FACULTY OF EDUCATION

ORAL EXAMINATION
GERALD MORTON

FOR THE DEGREE OF

DOCTOR OF EDUCATION
EdD

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EXAMINING COMMITTEE

Chair: TBA

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HOW DO BRITISH COLUMBIA SCHOOL SUPERINTENDENTS MANAGE DATA

ABSTRACT

The British Columbia Ministry of Education has been collecting demographic and academic performance information on every student in grades Kindergarten-12 since 1992. The amount of data held by the Ministry and now available for use is considerable: between 50 and 500 data elements have been collected from each of more than 500,000 students annually for the last 15 years. Most school districts also collect data on the performance of their students.

School Superintendents, as senior educational leaders in each school district, play vital roles in connecting data use to student learning and achievement. However, the patterns and strategies they employ to manage data use are largely unknown: consequently the central research question of this dissertation is how British Columbia Superintendents manage data use in their districts.

The study uses a grounded theory method to pursue this question. Twenty-two British Columbia Superintendents participated in interviews that each lasted between one and two hours. The resulting transcripts were analysed intensively to determine the underlying patterns and core variables at play. Eventually the following theory emerged: British Columbia School Districts improve their capacity to create and use data-based knowledge by combining staff engagement with structural support in such a way that the district advances along a trajectory of increased data use in a series of five developmental phases.

The theory offers a model that enables assessment of how far a district has come and what possibilities there may be for further development of data-based knowledge. The model also provides Superintendents with an understanding of the actions that are critical for continuous improvement in the capacity of the district to use data effectively.

The study suggests that the BC Ministry of Education should provide overall leadership to develop organizational intelligence in the education system by modelling data-based knowledge use, building trust, working with districts to supply the necessary technology and data, and supporting processes that turn data into knowledge.

Academic Record:
1998—M.A. Leadership and Training, Roads University
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Professional Experience:
2002--Present  Director of Information Department, BC Ministry of Education
2001--2002  Manager/Director, Research Branch, BC Ministry of Education
1999--2001  Manager, School Accreditation Program, BC Ministry of Education
1996--1999  Director, Program Evaluation Branch, BC Ministry of Education, Skills and Training
199—1996  Strategic Communications Advisor, BC Ministry of Education
1991--1994  Director, Communications Branch, BC Ministry of Education
1990—1991  Assistant Director, Communications Branch, BC Ministry of Education
1980--1990  Contracting and consulting in domains of communications and research.

1999-2008  Sessional instruction and major project supervision, Royal Roads University