

Interview with Marjorie Mckee

February 17, 1995

START OF INTERVIEW

TAPE 1 SIDE A

Lynn Churchill (Interviewer): An oral interview with Dr. Mckee by Lynn Churchill on February 17, 1995

Marjorie Mckee (MM): So we begin at the top or what would you want me to do?

LC: Yes, first I want you to say what is your name and then spell it out.

MM: Marjorie Mckee. M-a-r-j-o-r-i-e M-c-k-e-e

LC: Where were you born?

MM: I was born in Detroit, Michigan so that is where I am from. And I taught in the Detroit public schools, 13 years. And in the schools in Harbel Liberia, West Africa for 13 years and then came to Northern.

LC: What made you go to Africa?

MM: My husband is general manager for firestone plantation and they needed a school so I went to start the school.

LC: What were your experiences like there?

MM: Well it was very exciting, how many teachers ever get to, to build a school and to build it up? And we started with 5 children and we ended by the time I left with 65 and two additional teachers and grades K through 12. And the children were taught in English although the majority of them were not English speaking children.

LC: When did you come to Northern University?

MM: In 1969.

LC: Why did you choose to come here?

MM: I came originally in the summer of 1969 to help Dr. Carter on his federal project called Carter, which was a retraining of regular education teachers to handle special education students. And I came to teach that summer for him and was hired by the university in late August.

LC: What was special education like when you first started?

MM: The Carter Project was functioning at that time. It handled, I really don't know the exact number of teachers in the Upper Peninsula that it touched, but I would make a guess that there must have been 20 to 25 of special education as an undergraduate curriculum was quite small then. It actually began in 1965 when Dr. Gene Rutherford [SPELLED PHONETICALLY] offered the first course in exceptionalities, but as a teacher training program it really didn't begin to function until 1968 somewhere through there, and from then on it grew, but until it was very large, but it was funded primarily through federal, federal grants and I can't remember when the university itself assumed the responsibility of financing the program, it's in the 70's sometime but I really don't know the exact date.

LC: What were your credentials when you started at Northern?

MM: Excuse me?

LC: Your credentials?

MM: My doctorate.

LC: Oh, okay where did you go for your doctorate?

MM: Wayne State.

LC: And your bachelors?

MM: Well it was called National College of Education, it has been renamed it's called National Louis University in Evanston, Illinois.

LC: What is your philosophy of education?

MM: I don't know as I've ever tried to put it into a statement. I know it's exciting, perhaps that's what's exciting about it, it's not static, it grows. I believe all people learn, I don't necessarily believe all people learn the same way but I believe they do learn, and I think maybe they learn what they wish to learn. I'm, I'm not always sure that what a professor wants you to learn is what a student does learn but at least the professor presents the opportunity to consider the thing. So I don't always just an ever

evolving changing very challenging, and I think exciting thing for people to be engaged in, both as a learner and as a teacher.

LC: How many faculty were in the education program when you arrived at Northern?

MM: Well when I came in 1969, there were approximately 61 persons that held rank in the department of education but you have to realize that they were not all visible teaching faculty even the president of the university held rank in this department, Dr. Jamrich held rank in education. So when you look back at records, when you see 61 that does not always mean that there were 61 teaching faculty but there were 61 persons assigned. At that time people in counseling center held rank in the department of education we had a core of persons called area directors that had regions in the Upper Peninsula that they coordinated student teaching in, and they also taught field courses in those areas, we don't have that anymore. Library was part of the department of education at that time and came in the count of 61. There were persons Mott foundation in Flint, we had two persons on our faculty that were Mott, and took care of the Mott programs here at northern, we had three reading people in the teaching end of things we had four persons that taught only in the area of foundations, history of education, dimensions, sociology of education, things like that. We had three who taught in psychology that were part of this department, three in special Ed, and then we had a program in administration and we had a person in that. So by the time you put together 10 administrators, which included the president of the university and one of the vice presidents in the university, plus those who were in counseling, that would be about 6 in counseling. You know library, 5 or so in the library by the time you put it together we had about 61 people. That I think it's a close guess, it's about the best I can do. And at that time, well, like in '61 almost 80 percent of those graduating from Northern graduated with teaching degrees. Now that percentage of graduates decreases because in 1972 we were only graduating 55 percent of the graduates of the university and it has declined due to many reasons but it, it has declined and I don't know what that percentage is, I think Dr. Hendrix [SPELLED PHONETICALLY] is going to be able to give you that, my rememberer wont go that far. But its an interesting thing because in '65 we had 537 persons preparing to be teachers in education and then it began to climb and it went to 690 and so on and so on, 1970 was a big year we had 712. '72 was a big year we had a little drop in '71 but '72 we were back to 713 and then, I think it was '73, it starts down 633 to 523, to, and its down well, by 1980 it was down to about 243. So there was a big huge plump in growth during the early years that I was here which really stretched people about as far as they could go. Classes were very very large and it was wild trying to student teach all of these people and it forced the department of education to do a great deal

of expansion, in fact we expanded into Wisconsin for student teaching and at one time we had a number of student teachers teaching downstate, simply because where else were they going to go? So it's been kind of interesting to watch the pattern, you know?

LC: Where was your office when you first came here?

MM: When I first came, in the basement of John D. Pierce.

LC: Okay.

MM: We were all down in the basement.

LC: What was the role of Pierce School?

MM: Well it began as what was called a lab school. Most teacher training institutions had their own school it was, they were run just like public schools, certified teachers who ___ schedules and everything just the same and Pierce started out K-12 it covered through high school. The high school part of Pierce terminated in 1964 and the elementary school terminated in 1969 but it began like, like it began in any institution of teacher training it was for the purpose of placing student teaching, teachers, and demonstrating model teaching techniques and also advanced curriculum that's where a lot of the curriculum studies came out of, experimental types of things that now are just part of public education and were born in lab schools. They had a full faculty and a principle and it functioned, just like any other school. I don't know, I've tried to think about it, but politically in Michigan, and I don't remember, and I can't find it out, one of the governors felt that lab schools should not exist, that public school teachers should be trained in quote- quote regular public schools. So that had something to do with the closing of these units, we were one of the last I think to close and maybe it was because we were so geographically different than the lower peninsula, maybe that was one of the reasons, but I think we existed maybe a year to two years longer than any other one. And then you see we added those people to our faculty when that, we added four teachers from John D. Pierce to the department of education faculty when John D. Pierce closed, so you see that's how we had such a large number.

LC: How has the department changed since you've been here?

MM: Well size wise it certainly has changed. I think it's made some major adjustments probably that reflect changes within the philosophy of what constitutes good training for an educator. When the university changes liberal studies requirements, that of course effects the department. There was a time where we had one methods instructor, now that's quite different we have more. There was a time when

all of the teacher training was done within the university buildings and you only went out for student teaching. Now more and more you are out, well at least from your junior year on, you are in practicums in the school. We have in my own particular curriculum we have a month long apprenticeship where you are apprenticed to a teacher in a public school in special education and you assume the duties that that teacher has and that precedes student teaching so there have been changes like that. We haven't always perhaps been as interdisciplinary as we could, but I think we have tried very hard to bring the inter- [CUT SHORT BY PHONE RINGING] excuse me.

[STARTS AGAIN WHEN AUDIO CUTS BACK IN]

MM: I think we have made every, a real effort to try to broaden the base through the liberal studies to encourage study in other disciplines, you know, more interaction between. We have a way to go, I don't think we are there yet but these are good changes I think that have come about, we are very involved in public schools now where as I think we were not as involved before, but we are and insisting faculty and students to consider some other options and consider other curriculums and other ways of teaching and we have one professor in development school we are working with now down at Superior Central and we are very much involved with Gwinn public schools as they try to find their way through this terrible base closing and you know the organization, its, I think maybe less of an isolated factor is one that changes, that you see, I think the department always was very community involved but not necessarily school involved so that to me is one of the biggest changes.

LC: When did the department move to Magers?

MM: Believe it or not in 1988, we came in before they had even started to renovate the second floor or the third floor. So we lived through jack hammers and wall expansions and painting and workmen for well two, two and a half years it was rather wild. [Laughter]

I: How many faculty make up your current education department?

MM: I am going to let you ask Dr. Hendrix that because I could give you the teaching faculty but that would not be what the count was and if it's going to be comparable to what we talked about before you really need the whole account.

I: Okay. How many students are enrolled in special Ed?

MM: At this point there are 87.

LC: Okay, what trends do you see arising in the future of education?

MM: I think it's a very turbulent time in education and I think it's a time when, where our forces driving education perhaps are not to be, I think there is a very strong political force which spills into a financial force, and I think, I think sooner or later we are going to have to face the fact that public schools cannot be responsible for all of those. Right now I think you have many many pressure groups, you have many power groups that are influencing what goes on in schools and maybe not wisely. So I think sooner or later you will begin to see a turn back to schools being more basic and you will find less preimage curriculum maybe because I don't think we will be able to afford that and you know schools are supported by, by the population and the population is making it abundantly clearer that in their minds a certain amount is sufficient and that's all the money there is going to be and you can't, you know spread so far, so I think we are at a point that is a difficult time where the educational realm is trying to figure out how to bring to students what we believe is essential to bring to them. In way of learning skills and still provide for them all these other things that people seem to think are part of the public school, so I think there are going to be many changes, and like with all change you know change is a process and sometimes it results in good things and sometimes it results in things that send you back to square one to do all over again, because they don't work. So it's difficult in education how do you measure how well you do when you don't see that person at the end their education? You know, does measuring someone when they finish the second grade does that say yes you have done, you have educated that person well? I don't think so. And you don't see that person at the end of twelfth grade. So sometimes we fly blind you know, we, you do the best you can but you never have the insurance, yes I did that absolutely right. There's a lot of hope, you know?

LC: What are the degrees offered from the education department?

MM: Well at this time, that has shrunk, the max would be the bachelorette degree. A BS or a BA although most people seem to gravitate to the BS, the bachelor of science. And then on the masters level there is a masters in elementary education and there are masters in secondary education that are disciplined driven, in other words you could have a masters of education English or masters of education math, you know so they are academic driven, there's a masters in special education which is specifically learning disabilities. And there is a masters in administration, and that is what exists now, which is greatly reduced from when I _____. We were between 9 and 10 masters degrees alone, not counting the elementary, when I first came, plus the certificate program that resulted in a certificate in reading from the state that created what, well when you were going to school that's were remedial reading teachers

came from, that was not a degree but that was a certificate over your other degree. So it's, the programs have shrunk because they have been eliminated because we no longer have counseling program, we don't train school counselors and we don't train counselors in what they called industry, which it was not necessarily, but it was agency counseling. We no longer have the counseling program, so two degrees were dropped there. We no longer have the program in community schools or community colleges so two more masters degrees were dropped there. We at one time gave not only a master's degree in administration we gave and education specialist, which is above a masters we no longer have that. so that is, there has been a reduction but if you look at the university as a whole there has been a reduction of graduate programs all over the university and it hasn't necessarily been in balance with an increase in undergraduate programs. It's only in some [END TAPE 1 SIDE A]

TAPE 1 SIDE B

MM: So I don't know have I helped any?

LC: Yes I have some more questions I thought of as you talked, what was the Mott program?

MM: The Mott program I'm not really well versed in it but Mott was a very wealthy individual who believed in education and he set up foundations to further innovated education to start different kinds and it was based in Flint and I believe he was originally, I think that's where his home was. And it is a great deal of money and he was somewhat selective as to which universities he would sponsor you know, these things in. Northern was fortunate in that we were one of them, and I cannot think of the other gentleman's name, but Mr. John Garber was our person, one of our persons in Flint, who and he later came to campus and worked on it but he was in Flint for a number of years teaching and doing whatever has to be done in that program. It was just the belief of Mr. Mott that education needed you know, it money it needed assistance to flourish and that was his way of doing that. So I hope you can find somebody who can talk about it more than that, I can't.

LC: Okay. I forgot to ask, where did you get your bachelor's degree and, and your doctorate degree?

MM: Well, my bachelors degree is in teaching. And I have MSW, a masters of social work in psychiatric social work and then I started again, that was at the University of Michigan, and I returned to the University of Michigan to start in what I thought was going to be EDS an educational specialist, in the area of special education and then I was fortunate enough to be accepted at Wayne State and that was in special education administration. So,

LC: Okay. What, how do you feel about mainstreaming? I know that a very controversial subject.

MM: Well it's, it's a word. It's a word that people came up with I think to promote a philosophy, and the philosophy comes originally from a federal law which is a very sweeping and still is a very controlling law when it comes to philosophy as for teaching exceptional people. It simply states and nowhere in that law by the way, is the word mainstream used, but it does say that to whatever extent is possible exceptional individuals must be educated with their peers. You have to watch the wording it didn't say they had to be, it said to whatever extent is possible, and correct for the individual. Must be educated with their peers does not mean in the same classroom necessarily, it can mean in the same building. But like all law is written in language that is subtly terribly definitive and it's done that way on purpose so that you're easily range that is covered. When law came out 94152 was written, there were persons who said that means he must be educated in this classroom with other people, special Ed really studied the law and I think made a very accurate interpretation as to it didn't say that, it said you have to look at his needs and then you have to come up with a plan that meets those needs and if that means 60 percent of the time he belongs with a special teacher, and 40 percent in the regular stream of education than that's what you come up with. If it's 90 10 you come up with it. It does not say anywhere, now 94142 is no longer, well ADA is the controlling law now and ADA also says that it says it does not use the word mainstreaming and it does not use the word inclusion. Those are terms that came from their jargon and their ____ law and there is still nothing in the law that says persons, all the persons are to be in the same classroom. In fact the law says quite the opposite, it's says when you deal with exceptional people you cannot just plunk them wherever it's convenient for you to plunk. You have to make your best professional judgement as to the needs of that individual and then you come up with a service plan. There's a lot of controversy about it. It breaks my heart many times when I see people who will misinterpret the law and I think this includes in some cases parents, as well as administrators and teachers, and I see children put where they cannot possibly function and I think that's wrong to me that negates years and years and years of really struggling on the part of special educators to say to people you cannot ignore this person, this is a person, this is a person the same as anyone else, the difference may be the absence of a leg or it may be a mind that is less agile or less alert but you cannot say that is not a person and that person has things that are entitled to them. So I, I have I guess very mixed feelings about what I see nationwide, but very very mixed feelings as to what I see Upper Peninsula wise because it's almost as if they are ceasing to look at the needs of the person. So I don't know, and two I think you have to be very frank about it. Teachers that go into special Ed go in because they choose to, when someone does not choose to go into special Ed, that's a pretty good indication that that that

person knows themselves well enough to say that is something I don't feel I will be good at, I believe I will not be happy doing it, and so they are wise enough not to do that. I don't see throwing it down and throw it at some _____ accomplishes anything. And if this is to be, you know the way of the future, if this is where it is going to go, then they are going to have to revise teacher education right down to the bottom line, because most regular teachers are not prepared, not prepared to deal with the idiosyncrasies that come with kids that are a little bit different, they just aren't. It's a study in its own, I think there's room for both but we are going through kind of a wild stage now where someone got the idea that this discriminated against them, that was never the purpose, the focus was the exact opposite. It was to make things possible for them, not to discriminate. So I think we have a long way to go as to what is the answer and you now to me, the way to find the answer is in the law, it leaves it wide because it says that is an individual thing, it is not a mass thing. You make, you decide what he needs and that is what you must provide, [CUT SHORT BY PHONE RINGING]

MM: Did we run out of questions?

LC: No I still have more.

MM: You still found more! Oh my! Alright.

LC: Okay, what was the program you _____ a degree for in 1973?

MM: That I did?

LC: Yeah.

MM: That was a, was that the federal one?

LC: I believe so.

MM: Well we were touching base with not only state grants but federal grants because we had to support it. It simply came out of the office of education and it was for the purpose of training special educators, and they were called seed grants, which means that they were not intended to go on for the next hundred years you know? And they had a life usually a year's life and they you have to re apply and re write the whole group big thing. So then a budget distribution and things like that, and it did it made possible, it made possible the purchasing of much of our library that is special to this discipline, it bought, that was a small part of it, it did provide some monies in our budget for work in the public schools helping other teachers adjust to the presence of a special teacher and special kids, but basically

it came out in the form of scholarships to students which allowed their tuition, which paid their tuition so that they could afford to, to study. That's basically what the grant was.

LC: What are the areas of special Ed, what makes them up?

MM: In our department we offer only two, the base program in mental impairment which some people call mental retardation and you are just as correct in doing that as to call it mental impairment. And then on the graduate level we brought in our program on learning disabilities and we were on of the very first institutions in the state of Michigan to have an approved program. So and we never lost that approval and we are considered in learning disabilities to have one of the best, our people score better than anyone else on the student test. So northern never saw their way clear to bring other areas of special Ed in though the department of education. Speech pathology has always been second at one time they belong to one school and now they belong to the school of nursing. So there numbers have dropped considerably because their professional organization is, has undergone some changes too at one time to be a speech pathologist in school you had to also hold a teaching license and that is no longer required so we don't see very many of those people in preparation because they don't choose that and then their own professional organization said four years is not sufficient time to be a speech teacher and they demand you hold a masters, so their program is a five year program. So, but that's the only other area of special Ed in the university.

LC: How close does Northern work with the intermediate school districts?

MM: We have worked very closely with most of the intermediate districts in the Upper Peninsula, in fact the Copper Country, both the superintendent of the Copper Country Intermediate School District and the director of special education are both, went through Northern's special Ed program and administration program. The director of special Ed in Dickinson Iron, Gary Paige [SPELLED PHONETICALLY], is a Northern graduate. Most of their staff, most of their consulting staff are so we have very close ties with the intermediate districts, particularly in special Ed because that's where special Ed lies in most schools, is not in the individual school but it is in the intermediate district, that is where we find it.

LC: Undergraduates at Northern, where can, are they able to work in intermediate districts and their classrooms there or?

MM: If they would want to, if the intermediate district has classrooms, see Marquette Alger has closed all of their classrooms. They put them all back into the regular school and said the regular school has to

run them. Therefore then they run them, so Marquette Alger has very very few, they have no existing programs but yes our people could certainly could. We have had well it's been kind of fun I've tracked, ever since I've come to Northern I have tracked every single student who has gone through, and every year I publish what we call a newsletter because I hear from close to 200- 225 student and then we have sort of a bonding letter that goes out and passes the news along to a number of people. We have a number who have gone on in special Ed after years of teaching, some of who are now professors teaching at other universities. We have a large number who have doctorate degrees and are directors of special education administrators, we have, I think six now who are superintendents, it's been kind of neat and they are all over the world. We have a large number of graduates in England, in Germany, none I know of in Spain or Italy anymore, I don't know how many we have that teach for the department of defense and are all over the world whenever they get sent and as far as our graduates graduating and teaching within the public school system in special Ed, I think there was only one or two states in the United States who don't have graduates in them, so our people don't necessarily just graduate and stay in the Upper Peninsula of Michigan. I have been several times, well I have six positions to fill for September of this academic year that I couldn't fill because I had run out of graduates. All of our people had contracts signed before they had finished student teaching. So I think we've been well thought of. I don't know it's, it's a wicked program, it's always been many more credit hours than just, you know, a bachelorette. But a very neat group of people so.

LC: Are the students community based instructed?

MM: What do you mean by community-based instruction?

LC: They go out in the community with the students, they take students out in.

MM: The backstreet curriculum is very popular curriculum in Wisconsin, are you from Wisconsin?

LC: No.

MM: I just wondered because well, well it's very popular in Wisconsin and they are approaching it in some interesting ways, particularly in the Green Bay area. Michigan has maybe been a little bit different, it's always been there it's never been identified but it's always been a part of special Ed, but now it becomes a curricular part of special Ed on the middle school and high school curriculums. So our approach is a little different than there's. California is very big on it, the state of California is, New York doesn't touch it, New York state for some reason the eastern tier remains pretty solidly academic and then they bring this community base in as post-secondary which is still another way to look at it, so

nation wide I think probably every teacher training program would have that component, that is really difficult when you are in a very small somewhat rural area to do too much in community based works, sometimes a little better in the larger areas like Green Bay when you have more industries and opportunities and business and, and you can work out some very good programs particularly on the high school level when your old enough for working papers that your students are out actually working in the businesses and then are still coming to school for the other part. So you introduce some exciting things on that, it's a little hard in Rock, Michigan or in Gwinn, Michigan or places where you have limitations.

LC: How do you feel about ____ do you think it's a good thing for the kids to get out in the community and people to see them interact of?

MM: If it leads to interaction its good. If it just leads to exposure, no. you know not all communities are ready for it. They just aren't. And to me then you whipped before you start, then it becomes nothing more than you having visible exposure of your students and I have some mixed feelings about that.

LC: Does the department do vocational training to teach their students for special Ed?

MM: well in special Ed they have an entire course in vocation education. We are fortunate, Mr. Tom Sencal [SPELLED PHONETICALLY] is teaching that course for us and Tom, Tom has an extensive background in special Ed and on top of it and also taught many years in special Ed and then he went with mental health and he has been the person that has been in charge of the works center and the workshop which used to be the showroom workshop, which he has been their director well up until, likely, three years ago. So I'm very very fortunate, our graduates are not, our students are not just hearing theory they are really hearing from someone who has been there and who has devoted a life time to work with students in training skills and vocations and testing and things of that sort and he brings that component to the course. So it's a very live course, it's not just read the book and take the quiz, it's kinda neat, it really is. With Ed off and on we had one time in fact we gave in special Ed we had a joint program Dr. Connoly Egal [SPELLED PHONETICALLY] was then, Kay Watera [SPELLED PHONETICALLY] was head of IE when I came to Northern and he started it and Dr. Connoly Egal [SPELLED PHONETICALLY] kinda maintained it, it was not a long long time I think it existed maybe eight years at the outside. But it was possible to train and to lead and industrial education teacher with your major and minor there with another major in mental retardation, so some of the persons who are now heading up vocational workshops came out of our program. Its just like at one time we had a joint program with physical education and we trained persons to do physical education specifically with

handicapped kids, that was during the time Dr. ___ was here , it sort of expired when she retired, there is a need for adaptive physical education teachers, its not a large need, but there is a need, so we have had kind of some fun things like that where we have had joint departments working in special Ed and that and it's been fun.

LC: Do you like to think other departments besides, well there's physical Ed, and--

MM: Well you see our minor they are required to carry and psychology minor so yeah they had a very close tie to psychology but yes I think there are some, some blends that we've never done that could be done. Right now I'm not, I'm not sure northern is that committed to the undergraduate program. It's being studied and there would be a possibility that it would no longer exist. Probably the graduate program will, because the graduate program has a large enrollment, but I don't know, these are things, that I guess answers are in the future and I'm not sure I will be able to see those answers.

LC: What changes would you like to see if you could initiate in the department?

MM: I would like to see them continue to train special education teacher and I would certainly like personally to see

[TAPE STOPS ABRUPTLY]