official representatives of the BCTF. It was less committed to a strong defence of discipline-based subjects as the starting place for curriculum development. If it could not gain influence at the provincial level, the Federation was prepared to shift focus and attempt to influence teachers directly where they worked, in the classrooms. However, the BCScTA remained committed to its subject focus and continued its efforts at the provincial level.

## 1965-75

As Tomkins notes, curriculum change between 1965 and 1975 reflected the social ferment and permissiveness of that decade.<sup>34</sup> Increased teacher professionalism and militancy, themselves a product of a better-educated teaching force than in the past, spurred decentralization. As well, locally developed curricula were encouraged as alternatives or additions to Ministry-developed curricula, although the major subjects were still prescribed through Ministry guidelines and Ministry-authorized textbooks. Locally developed curricula tended to have a more thematic, integrated approach and less rigid, discipline-imposed boundaries.

---

32. J.S. Church, "The Role of the B.C. Teachers' Federation in Revising the Elementary Science Program in B.C. Schools," 1970, BCTF Records PD70-55.

33. Ibid.

34. Tomkins, *A Common Countenance*, 306.

The BCScTA, whose membership grew from 424 in 1963-64 to a peak of 985 in 1971-72, was influenced by and supported the movement for greater curricular diversity. It called for the teaching of science to university-bound non-science students and separate courses for “non-academic” students. It recommended that

there should be a plethora of alternatives with numerous locally developed units. An optional credit course embodying aspects of science other than the traditional biology, physics and chemistry should be developed as a desirable alternative at the grade eleven and twelve levels.<sup>35</sup>

Science study expanded outside the traditional disciplines. Units on agriculture and sex education and courses such as physics and society were developed in some districts. In a brief to the 1968 BCTF Commission, the BCScTA expressed the hope that “the reliance upon a standard text will become something of the past. The text should be replaced by school and district resource centres that would contain a large variety of books and pamphlets as well as series of monographs that deal with the concepts related to laboratory work.”<sup>36</sup> Several years later, in 1973, the BCScTA executive minutes noted the expectation that “curriculum matters will become more and more local responsibilities and...the role of the Department regarding specific details of curriculum will vanish.”<sup>37</sup> Money was sought from the Ministry to assist science curriculum development at the local level.<sup>38</sup>

These developments indicate that the Association was open to some decentralization of curriculum development to local groups of teachers. While retaining a subject focus, the Association was also open to broader definitions of school science, especially for the university-bound non-science students and for those not going to university at all. However, the university-oriented science courses remained centrally controlled. It was through these discipline-based courses that the science teachers retained their links with university scientists, and strengthened their position as professionals with specialized knowledge.

During this same period the BCTF moved away from an emphasis on subjects as organizing frames for the curriculum. In 1967-68 the BCTF held its own Commission on Education, which received 266 briefs and hosted 170 public meetings.<sup>39</sup> The recommendations of the Commission’s Report led to the

---

35. BCScTA Minutes, Dec. 1971.

36. *BCScTA Newsletter* 9, 4 (1968).

37. BCScTA Executive Minutes, 16 Nov. 1973.

38. BCScTA AGM Minutes, 1974.

39. *Involvement: The Key to Better Schools: The Report of the Commission on Educa-*

development by the BCTF Curriculum Committee and the Curriculum Directors of a statement outlining a working philosophy. This statement emphasized that education should be “humanized and personalized” and that the development of emotional maturity and social responsibility should parallel the development of the intellect. Subjects were to be de-emphasized: “Teachers would teach in a subject context rather than teach subjects.”<sup>40</sup> A human growth and development model for curriculum development was adopted and four elements of that model, pupil growth, the educative environment, teachers’ plans, and evaluation, were emphasized because “these are the components over which teachers can exert a strong measure of control.”<sup>41</sup>

After the experience of the elementary science revision and the success of the BCTF’s Commission of Education, the Federation turned the attention of its staff and committees from provincial-level curriculum decisions to district and school curriculum work. The statements of philosophy and goals prepared during these years provided a rationale for this shift in strategy developed in response to the stonewalling tactics of the government in the early 1970s, tactics perceived by BCTF staff as a way of keeping the BCTF quest for power in check.<sup>42</sup>

In 1973 the BCTF sent a brief on curriculum development to the new NDP Minister of Education.<sup>43</sup> The brief suggested a transformation from a policy in which the subject disciplines dominated the curriculum to one emphasizing “personalized learning.” Under such a policy provincial curriculum committees would be restricted to recommending intended student learning outcomes, and money traditionally spent at the provincial level for curriculum development would be transferred to the districts for local curriculum development.

The abandonment of subjects and provincial-level curriculum development by the BCTF Executive resulted in a struggle between the Executive and the PSAs over who would have primary responsibility for curriculum leadership. In a brief to a Task Force on Reorganization (established by the Executive), the PSAs argued that they should continue to coordinate leadership in curriculum development at the provincial and local level.<sup>44</sup> However, the Task Force made recommendations that put the PSAs more in a consultative than a leadership role with respect to curriculum matters. Local PSA chapters were to work closely with

---

tion of the British Columbia Teachers’ Federation (Vancouver: The Federation, 1968).

40. BCTF Executive Committee Minutes, 14/15 June 1969: 6.
41. W.V. Allester, “In-service Education from the BCTF point of view,” A talk for a conference sponsored by LEARN, Duncan, 28 Oct. 1972, BCTF Records PD72-535.
42. C.D. Ovans, Memo to J.S. Church, 11 Aug. 1971.
43. BCTF, *Curriculum Development Brief* submitted to the Honorable Eileen Dailly, Minister of Education, Government of British Columbia, Sept. 1973.
44. BCTF, “PD in the BCTF,” Brief from PSA Council to the BCTF Task Force on Reorganization, 7 June 1973, BCTF Records PD73-399.

local associations which would "help coordinate the activities of PSA chapters" through the appointment of local Professional Development and Curriculum Committees [PD&CC].<sup>45</sup> The additional recommendation that "PSAs in related fields should be encouraged to integrate" was the clearest indication to the PSAs that the Executive was looking for ways in which to redirect the subject-discipline orientation of the PSAs. The Executive hoped that the PD&CC would work with the PSA Council to "help ensure that PSAs develop a K-12 interdisciplinary orientation based on a mutual concern for human growth and development."<sup>46</sup>

The PSAs felt under attack. At a meeting of the BCTF executive in June, 1974 the PSA officers present pointed out that the PSA Council policy was to encourage integration between willing PSAs but that "it was adamantly opposed to any coercion."<sup>47</sup> In the fall Representative Assembly, a "considerable undercurrent of anti-PSA sentiment" was noted.<sup>48</sup> The PSA budget was reduced from \$55,000 to \$40,000 and that of the PSA Council from \$7,700 to \$2,500. At the close of the year, the BCTF President addressed the PD&CC, suggesting that PSAs become directly responsible to the PD&CC, local PSA chapters become responsible to local professional development committees, the PSA Council be eliminated, and grants to PSAs be withdrawn in favour of increased aid to local professional development programmes.

One response to these manoeuvres came from a past chairperson of the PSA Council who suggested that severance from the BCTF should be considered because "its accompanying financial, professional and political independence is desirable."<sup>49</sup> However, a questionnaire was sent out to the PSAs by the PSA Council to gather their reaction to these suggestions.

On receipt of the questionnaire, the BCScTA executive decided that "such integration is not in our interests and that we should not respond."<sup>50</sup> It set up a committee to investigate the idea of withdrawing from the BCTF. In the end the BCScTA decided to stay within the BCTF structure, but the debate led to a more deliberate challenging of BCTF curriculum policy by the BCScTA.

In a reversal of their 1968 position in which they were supportive of some decentralization, in May of 1975, the BCScTA executive passed a motion that the Association oppose the decentralization of science curricula in BC. This move against decentralization in science was made in conjunction with a move to support the retention of government scholarship examinations in the face of explicit BCTF opposition to them. The BCScTA argued that examinations would

---

45. BCTF Executive Committee Minutes, 14/15 Dec. 1973.

46. *PSA Council News* 3, 2 (Jan. 1974).

47. V. Haslin, Memo to PSA Council Executive Committee, 9 July 1974.

48. V. Guenther, Letter to the Editor, *PSA Council News* 4, 2 (Nov. 1974).

49. *Ibid.*

50. BCScTA Executive Minutes, 15 Nov. 1974.

ensure some standardization of the courses taught throughout the province—without them “some teachers might be encouraged to go off on their own favourite topic, to the neglect of giving a broad course.”<sup>51</sup> Not only did examinations encourage some measure of standardization, they also provided a set of common standards—an “external measure by which both teachers and students could judge their effectiveness.”<sup>52</sup>

During the period 1965-75, a sharp break developed between the views of the specialist science teacher's organization and the views of the generalist organization representing all the teachers. The BCScTA had been prepared to experiment with locally developed courses and with integration of the sciences for students not majoring in science at university, but when this trend seemed to undermine the status of their academic courses through the elimination of the scholarship examinations, and to threaten the integrity of the subject field itself, it moved swiftly to protect its boundaries. During the next decade this conflict with the BCTF heightened.

## 1975-80

The election of a Social Credit government in December, 1974 brought increased tension between the Ministry of Education and the BCTF, which had supported the New Democratic Party during the election. The new government brought in a policy on core curriculum which stressed subjects and de-emphasized locally developed curricula. There was increasing emphasis on accountability, standards, and “back to the basics.” A subject-based Provincial Learning Assessment Program [PLAP] was introduced in 1978 beginning with science. The response of the BCScTA and the BCTF to these initiatives was quite different and represented their different approaches to curriculum policy.

As part of its struggle with the government, the BCTF withdrew its representatives from Ministry committees and tried to limit the participation of all PSA members on curriculum committees. In spite of these moves by the BCTF, the BCScTA actually developed stronger links with the Ministry during this period.

In 1978, after the first Science Learning Assessment, the BCScTA Executive Minutes note that the question, “What direction do we want science to take?” is important because “now is probably one of the best chances we have ever had to influence it.” They also note that “the Curriculum Branch is undecided as to the future. They are leaning heavily on this PSA for support and recommenda-

---

51. BCScTA Executive Minutes, Apr. 1975.

52. Ibid.

tions."<sup>53</sup> The Ministry was looking for allies in its fight with the BCTF, and, with its emphasis on a return to the basics through traditional subject matter, was offering the science PSA an opportunity to have considerable influence if it would break ranks.

The BCScTA initiated a number of surveys, in Junior Secondary science and in physics, for example, to determine its members' feelings with respect to the courses and to build arguments for the need for revision. Curriculum development work swung back to a focus on provincial committees which would provide a common programme with uniform texts for the whole province. Science teachers argued that they had both the pedagogical and disciplinary expertise to establish curriculum guidelines by themselves. Initially, the Ministry of Education accepted these arguments, and the physics committee set up in 1978 was composed only of teachers and one science educator. The composition of the 1978 committee was in contrast to that of the previous committee set up in the early 1960s which had had three university physics professors, three physics teachers, and a science educator. However, the 1978 committee was later modified under pressure from university physics departments, and two physics professors were added to it.

While the academically oriented PSAs used this period as an opportunity to consolidate their position as subject specialists who had the right to be consulted in curriculum matters, the BCTF continued to stress decentralized curriculum planning, and to de-emphasize subjects. It argued that the curriculum model implicit in the core curriculum emphasized the importance of subject matter rather than child development, and would lead to fitting the child to the curriculum rather than moulding the curriculum to fit the needs of each child.<sup>54</sup> It fought hard against the introduction of the learning assessment programme and the re-imposition of provincial examinations. It argued against moves which they saw as leading to more centralized control, and more structured forms of schooling.<sup>55</sup>

The BCTF continued to develop structures to encourage decentralization. The PD&CC was replaced with the Professional Development Advisory Committee [PDAC], a committee of sixteen members based on geographical zones.<sup>56</sup> PDAC co-ordinators were to have a dual role: advisors to the Executive on professional development matters including curriculum, and promoters and planners of professional development within a cluster of five or six local associa-

---

53. BCScTA Executive Minutes, 28 Nov. 1978.

54. BCTF, "BCTF Position Paper Regarding the Draft Statement of the Department on Core Curriculum: A Working Paper," 12 July 1976, BCTF Records PD76-520.

55. BCTF, "A Working Paper Toward Identifying Essential Educational Experiences: Draft 5," prepared by the Professional Development Advisory Committee, 11 Jan. 1977, BCTF Records PD77-47c.

56. BCTF, Minutes of the Annual General Meeting, 1975.

tions. The Executive-approved recommendations of the BCTF Task Force on reorganization made it clear that PDAC and not the PSA Council would act as a liaison on matters of existing policy between the BCTF, the Ministry of Education, and other provincial education agencies.<sup>57</sup> Moreover, the PSA Council would serve in an advisory capacity to PDAC and the Executive Committee only on matters relating to the PSAs. A recommendation that there be close liaison between the PSA Council and the PDAC on all matters requiring action with the government was deleted.<sup>58</sup> These moves by the Executive amounted to a sharp reduction in the PSA Council's role in curriculum affairs.

The PSAs were not prepared to accept their diminished curriculum role. Dissatisfaction was expressed by both PSAs and local associations.<sup>59</sup> The PSA Council presented a rationale for becoming the BCTF's Curriculum Committee, arguing that "because of PDAC's regional organization and broad terms of reference, it is difficult for PDAC to have the required expertise in many curriculum areas, or to have the time for curriculum development."<sup>60</sup> The argument was made that the BCTF "desperately needs an effective initiative in curriculum development if teachers are going to advance toward professional status and if the BCTF is going to break out of its pattern of the last few years of merely responding to Ministerial initiatives."<sup>61</sup> The Executive responded to the pressure by modifying its initial plan and approving both PDAC and the PSA Council as curriculum advisors to the Executive Committee.<sup>62</sup>

The conflict over curriculum policy, however, was not resolved by this compromise. In response to continuing criticisms of the professional development activities reported to the Executive via PDAC, the Federation commissioned a report to identify weaknesses and recommend improvements. After extensive interviews with teachers, Flanders found a low level of awareness of what the Professional Development Division was doing in the area of curriculum.<sup>63</sup> Awareness of PSAs was very high and they were thought of as separate from the BCTF. "PSAs were said to be 'more real', 'tangible', and 'not as political' as the BCTF."<sup>64</sup> On the whole, Flanders found that classroom

---

57. BCTF, Minutes of the Representative Assembly, May 1975.

58. BCTF, "Re-Examination of Programs 25 and 26," memo from W.V. Allester to Representative Assembly, 5 May 1975.

59. BCTF, Resolutions submitted by the Physical Education Teachers' Association, and Penticton District Teachers' Association, 1976.

60. *PSA Council News* 7, 3 (June 1978).

61. *Ibid.*

62. BCTF, Minutes of the Executive Committee, 20/24/25 Aug. 1978.

63. T. Flanders, *Summary Report of the Professional Development Study*, prepared for the Professional Development Division of the BCTF, Mar. 1980.

64. *Ibid.*, 6.



teachers were content for others to prepare the curriculum. Most thought of curriculum as a minimum kind of standard which would always be adjusted or adapted.<sup>65</sup>

During this period of conflict between the government and the BCTF, the BCTF made its strongest push to establish a form of curriculum policy that de-emphasized subjects and maximized the control of individual teachers over curriculum decisions. Subject-based PSAs such as the BCScTA resisted, and attempted to develop closer relations with the Ministry of Education in return for increased influence over the development of provincial curriculum guidelines intended to set topics and standards for the whole province. In interviews, some of the key players gave a sense of the conflict. Art Creelman, an influential science teacher in the province, commented,

We objected as members of the BCScTA because the Executive of the BCTF was trying to use us. We felt at that time they were trying to use us politically. We wanted to make our own decisions on matters of curriculum and deal directly with the Ministry. And they said “No—all those matters have to be first of all approved by some Executive Committee of the BCTF.”<sup>66</sup>

John Meredith, Director of Curriculum in the Ministry of Education in the early 1960s and later Superintendent of Instruction in the 1970s, commented when asked about the role of PSAs in curriculum development in subject areas:

Specifically the Science Teachers’ Association; they were excellent. They still wanted to work but, I don’t know, behind the scenes. I’ve heard by “the grapevine” that they were being brought under control. They were going to dissolve the PSAs at one time apparently. There were some arguments about whether or not they should fund them.

The fact [was] that educational philosophy was operating there too. Some of the PSA people that I knew were still pretty wedded to the academic content, the quality. They didn’t want to see their subjects subverted to something loose and vague and sort of wishy-washy.<sup>67</sup>

---

65. *Ibid.*, 13.

66. A. Creelman, Interview, Dec. 1983.

67. J. Meredith, Interview, 26 Feb. 1985.

## Discussion

During the period under study, the BCTF and the BCScTA, while both attempting to achieve greater teacher control over curriculum-making, diverged sharply in the models of teacher control they struggled for. They took different stances with respect to the importance of subjects in the development of curriculum and in the responsibility of individual teachers versus representative groups of teachers for making curriculum decisions.

For the BCScTA, subjects were always a central focus for curriculum-making and a way of confirming the expertise of science teachers. The BCScTA sought to extend the number of discipline-based science courses available to students (at the expense of general science courses), especially during the first few years of its existence. In the 1960s, when there was widespread support for more locally developed courses with integrated themes, the BCScTA was supportive of these but only for those students who were not bound for university science programmes. When these initiatives opened the door to the idea of widespread integration and loss of subject identity, the Association pulled sharply back and reasserted the importance of subjects and subject-centred teachers' associations. The Association did not support the BCTF's campaign to de-emphasize subjects even though amongst its members were individuals who upheld the Federation's position.

The BCTF, while initially not antagonistic to subjects, was always less committed to them as a primary focus for curriculum-making. In its brief to the Chant RCE, the point was made that as much emphasis should be placed on the needs of children as on the organization of subject matter. During the 1960s, curriculum papers from the Federation increasingly stressed a human growth and development model for curriculum development as opposed to a subject-based model. The change in preferred model for curriculum development coincided with a reassessment of strategies for gaining influence over curriculum policy.

Along with a difference between the two organizations in focus on school subjects went a difference over the process of curriculum-making. The BCScTA generally favoured curriculum-making at the provincial level by committees of teachers who, under ideal conditions, would be selected by the BCScTA and be responsible to the Association for their curriculum decisions. Even though such control was never achieved, the Association worked to maintain its links to the Ministry by not engaging in direct political confrontation. The emphasis was always on the maintenance of standards in an already high status, subject area. The best way to keep standards high was judged to be through the standardization of the scope and sequence of the curriculum. It argued that common texts and examinations should be used to stop teachers from straying too far from the established curriculum developed by the recognized experts in the profession.

The BCTF, on the other hand, struggled against a common curriculum supported by provincial examinations. When it found it could not gain control

at the provincial level, it emphasized the importance of individual teachers making curriculum decisions. The focus on individual teachers was justified by promoting a model of curriculum that put primary emphasis on the local context and the needs of individual students.

During the period examined in this study, different strategies for gaining control over the curriculum were developed by the two teacher organizations. These alternative approaches can be understood in terms of the different roles of the two organizations. The BCTF represents the interests of all public school teachers in the province, regardless of the teachers' subject affiliations. The BCScTA represents a particular group of teachers defined by their affiliation with one subject, science. These two different roles make the different organizations open to different strategies for controlling the curriculum in particular contexts. In promoting the professional status of all teachers, the BCTF has sought to enhance the control of individual classroom teachers over curriculum decisions. In promoting the professional status of science teachers, the BCScTA has sought collective control over a standardized curriculum.

These are two quite different views of curriculum development policy and the role of subjects in school programmes. Which view prevails depends not only on the relative strengths of the two organizations, but also on the way in which the different views fit in with the larger purposes of the government. A focus on a provincially set, standardized curriculum specified by a list of examinable topics in a subject area emphasizes the authority of the Ministry in curriculum matters and de-emphasizes the autonomy and expertise of individual classroom teachers. It is, therefore, not surprising that the BCScTA and the Ministry have had more compatible views on curriculum issues than have the BCTF and the Ministry. However, such alliances are not static and tensions may develop as circumstances change.

The recent Sullivan Royal Commission on Education in British Columbia<sup>68</sup> and the subsequent curriculum policy document, *Year 2000*,<sup>69</sup> have recommended a move to more integration of subjects. The role of subject associations in responding to these recommendations will be important. As Layton comments in his history of the ASE:

With regard to the school curriculum it might be questioned whether the establishment of subject teaching organizations has not contributed to educational divisiveness. Boundary insulation around subject ter-

---

68. British Columbia, *Royal Commission on Education, A Legacy for Learners: Summary of Findings* (Victoria: Queen's Printer, 1988).

69. British Columbia, Ministry of Education, *Enabling Learners: Year 2000: A Curriculum and Assessment Framework for the Future* (Victoria: Queen's Printer, 1989).

ritories has been strengthened, making more difficult the construction of, and acquisition of status by, new organizations of knowledge.<sup>70</sup>

The two views of teacher control outlined in the paper have implications for the way we think of teachers' influence in the curriculum field. Most often, increased teacher control of the curriculum is thought of as increased control by individual teachers in the classroom. The BCScTA's emphasis on collective control through provincial guidelines offers an alternative model of teacher influence. This option is likely to be more acceptable to associations representing subject areas which are already perceived as having high academic status, such as science. These subjects are often externally examined, and content and standards are monitored by their respective university communities. If the interests of the subject associations overlap with those of the state and the university then a powerful alliance can be formed limiting the establishment of new areas and organizations of knowledge in schools. The issues illustrated by an examination of the strategies of the BCTF and the BCScTA suggest the need for additional research on the role of teacher organizations in the shaping of curriculum policy and school subjects.

---

70. Layton, *Interpreters of Science*, 289.