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This interview was conducted with George Lamb on January 11th, 2006, in Special Collections. The interviewer is Tamara Belts.

TB: Today is Wednesday, January 11th, 2006. I am here with Dr. George Lamb who both taught at the Campus School and went on to teach at Western. He has just signed the Informed Consent Agreement, so we will now proceed with our oral history. Our first question is, how did you come to be a teacher at the Campus School?

GL: In 1958, I was teaching school in Seattle at Sacajawea School. I was teaching fourth grade. In September after school had started, Dr. Ray Hawk came down, looking for somebody to teach sixth grade in the Campus School. Apparently he could not recruit anyone from the local area. He interviewed the teacher that taught in the room next to me. That person eventually declined the offer. Then they made the offer to me. He went through the Seattle School District to recruit. Apparently they gave him my name and he invited me to come to Western. I thought it was a good idea even though it was an offer of less salary than I had in Seattle. My wife Carol and I drove up and we looked around. We decided to take the job and we eventually came up and Dr. Hawk spent a good part of Saturday driving us around looking for a place to live. We finally found one out on Lake Whatcom that we liked. That's how I came.

TB: Excellent. So if you came as a certified teacher, which you did, what were your credentials?

GL: I'm not sure what you mean by my credentials.

TB: What degrees did you have at that time.

GL: I had a BA and a teaching certificate from the state of Washington at that time. I had started working on my masters program at the University of Washington.

TB: What were the years and grades that you taught at the Campus School?

GL: I taught three years: 1958 through 1961, those three years. I taught sixth grade for two years and fifth grade for one year.

TB: Have any family members attended or taught at the Campus School?

GL: My daughter attended Kindergarten.

TB: What year was that probably?

GL: That was 1960-61.

TB: Ok, '60-'61. She was in Kindergarten and what was her name?

GL: Louise.

TB: Louise Lamb. To the best of your recollection, please describe a typical school day.

GL: Oh gosh. It started in the morning.

TB: Did you have responsibility for the whole classroom or were you there at a time when you sort of shared, like there was a language arts specialist or anything like that?

GL: There were specialists, yes, but in general I was in charge of the classroom. The music specialist came into the classroom and worked with the children. For PE we went out of the classroom and came over to the gym usually or down to the little gym in the lower part of the Campus School. We had also specialists in industrial arts. Edna Channer would come over and do things with the children or sometimes we would go over to the Industrial Arts building and do things.

On a typical day, I would come in and I usually put a schedule on the chalkboard. We usually started with routine stuff like who's here and who isn't and what we're going to do today. Some days we had observations from students from education classes that came in and watched. Those lessons were usually planned a little bit ahead of time so that we knew what was going to be different about them. I can't remember the sequence of stuff that necessarily went on. You usually have three student teachers, so as the quarters went on, they took over more and more responsibility for working with the children. I did a lot of observing and talking to student teachers about what they were doing.

TB: That's good. Kind of describe the physical classroom. I have heard that you had two rooms. There was more of an art-y as well as a general classroom. Can you talk about that? Did the students have freedom to go back and forth between the two? If they finished their work, could [they] go work on their art project or something?

GL: Yes. In the sixth grade, the classroom was on one side of the hall and the work room was on the other side. In the work room we had artwork and industrial arts projects and that sort of thing. The other unique part of it was that there was a separate office for the teacher, which was very unique. Right off the classroom was this nice little office. The facilities in that school were just absolutely magnificent. They were absolutely first rate. It was a joy to teach there in terms of facilities. Ray Hawk had a philosophy that materials were cheaper than people. If you wanted things that were within reason for materials, he would try to get them for you. In that sense it was a joy to be there. In the fifth grade, the work room was next to it. We just had things back and forth all the time. Part of the stuff was going on in the work room and part in the classroom. That also had a separate office.

TB: Why did the teachers have a separate office?

GL: I think it was to have a separate space of your own, apart from the student teachers.

It was a place to go to get out of the classroom when the student teachers were doing their thing.

TB: That makes sense. To the best of your recollection, please describe a typical school week such as regular assemblies, music programs, PE, anything different from what you've already spoke to that happened on a weekly basis.

GL: Besides the regular classroom curriculum and activities, there were not weekly but maybe monthly assemblies. Occasionally there were faculty that would come in from other departments and try some things out with the children.

TB: Like from the main college type of education?

GL: Yes. There were a lot of programs at the holidays of course. There were always displays. Each room had a display case out in the hall [where] we displayed material.

TB: Was that right outside your classroom?

GL: Yes.

TB: Wow. Could you tell me a little bit more about the assemblies? What kinds of things were at the assembly? Did you have a lot of outside speakers or different things?

GL: Sometimes, for example, Bill Gregory would come over and do stuff with the kids in the auditorium on creative dramatics. Quite often we went down to the auditorium and had little productions of various kinds. One of the things that we should have done more of that we didn't do was to get more faculty from the regular college involved. One of my regrets is that I did not have at that time the vision of what this institution could be. I don't think it would have made any difference in saving it, but more could be done between the regular faculty of the institution and the children that were available and the facilities that were available in the Campus School.

TB: Describe the type of activities that they did at recess.

GL: We went outside and played a lot of square ball and dodge ball and all kinds of games. In the sixth grade, usually the boys played whatever they played, football, and the girls did their things. I'm trying to think of what girls did. I don't remember.

TB: I think they played dodge ball, I've heard that.

GL: I think they played dodge ball a lot.

TB: They called it 'Bombardment' though.

GL: Bombardment! That's right. Terrible things! That's right.

TB: Was there a dress code at all for the students?

GL: No. Well except that it was the custom at the Campus School for children to take their shoes off and put on tennis shoes in grade school. That was the protocol when I came there. I think it was a good one. Everyone had their own 'tennies' and their shoes out in the hallway. It cut down the noise a lot.

TB: Did they wear those outside too or just in the building?

GL: Usually they wore them outside also when the weather was good.

TB: That's interesting. Please describe any part of the curriculum that you particularly remember.

GL: I remember particularly a nice project that we did in sixth grade one year. We took an imaginary trip to Europe. We had been studying Europe in geography quite a bit of the year. I think it was at the suggestion of one of the student teachers that we should take a trip there but it ended up that I think we spent the better part of two weeks, most all day. The kids figured out how to get passports and they made those up. Then they decided they would have to have money so they devised checking accounts. They had to fly there and they had to go on the airlines so they had to get arrangements for the airlines and how to take care of their baggage. I remember that the day before we theoretically left, they had to bring in a list of what they were taking and the weight. It had to be under a certain weight, so they had to go home and get all that stuff together and put it on a bathroom scale or whatever. Anyway, that project went on for quite a long time. It was interesting to me because the longer it went on, the less I was involved in directing it. It

sort of took on a life of its own. I remember one afternoon sitting in the back of the room just watching this whole thing go on. It was a wonderful project.

TB: Wow. What was the grading system like when you taught?

GL: We wrote narratives. We had parent conferences every quarter and we wrote narrative evaluations I think just at the end of the year if I remember right. I don't know if there was an interim narrative or not. I don't think so.

TB: Do you know how often you had the parent-teacher conferences?

GL: I think each quarter.

TB: When you were teaching at the Campus School, were there any momentous local, national, or international events like the JFK assassination or something else?

GL: Sputnik.

TB: How did this affect your students and your teaching?

GL: Well, we spent a lot of time on the news, on the Russians. That was a big topic then because America had fallen behind the Russians in science. It was a big concern. The kids were interested in that topic. We did a lot of stuff on space exploration and following the news on that. We often in the mornings would come in with some kind of news item. Sometimes a good discussion would take off on that. I remember one we had where there was an item about a child that was abused. The court I think had decided to put the child with foster parents or something. Somehow that got discussed in class and the kids were very interested in that, where a child should be placed. That was really something that hit them at home. We had a lot of those discussions about current events.

TB: That's interesting. Do you remember any of your student teachers?

GL: I remember their faces. I have a hard time remembering their names right now. I hope we have a record somewhere of student teachers.

TB: Do any of your [regular] classroom students stand out from your experience and why?

GL: Oh sure, a lot of them.

TB: Do you remember any names of them or why?

GL: I remember Joel Connelly was in my sixth grade. He was a very special child.

TB: Did you know he would end up going into journalism?

GL: Oh yes. I know Keith Trafton because I have seen him recently. All of the kids at the Campus School were really wonderful kids. One great disappointment was a Native American child we had in the fifth grade. It took me almost a year or two to figure out that he had practically no identity. He had been abandoned in a Seattle hotel by his parents. He was living with foster parents here in Bellingham. He had previous foster parents who had abused him. He had a lot of uncertainty about his background, his family, his race. Was he white, or Indian? He had no connection with the Lummi particularly. It was a very sad case. He was kind of outside of the main stream of the class. I always regret that I couldn't do more. I did a lot with him; took him around, went out to the Lummi Stommish with him. It was a really difficult case. Well that's outstanding in a different way, but there were a lot of outstanding kids in those classes. That was one of the joys of the Campus School. The children were just a joy to work with.

TB: What subjects or classrooms or classroom activities did you most enjoy teaching?

GL: I don't know. Language arts and mathematics I guess.

TB: As a teacher, did you take your classes to visit areas of the college or to special events on campus? Do you have any special memories of these experiences?

GL: Not enough, not enough. We should have done more. I should have taken those classes over to some college classes and sat in on them. I didn't think of it at that time. We went regularly to swim in the gym.

TB: Did you bring them over here to the library?

GL: Yes. There was a children's section in the library. I don't know where that is now. It's probably not any place.

TB: Yes. We have a children's library. Now it's up on fourth floor. At one point in time it was in this room, but I don't know where it was by the time you came for sure.

GL: That's another person that came over and worked with us, the children's librarian.

TB: Was that Mrs. Mathes? Miriam Snow Mathes?

GL: You know, I've forgotten.

TB: That was before me.

GL: We had a lot of library books. A lot of them came from that children's library. There were a lot of books available in the Campus School. A lot of our curriculum revolved around children's reading. We shared books a lot. That was a regular part of our curriculum, time to share books.

TB: What did you do there? People told what they were each reading?

GL: Yes. Sometimes it would be deadly boring! But we worked on that, how do you tell about your book in a way that people will be interested. It was something to work on.

TB: Since you had taught at the public schools before you came to teach at the Campus School, how would you compare the two experiences?

GL: The facilities were much better. I came from Seattle schools at a time when the schools were burgeoning. I was teaching in a portable building with a space heater with 44 children. We literally could not rearrange anything for any purpose. Whatever was the arrangement we had had to stay that way. So coming here to these facilities was just an eye opener. The other thing about the Campus School was there was kind of a family atmosphere. There was a lot of contact with Ray Hawk and Bearnice Skeen and the secretarial staff with Nancy Smith and Dorothy Melland and all of the teachers on the faculty [in the school] school and the whole faculty of the teacher training department. We had regular meetings, I think monthly if I remember right. We had a lot of social events. There was a big social event every fall when school started and throughout the year. We knew each other very well. It was a wonderfully close atmosphere and environment, largely due to a lot of people but I give Ray Hawk a lot of credit. He was one of the best administrators that I've ever worked with. Bearnice Skeen was kind of a saint in my opinion. She was so supportive and everyone was cheerful and upbeat. It was a great place to work.

TB: Now did Ray Hawk retire or did he take another position somewhere?

GL: He retired. He retired when he was 67.

TB: Oh, so he even stayed a little bit later.

GL: That was the standard retirement age at the College when I came here.

TB: Wow. As a Campus School teacher, did you do anything special to prepare your students for their transition to public schools?

GL: We took trips over to the middle school. We took the sixth graders over and we visited. You'd have to talk to the kids a little bit more about how the transition worked for them. We probably could have done a better job with that, but we did make serious efforts to make that transition. I'm sure the atmosphere was somewhat different for them. The kids in the Campus School has been together since Kindergarten. They were an intact groups. There was not very much in-and-out changing. They were used to their own little group. I'm sure that going to middle school was a different social environment entirely.

TB: You mentioned that some students occasionally did come in to the Campus School who had been in the public school. How did you help those students adjust to the Campus School?

GL: I don't think they required a lot of adjustment, myself. I don't remember another student coming in, as a matter of fact, in the middle of the year or even at the beginning of the year. I don't remember. That's why I say, these groups have been together since Kindergarten. They knew better than I did how to run that school! If I had any problems, [or needed to know] where stuff was or how things worked, why, you just asked the kids, they knew.

TB: You were the teacher, but some of the kids have talked about how of course they ran the students teachers (manipulated them). Did you have any sense that you were being run by the kids?

GL: Oh sure. They tried all the time. Sometimes they succeeded and sometimes they didn't. But generally speaking, they were very easy kids to work with. If you were firm in what you wanted it would be okay. But if you weren't too firm about it, they might take advantage of it, like all kids do.

TB: As a classroom teacher, what was your relationship with the other faculty of the Campus School and with the faculty of the College as a whole?

GL: My relationship with the faculty of the Campus School was very close. We met regularly, both in organized meetings and usually with the entire faculty of the department of teacher training, and also a lot of informal. We met in the teacher's lounge and all over the place. We had a lot of, as I said, a lot of social gatherings. We had a lot of contact with the Campus School teachers and with all of the faculty of the teacher training department. We also attended meetings of the whole faculty and the regular monthly meetings held in the Campus School auditorium.

TB: There you are talking about Western the College.

GL: I'm talking about Western, yes. I had a lot of contact with many of those faculty members. At that time I also was a smoker and there was a smoking room over in Old Main. Terrible place! But sometimes I would run over there to have a cigarette and talk to other faculty members. Also, the faculty had a lunch place in the basement of Edens Hall. Quite often I would go over there for lunch and interact with faculty over there. Although most of the time (that was infrequent), most of the times I had lunch with the kids in the classroom. The Campus School served lunch. They had a little lunchroom and kids usually brought their lunches from there back to the classroom and we sat there in the classroom and ate. That turned out to be a very nice time of the day to sort of chit chat with the kids informally, talk about their families and their vacations and whatever, just as people-to-people. It was kind of nice.

TB: Please tell us what you remember about Campus School faculty meetings.

GL: I have no idea what the content was anymore. They were always very stimulating I think.

TB: Please tell us about any aspect of involvement by students' parents that you particularly remember.

GL: That's another area we probably should have done a lot more than we did. Parents were very interested. Of course, these were kids that had parents that had signed them up for Campus School before they were born, practically. They were very interested. As I say, we had conferences every quarter I think. I knew the parents fairly well. I have a funny story about parents and my own ineptness. One of the sixth grade kids came in from recess in the afternoon and his arm hurt. I made a Layman's diagnosis that it would probably be okay until he got home, which was a big mistake because he had a clean stick break. The father came over to talk to me the next day and wanted to know where I had earned my medical [degree]. That was a good lesson to me at that time. When in doubt, send them to the nurse (which we did have by the way). The college nurse also came over to the Campus School. I'll tell you, the facilities and support system for that school and those kids was just phenomenal. There was no reason at that time I could not have sent this kid to the nurse.

TB: So he had actually broken his arm?

GL: He had actually broken his arm.

TB: Wow; any thoughts about the administrative structure of the Campus School?

GL: I said that Ray Hawk was that director of the Campus School and the chair of the department of teacher training and a wonderful administrator; very low-key in a lot of ways. He had a way to get his way and to get it done in a way that everybody agreed with I guess. He was a very shrewd guy and underestimated. I learned a lot from him and I am very grateful that I shared part of my life with him. Of course as I say, Bearnice Skeen was just incredibly supportive. Nancy Smith was kind of a saint. She was just a joy to be around. She was always upbeat; everything was possible and happy and so on. Dorothy Melland was there. These were really high-quality people. The administration of the Campus School itself was just a joy in my opinion. For me it was. We also had another administrator after Ray retired. Bob Simpson was the director of the Campus School then, and he was a very good administrator. It was a very well run organization in my opinion.

TB: Any favorite memories of your days as a Campus School teacher that we haven't talked about?

GL: I have a lot of favorite days. Every day that I came to school was a joy. It was one of the best jobs I've ever had. It's too bad that it didn't last. I don't think there was anything that was going to save it. It got too expensive I think. The whole university went in a difference direction in its emphasis. I'm sorry that at least I didn't have the vision of what was possible to do with that program. It was a wonderful institution and a joy to be in.

TB: Anything else related to the Campus School and your experience that you would like us to know?

GL: I would say that working in the Campus School in a college atmosphere was a motivation for me to go on and get my doctorate and come back in stay in higher education. It was a great benefit to me professionally.

TB: I'm going to back up a little bit. You did mention lunch and what a nice time it was with the kids. Do you remember did everybody have to stay in the room until everybody else was done eating before they could go out and play?

GL: I don't think so. I think maybe it was different in different rooms. I don't remember that.

TB: Also, you mentioned Katherine Casanova and I think that's when the tape was off. Synva Nicol, too, had been long-time teachers. Can you just talk a little more about what they were like?

GL: They were first-rate professional teachers. They were very confident, very self-assured. Otherwise I don't really know that much about them. They were wonderful to work with. Everybody thought they were great teachers and respected them, I know that.

TB: I will say thank you very much for this part of our interview.