Oral History Interview with Louise Dyer

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California Department of Education
Adult Education Oral History Project

Oral History Interview

with

LOUISE S. DYER

San Diego Community College District Board of Trustees, 1981 - 90
San Diego Community College District Adult Education Teacher, 1974 - 81
San Diego Unified School District Board of Education, 1965 - 73

November 9, 1992

San Diego, California

By Linda L. West

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RESTRICTIONS ON THIS INTERVIEW

None.

LITERARY RIGHTS AND QUOTATIONS

It is recommended that this oral history be cited as follows:

Louise S. Dyer, Oral History Interview, Conducted 1992 by Linda L. West in San Diego, California, for the California Adult Education Oral History Project.

PREFACE

Adult education in California has a proud history of helping its citizens to meet the challenges of life in a huge, complex, multicultural state. Through the years, California adult educators have provided leadership to the nation in the development of innovative instructional practices and creative educational solutions.

The California Adult Education Oral History Project began in 1992 as a companion to a print history of adult education commissioned by the California Department of Education. As the century draws to a close, the growth and energy of California adult education in the sixties, the institutionalization of competency based education in response to the influx of refugees and immigrants in the seventies and eighties, and the innovative uses of technology of the nineties will be recorded.

The oral history project started with a small group leaders whose careers began in the 1950's and 1960's and who witnessed and influenced important events in the development of the nation's largest adult education program.

Significant assistance to the new project was provided by the staffs of both the California State Archives and the Oral History Program, History Department, California State University, Fullerton. This project could not have begun without the vision of Raymond G. Eberhard, Administrator, Adult Education Unit, California Department of Education, and the support of Lynda T. Smith, Consultant, Adult Education Unit.

Linda L. West
June 1, 1993

INTERVIEW HISTORY

Interviewer

Linda L. West

Interview Time and Place

One interview was conducted in Louise S. Dyer's home in San Diego, California, on November 9, 1993.

Editing

The interviewee reviewed and edited the transcript. No information was omitted. When the tape was inaudible or when necessary for clarification, some information was added and is indicated by brackets [ ]. Louise added a concluding statement which is also indicated by brackets.

Tapes

The original cassette tape was transferred to reel to reel format at California State University, Fullerton and deposited with the California State Archives.

CALIFORNIA ADULT EDUCATION ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

INTERVIEWEE: LOUISE DYER

INTERVIEWER: Linda L. West

[Session 1, November 9, 1992]

[Begin Tape 1, Side A]

WEST: This is Linda West interviewing Louise Dyer in San Diego, California, on November 9, 1992. I'm interviewing Louise to record her recollections of significant events and trends in California adult education during her career.

Louise, you were a member of the San Diego School District Board of Education from 1965 to 1973, and at that time, dividing the community colleges from the unified school districts was an important issue. What can you tell me about what happened in San Diego?

DYER: Statewide there was a law that required the boundaries of unified or school districts to be coterminous with the community college district. In San Diego, we had one board of education for K-14 education, so we had the K-12 and the adult education and the community colleges. After the law passed, our boundaries were coterminous, so we could continue to operate that way, but there was quite a bit of

pressure growing from faculty groups in the community colleges that wanted a separate board. Ultimately, there were only, I believe, five districts, but very few districts that were coterminous, and we were the only ones remaining. Finally, we had an election to see whether the people wanted it to be two districts or one.

WEST: What year was that election?

DYER: I'm not sure. I think it was '71, but I'm not sure. At that time, our board of education was elected in odd-numbered years and along with the city council, and then, of course, the statewide and national elections were even-numbered years. After that we changed to even-numbered years, but I'm not sure whether that proposition was on the ballot in conjunction with the board of education elections or in conjunction with the statewide elections, but I believe it was probably '71. And because of all the campaigning by the faculty, it [the proposition] passed to divide the district.

Actually, our board wrestled with it for a long, long time, and finally decided to take no position on it, so there was nobody campaigning really to maintain one district. Now, I always took that position, I favored one district, but what's one

person going to do? So the district separated. That meant that in '73 there were three trustees up for reelection--I think it was three. I was one of them. The other two could decide whether they wanted to be with the unified district or the community college district, and they chose to go with the community college district. Unfortunately, I ran for reelection for the board of education and I was defeated that time, and so they elected three new people for the community college board. [In retrospect, I believe it was best to separate the district.]

The other thing that happened during that time was we had to wrestle with who was going to take adult education, whether it would go with the community colleges or whether it would stay with the K-12. So we worked out a delineation of functions agreement and adult ed[ucation] went with the community colleges. Around the state, more--I believe I'm correct--of the adult education was with either a unified district or a high school district, so we were in the minority, and continue to be. I'm not sure how many districts now--I think there are only about eleven, as I recall, but you could check

that out--districts where the community colleges have the adult education with them.

WEST: Why do you think that San Diego chose to do that?

DYER: Well, that we felt very strongly about here, and I think everybody did, feeling that people in adult education were adults, just like college people, but K-12 dealt with the children from five, or whenever they started to school, up to eighteen when they graduated from high school. And we felt that the community college instructors and faculty members were much better able to deal with adults, and adult education took those from eighteen up until the end of their life.

And there really was, as I recall, no real discussion or argument; the main thing was just to work out all the details of that. Although there were a few, I think, as I recall, in the K-12 that would have liked to have kept it, it was just another place for their teachers to be. But mostly the feeling was just because you were a good kindergarten or first grade . . . primary school, you know, elementary school teacher, didn't necessarily mean that if they didn't need a lot of those that year you could teach an adult education class the next year. So I don't recall any great discussion.

It was kind of hard to work it out, but at that time the K-12 was growing. There were more children each year, so they really didn't have to worry where to place their teachers. Later on, it became more of a problem. In '78 and '79, it again came up because at that time the enrollment in the K-12 was dropping and there weren't as many children in the primary grades, and so the teachers were getting worried, you know. And at that time it was reviewed again and there was quite a bit of discussion about it. At that time I was on the San Diego County Grand Jury. We worked with the colleges, really, that we wanted adult education kept with the colleges, we thought it belonged there. And, fortunately, the colleges and our grand jury were successful, and again it was left with the colleges.

WEST: So what was the role of the grand jury in that decision?

DYER: Nothing really, except [individual grand jurors] to kind of lobby the state to leave it there, because it was the K-12 that time that wanted adult ed. You see, they were having trouble. There were fewer students and they had all these teachers, and of course some retired every year and all that, but still it was an increasing problem for them. And so

they wanted to take adult education back, be someplace for their teachers to work and it would be a source of income [for the unified school district]. But anyway it didn't succeed and the adult education in San Diego stayed with the community colleges.

This may be changing the subject a little bit, but back when I was first elected to the K-14 board, adult education. . . . And I can't remember the amount of money, but actually they were getting more money from the state than it always cost to run adult education, and so it helped support the colleges. Now that's something I found in my first election campaign. The reason I remember it, people would raise it and they. . . . Those of them that know, were aware of that, and some of the college people wanted. . . . They were glad they got the money. Some of the adult ed people didn't like the idea that it was going there, so it was kind of one of those topics that people didn't really like to talk about. Now, later on, gradually through the years and the way it is now, why, adult ed doesn't provide a means of support for the community colleges.

WEST: Adult ed money has to stay with adult ed more?

DYER: It has to stay with adult ed. And again, there's the controversy or the whatever you might call it between

the adult ed instructors and the community college people about money and where the limited resources from the district go. Because obviously . . .

WEST: Well, give us some examples about that.

DYER: Well, you know, the amount of money we get from the state--and I don't remember the exact amounts now, but whatever it is--for either the colleges or the adult education is not enough to support either. So on the budget there has to be money from the district, of course, that goes into it from the general fund. And because there isn't enough for each one, why, the colleges want it and the adult ed wants it, and unfortunately I think the colleges have been getting more in recent years and the adult ed is being squeezed a little bit.

WEST: Tell me a little bit about what adult education was like in the seventies. You were an adult education teacher from 1973 to 1981. How was it teaching adult ed in that period? And did you see changes during that period in how things were handled?

DYER: There were some changes, I guess. I taught quiltmaking in [the] consumer home economics [department], and we had a wonderful department. I taught, actually, in a couple of the different centers. I mean I had classes that were under a

couple of the different centers. And at first it was easier to establish classes.

I maybe should go back in my K-14 days. If somebody saw a need for a class and there were people in the community or in one of our continuing education centers--they were adult ed then, but now it's continuing education--why, you could establish a class, and you knew you had the students and [then] you'd have it [the class]. Gradually there was more and more regulation or rules, and during those years that I taught it became increasingly so. To begin with, the numbers and names of the courses had to be uniform around the state, and it took so much longer to get a class approved, and suddenly you couldn't just decide there was a need for a class and start it next week or next month or something. So I saw more of that.

There were also many more requirements in my field. Quilting had been a hobby of mine all my life, and when I went off the board I was asked first by one of the deans who had a continuing education center if I would teach a practical politics course. There was a lot of interest in '73 in getting people more involved, you know, to combat the apathy in government and all, and a book had been written. It

was underwritten, I think, by the National Chamber of Commerce, but I could look that up. I have a copy of it if you want to know, but it was very good on practical politics. And so I said I'd teach it, because they wanted somebody that had been in government but not somebody that was running for office, and I certainly wasn't running for any office nor did I have the intention of doing so. But anyway, I only had a few people sign up and, you know, we kept it open for--what was it--two or three weeks and not enough people came so it was discontinued.

But in '73 the nation was beginning to plan for the bicentennial year, and various people knew that quilting had been a hobby of mine and I was asked if I would teach a quiltmaking class. And so, in the fall of '74, I guess it was, I started to teach quiltmaking. And the first semester, gee, I had a huge class, so the next semester I had two classes. And I can't remember exactly how long it took before I got my five classes, which was the limit--that's all you could teach was a 60 percent load--and they just really were great.

Someplace along the line, and I can't remember which year but it was probably, oh, '76 or '77, along

in there, because of getting federal funding for vocational education classes, suddenly consumer and home economics came under that area. And so then they had to require a lot more [educational] requirements for the teachers. Now, see, I'm only speaking of consumer and home economics because I don't know how it applied to all the other areas, but in this particular field, I did not have a major or a minor in college in home economics. My degree was in business administration and I was qualified to teach and all that sort of thing, but suddenly I couldn't teach quiltmaking if I didn't have a minor in home ec[onomics]. Well, there were a lot of other people in consumer and home economics, and I understand in other vocational fields as well, but anyway, so we had to start taking classes. And there were so many that the district in the adult education arranged with San Diego State and UCSD [University of California, San Diego] and some we took through Mesa College. And you had to fill in, looking at your particular transcript from your college, you know, what classes you needed. And I really didn't have anything in that field, so I had to get twenty-one units, which is more than you would need for a minor in most colleges or universities. And so, for a

couple or three years--it might have been '77 or '78 when it started, because I just finished when I was elected to the board of trustees of the community colleges in '81, and I got my twenty-one units. As long as you were taking classes every semester, I could continue to teach; but if I hadn't done that, I would have been out. And the classes really weren't about methods in teaching and all that. It was supposed to be subject matter oriented, except it wasn't my subject matter. There were a lot of classes I would have been happy to take, but I remember I had to take nutrition, and I didn't think that had much to do with any kind of sewing or design or color. And we had to take some things about principles of home economics or problems in home economics--I can't remember--and one in interior design that I took was the closest [to quilting]. Now, some we had to take and some you take what you wanted. Some of them they gave at the adult education center out at Fifty-fourth and University because there were so many of us that needed certain ones [courses], others we just signed up for [individually at a] college or university. I know I took my nutrition at Mesa College, our community college, because I just needed a lower division class

in that so I could get it there. It depended whether you were taking lower division or upper division. So I think everybody that was teaching finally probably finished up when I did, or the year after, or they dropped out of teaching. Now that's just one example in consumer and home economics, how it was much more structure. And suddenly the . . .

WEST: And this was as a result of the federal funding?

DYER: The federal funding in that year.

WEST: The requirements that teachers in the vocational area have a background?

DYER: Yes, if you didn't have that, then you didn't qualify for federal funding. And some of us said, "Well, look, nobody is going to take quiltmaking to get a job." Now, some of them did maybe work in a fabric store or a quilt shop. In fact, I had two students that started their own quilt shops, one here and one moved back to her home on the East Coast and started one there, so some people did make money out of it. But it wasn't a vocational type class, as if you'd go and take auto mechanics or something like that. But it didn't matter.

My classes didn't ever get any vocational money from the federal government, but you couldn't have any teachers, even if they weren't teaching something

that was really preparing people for the world of work. So we tried some classes where they had a--I can't remember the words--it wasn't a work component, but something like that, some kind of a component, where they had to learn about some small business practices and the instructor had to include some of those other things in it. But they weren't, as I recall, that popular. I didn't have that in my quilting, so I can't speak to that exactly, and part of that occurred after I was elected to the board of trustees in '81 to the community colleges. But the point of saying all this is there was a lot more regulation of adult education than there had been previously. It was harder to set it up. And, of course, in the colleges, too, you know, they set up the numbers, the 101, the basic course in everything, and on through.

WEST: And you had to have course outlines?

DYER: And you had to have course outlines, of course. When I first started teaching quilting I didn't have to have a course outline that I submitted on a certain date. I always personally--because that's the way I could teach--had a course outline and a syllabus, and I'd tell my students and they could plan for the semester and they knew what I was going to teach.

But it wasn't required, as I recall, to turn it in. I can't remember which year you had to, but pretty soon they had to make this very detailed and give it to each student at the beginning of the semester, if you were going to have tests or, you know, requirements and things.

Most of my students were taking it just for enrichment and I occasionally. . . . I don't think over all the years I taught I had more than three or four students who wanted high school credit. Well, of course, [in] a lot of adult education they're going for a high school diploma, but in mine it was not that. But there were, I'll bet, three or four that were taking this as an elective, and then I had to go through all the proper procedure and the requirements and the tests and the number of classes they had to attend. So I'm just using that as an example of there was more regulation, more structure from the state, and because of federal funding requirements also. And I don't know whether it's good or bad. I think maybe it's good in some ways, because, you know, we always heard rumors or at conferences, you know, you talk to other people and we'd think, well, we have a better course than they have. So maybe it would clean up some of those

areas, but on the other hand, it took away a lot of the spontaneity and enthusiasm that you could get by adjusting your course to meet the particular needs of the people in the class or the community. But whether it's good or bad isn't the point; it's just that it happened and there was a lot more regulation.

WEST: Sure. Is quiltmaking a class that had fees attached to it, or was it an a.d.a. [average daily attendance/apportionment] class?

[Interruption]

DYER: Of course, in the beginning it was free, and then when fees came in, then there were fees attached. And the first semester they put on fees I lost some classes; everybody did in fields like that. Nobody . . . well, I won't say nobody, but a lot of people thought, well, it used to be free. You know, maybe we won't have to pay next semester. Then the next semester [classes were] back up to the regular size.

WEST: Was that in '78 after Prop[osition] 13 that they started having fees on it?

DYER: Yes. Yes, when the state, the basket weaving kind of thing, Jerry Brown, [Chuckling] that you had to have fees, and that's when that all happened.

WEST: Tell me about what you saw, as far as changes. It affected your class and how it was structured and had

to be fee-based. Can you think of any other things that you noticed that you were teaching after Prop. 13, 1978, that's seen as a dramatic change in adult education?

DYER: Well, in some ways I liked it a lot better. Because even though the fees were small, really, comparatively, why, the people that came. . . . You know, if you paid a fee you would come every time and you would work on whatever you were doing. In my classes, of course, I just had wonderful women--I usually had women. I did have a few men through the years, but mostly it was women, and they just accomplished many, many things. But I found that after the fees they didn't miss classes and they came and they really made whatever they were supposed to, and I really liked it for that reason.

The other thing I noticed, some people didn't want to pay a fee for the full semester, because it was quite a bit, and I was one of the ones that pushed. . . . And I was just a teacher then, not on the board, but I knew all the . . . having been on the board, the people. So I'd go in and talk to them and say, "I wish we'd have some nine-week classes, you know, half the semester. Let them pay the fee for that amount." There were a lot of people that

would gladly come for nine weeks but didn't want a full semester fee. Well, at that time I didn't succeed at first, but then it changed to that because there was the realization that people would like a focused class for nine weeks on whatever the subject was. So most of the fee classes now are nine weeks in length. And of course, there are so many exceptions that, you know, if you're working for a high school diploma or you're handicapped or you're disadvantaged for one reason or another, there are a lot of people that don't have to pay fees.

WEST: They don't have to pay.

DYER: But mostly my quiltmaking appealed to those that could well afford it, but they just were hesitant that first semester when it changed. The other thing we tried, and I was back on the board then, on the community college board. . . . And of course, the minute I was sworn in I had to give up teaching. I couldn't even teach until the end of the semester. I was sworn in in December and I couldn't teach till January, you know, because I'd be voting on things like salaries and [benefits] for teachers. So I had to get people to take my classes immediately. But they [the district] tried [offering two types of] classes then, and I opposed it [as a] brand-new board

[member]. Well, I had worked with two of the trustees before and, you know, I really knew all of these things, but I felt from my teaching experience that we shouldn't differentiate and have two different kinds of classes. But the board didn't agree, the majority, and they tried to set up in the areas where people had less income, classes that supposedly had this work component with them that would be free, and in other parts of town they would be fee classes. Well, it wasn't too successful, I don't think, because I found [a few] people would drive clear from La Jolla to southeast San Diego because they could take a class free rather than stay in their area. [These free classes] did have another little [work] component, but it wasn't that successful [in some of the quilting and other consumer and home economics areas]. And I think all the classes like that are fee classes now, I'm not sure. So, you know, there's always somebody looking to get around a new law.

WEST: That's right. Continuing on the idea of being a teacher and how things changed in the seventies, student demographics changed a lot in San Diego, I think, in that period, did they not, with the influx of refugees?

DYER: Yes.

WEST: How did you see that change in the community affecting what went on in adult education?

DYER: Of course, ESL [English as a Second Language] classes were always big in San Diego and always will be because of the people coming across the border from Mexico. But with all the Southeast Asians coming, of course, we even need[ed] more adult education. We needed more people than we could possibly get that could speak those various Southeast Asian languages, and it was quite a challenge to bring them in.

I know when I was teaching it didn't affect me as much because I taught in the North Shores and the Clairemont Adult Schools, and so I didn't really have contact--I mean, I didn't draw [these new immigrant] students. I had always worked a lot on the board of education with the southeast area adults and so I felt close to them but not as a teacher. So, from the very first day I went on the board in '65, why, I had attended all their events, and they did a marvelous job.

But along in the seventies when we began to get so many refugees in, it did change the character. It also meant in things like. . . . Oh, in auto mechanics we had to have an ESL class for--I can't

remember what you called it--auto mechanics or something, but you had to have ESL classes after the basic one that included the vocabulary that they would need in certain fields.

WEST: Vocational ESL, yes.

DYER: And it was more than just the general vocational. It had to be geared to whatever particular field it was. So that made a difference. And then first it was ESL, but then there was a need for just basic skills training. We have had a very fine skills center here, and that has provided lots and lots of opportunity for people that either needed to upgrade their skills or needed to learn a skill or were changing vocations.

It may be getting ahead of your question, but it does pose some problems. All the years I was on the board of trustees for the community colleges from '81 to '90, as the colleges began to charge a fee, why, you know, some people didn't go. Again, the same thing like with adult ed, and therefore the colleges wanted more of these adult ed students in their college program. Also, there were ways of getting financial aid that went to college students that they couldn't get for adult ed, and that was when we changed our name from adult center to continuing

education centers, because it meant that they could qualify for certain [financial aid]. So, many of these students who were learning ESL in adult ed then suddenly wanted to be in our college programs, but they really, in my way of thinking, would have been better off continuing with continuing ed classes, because these teachers were geared to working with them. But the colleges wanted them because they had room in their classes. So that's been kind of a continuing [problem] ever since the seventies and on through, and it's just a different philosophy that people embraced.

WEST: Okay, changing the subject a little bit. The unionization of teachers in adult education has been a significant issue. What can you tell me about unionization of adult education teachers in San Diego?

DYER: When I first went on the board in '65, we just had the "adult educators" [union] and the dues were very modest and most of it stayed locally. I don't remember what the dues were, but I'm going to say it was $15 or $20 for the year, and maybe $5 went to the state organization. Those figures aren't accurate, but they show you the difference. While I was still teaching--so it must have been in the late seventies,

or 1980, anyway before December of '81--why, they voted, because there had been this big push to join the AFT [American Federation of Teachers] and it made a difference in many ways. To begin with, the dues went up considerably. I know I was still teaching because they called a meeting on a Saturday morning early to vote on it and not many people came--in fact, very, very few--and it passed to become union-oriented and be part of the AFT. For a number of years they [credit and non-credit teachers] were separate [had separate union representation]. Now I believe they're combined with the college AFT, too, so they [the adult education teachers] are a minor voice and they can't be as powerful, it doesn't seem to me. A lot of the people [teachers] in adult education still like the old "adult educators," but it's no longer going to be that way, so they go through the same process of collective bargaining and everything else that the unions have. I've never liked unionization in education, so I'm speaking from that belief. So I think that adult ed has been the loser in it because I thought that they got a lot more when they were just, quote, the "adult educators" and could talk with the various groups, but it's not going to be that way anymore.

WEST: What are the issues right now? When there are negotiations, what are the issues? Or what have been the important issues, to do with hours?

DYER: Oh, it's salaries, a lot of it, and then . . .

WEST: In addition to salary--salary is always an issue everywhere--but the number of hours that you can teach and benefits and . . .

DYER: And for adult ed, it's the number of contract teachers. In adult ed here, most of them are hourly teachers and they don't have benefits. If you teach a 60 percent load, you do get health insurance, but it's become more and more restricted . . .

[End Tape 1, Side A]

[Begin Tape 1, Side B]

DYER: [In adult education,] fifteen hours a week was 60 percent.

WEST: This is side two and we were discussing contract teachers and the benefits and percentages.

DYER: I believe I was talking about continuing education, in that they don't have as many contract teachers. A number of years ago, a number of teachers were grandfathered in under the Peralta Contract, and some people got contracts that way. But mostly the teachers work hard and long and hope to be able to get a contract, because most of the continuing ed

teachers are hourly, and that means that they can't teach more than 60 percent. Sixty percent . . . [Interruption]

Sixty percent in continuing education is teaching fifteen hours a week, and that normally would be five three-hour classes. And if you teach less than 60 percent, you don't qualify for any benefits. If you teach 60 percent, you would get your health insurance, and then you have the job security [problem, knowing] that you're going to teach. Because whatever the limit is--I'm not sure whether it's still nineteen--if you don't have nineteen in a class or if your class drops below that, you get a notice to close your class. And if you're an hourly teacher, that's the end of that for the semester. So even the hourly teachers, even if they aren't as concerned about the health benefits, because maybe their spouse has health benefits someplace else, they still want the job security of knowing that they are going to have a class and be able to teach all year. Our district has several different kinds of . . . not only the [tenure] contract but [fixed term], [when] you're guaranteed a class for a semester. They average the pay out; it's a little bit different. That way people know that at

least they're going to teach all semester. But that's been one of the biggest problems in continuing ed, the large number of hourly teachers.

But then when you look back, I can talk about this both as a teacher and as a trustee, you know, there are certain subjects that were popular and you hired a teacher because that's what they could teach. Like I remember a contract teacher we had that taught . . . I think it was jewelry, some kind of jewelry making. And that was real popular back in the sixties or early seventies, but after Prop. 13 and you couldn't pay for those things, people just didn't pay [fees] for that. And this contract teacher, she really couldn't teach a lot of other things, and therefore it was very difficult to know what to do with her. Here you had this person and they couldn't do anything. Mostly in continuing ed the teachers can teach in several different fields, but there are other areas.

There used to be a lot of parent participation classes, which are the pre-school classes and the parents, the mother, I think they meet two days a week and the mother has to help one day or something like that. I may be wrong about the times and all. But as there were fewer children born for a number of

years, you didn't need as many parent participation teachers, and so there's always been the hesitation about giving contracts.

What's happened, because ESL holds up, if it's not the people that come across the border from Mexico it's been the Southeast Asians, so there has been the tendency to give more contracts to ESL teachers than to anyone else, and some of the other teachers kind of resent this, you know, and don't like it. Probably ESL will continue, there's no sign that it's going to let up, you know, but still you don't want continuing ed in San Diego--and it probably isn't true in other parts of the state--but you don't want it to just be an ESL program, you know, completely, because it's important to have the enrichment or the high school diploma, or for citizenship, all those other . . .

WEST: And vocational programs.

DYER: And vocational. We need all of those, so you don't want just the contract people in that [ESL] area. We have always had some contract people in some of the vocational fields like the auto mechanics, but now with the dry cleaning that I thought was terribly important, we no longer have that. A year ago that went out, and welding isn't a big thing anymore, and

so if you have contract teachers in those areas, what do you do with them, you know? And so the tendency has been . . . like I know in the dry cleaning they could only work a certain number of hours because the classes were . . . I think it was five hours a day or something and they're only allowed to work so many hours in the year, so you got almost to the end of the year and you had to let them go. For the last two weeks they would go over the number of hours; otherwise you'd be giving them a contract. So it poses problems, but on the other hand, if you don't have the money to buy new dry cleaning equipment to keep up with the times, why, then you can't offer the kind of program that's good. And so, you know, it's the chicken or the egg. [Laughter]

WEST: Let's move into your experience on the school boards. You served on two school boards, the unified school district and the community college, and you were very active in the [California] School Boards Association. What would you like to share about the role of school boards in California education?

DYER: I think school boards have changed a great deal, from what I read in the newspapers and articles now. I was on the school board when it was a K-14 board from '65 to '73. When I first was elected in '65, we met

twice a week, and I'll say the first part of the meeting was K-12, and then we'd have a short break and then we'd have the community college part. As both groups wanted their share of attention and all that, we changed and met, as I recall, on Tuesdays on just K-12 things, and on Thursdays just community college and adult education. And that proved to be very good. That was kind of our answer to these people that wanted to separate into two separate boards and districts, and of course we did separate and the boards were elected in '73.

I still think school boards need to be local. I think the best place to make school policies are local. The state, of course, has the responsibility for education, and I guess there's always going to be that discussion: How much control should be in the federal government and how much in the state and how much in the local board? But anytime money comes from someplace, of course . . .

[Interruption]

. . . they'll make regulations and requirements, and obviously I wanted to do that, too, as a board member. If we put money into certain programs, why, the board had a right to have a say in it. So I

understand that. But it's meant that it has changed a great deal.

My first days on the school board also, I was elected in November of '65 and took office in December, and that fall, just before I was elected in September, the Elementary/Secondary Education Act passed. And, of course, that's what's ushered in all these various problems about--or concerns, not problems, but problems came with it--about civil rights and, you know, better education for the minorities.

WEST: And I think that that was the first home, also, of the Adult Education Act before it became separate.

DYER: That's right. Yes, that's correct. And so that made changes, but because I came on the board at that time, I wouldn't have seen as much change [as a board member], although I used to visit the board meetings. But before that, they used to meet, I think . . . well, not every week even, I can't say how often, and it was really very different. Boards began to become more involved because the people out there [in the community] wanted to talk to their board member. We were board members then, now they're all trustees. They wanted to talk to their board member and see if their board member was involved. I thought our board

here in San Diego, even though, you know, people changed--sometimes someone wouldn't run again for reelection or they'd be defeated or something--I thought we always did a very good job about not meddling in administration and doing what a board should do. Of course, there are lots of people [community, teachers, classified] out there that think the board does everything, you know, and they don't. They have certain responsibilities. They don't personally hire every teacher and make every little rule.

WEST: What do you think the role is, the appropriate role of the school board?

DYER: It's to set policy. The only person we really hire is the superintendent or the chancellor in our community college district--we call it the chancellor. We [the board] set[s] the broad general policies, and then you try and influence legislation of the state or be involved with it; that will improve the education and work for getting the proper financial support from the state, and then being kind of a good will ambassador in the community to explain education to the people. But it isn't to get in and administer the district. That should be left up to the superintendent or chancellor. And if you [the

board] don't [doesn't] like the job that's being done, then that's the person you get rid of, you know. [Chuckling]

So those years on the school board involved some hard times, like it did all over the country when the civil rights movement was beginning. And we had our share, I guess, of problems, not real serious here, not like some cities. Then, when I was teaching, it seemed like things went along pretty smoothly, and here we could, if you needed more money, you could decide to raise the tax . . . you know, property tax rates. And we had a good district and financially we were doing fine.

And then when Prop. 13 came in, it meant again very definite changes. There suddenly wasn't the money, you didn't have control over it, and yet the public and the staff and faculty felt that you [the board] should be able to get all this money and do all these things they wanted, and there simply wasn't money. And you also then had to cut down on maintenance and building and things because the money had to go into just education, which is, of course, where it should go. But you also have to maintain equipment and you have to buy new equipment. Some of the programs are expensive that they take,

particularly so many of the skills center type programs, and you have to keep up with changing machinery and everything. So there have been changes in that way.

I think the other change is the realization by the boards that they have to be more involved with the business community in involving them and working with them to either have classes on their sites or have their employees come in. One thing that we did that ended up being extremely controversial was establishing a foundation, and our former chancellor Garland Peed, who was chancellor when I was elected, and before that for several years, when I was elected in '81, that is. His area, he had been business manager here briefly first, and his area--it was really an expertise--was in the management and financial area. So we set up a foundation patterned after those in the major colleges and universities across the country.

Our first efforts were in teaching classes for the navy at the Naval Training Center here, and gradually during the years I was on the board we were teaching in all the major recruit centers for the navy, and many for the Marine Corps and the army all

over the country, and it was all done under the foundation.

Also, when we could no longer teach certain kinds of classes, one of the main areas was in foreign languages, and [other] continuing ed. We had to discontinue them [foreign languages in adult education]. Then the next year we set up classes under the foundation to teach foreign language. That was different, but here we'd been without any language classes and we needed it. The salary schedule and the various things were a little bit different and it caused controversy, of course, out there, but we could no longer [according to state law] teach the kind of classes that we had been teaching, and we felt it was better to have one kind than nothing at all. So things changed because of laws and it meant that board members increasingly were being called upon to answer to these various things, being dragged into, you know, controversy, where they really were setting policy, I feel, appropriately.

Now I mentioned the foundation that caused so much problem here because the teachers decided that they wanted those classes in the colleges, because there wasn't as much money from the state, and why

could we do that? The only trouble was you couldn't have. . . . The navy at the recruit depot wasn't going to bring a bus load of students to Mesa College or City College every day, and besides, our faculty didn't have the knowledge to do it [teach the navy courses]. And the navy wanted to get out of using uniformed personnel to teach those. It was easier and better and more economical [for our district] to hire someone else, so most of our instructors were retired navy chiefs. And you know they taught everything from air [traffic] controller in Florida, you know, where the navy had that school. Here [in San Diego] they had the school for the cooks and bakers for the navy, and all kinds of basic things, also the program for those that were hoping to go on into the navy officer program. And we did all these, but you see, they went to school all day long and they were at the navy base and they marched from one class to the other.

So the foundation made money and it put money in, [invested some, and] then gave money to the district. And the foundation board was appointed. Each trustee could appoint one person to be on the board of the foundation and they reported to us. It was very, very successful. And part of the money

stayed in. . . . You know, everything was drawn up legally. It was perfectly legal with the state; but it wasn't under the Education Code, it was under another code [Administrative Code] that dealt with other things. So, anyway, part of it [the money] stayed in the foundation to generate interest and part of it went to the district [for both the colleges and adult education].

Well, two years before I went off the board, the faculty just was upset. They wanted this money that was in the foundation, you know, that generated interest, and so two new trustees were elected in '88 on the side of the faculty to get rid of the foundation. It was a court case and it dragged on and on and on and on. And, anyway, ultimately it caused the break-up of our foundation, and so they've gone their separate ways and they have a wonderful foundation that's now operating in, I think, every state in the union and trains people in business and industry, conducts lots of training in businesses. It goes in and does what we were doing. The military part was given back to the district but the foundation operates some of it under a contract with the district. So I felt kind of badly about it, because if we [the San Diego Community College

District] still had it [the foundation] there would be income from that to the district. But no, they're hurting and they have lots of problems, but the two candidates that were just running for reelection that came in on the platform in '88 of getting rid of the foundation were reelected, you know, in the election two weeks ago, and one of their big campaign pitches was they got rid of the foundation and got that money back. But they didn't get the millions of dollars that it's making every year, which goes into education. I mean, it's a nonprofit type of thing, it's not making money and lining anybody's pocket, it's nonprofit. But those are some of the changes that I see the boards have had to face.

WEST: Picking up on something you were saying about the change with more state control. Did you see that the boards have become . . . School Board Association, for instance, become more politically active and try to influence state legislation, federal legislation, as the local control has moved to state control so much?

DYER: It's been so long since I've been on the school board that I really don't know, since I went off that board in '73, and I really only know [that they are urged to be politically active]. But the community college

board, I think it usually attracted people that were a little older, many business people. . . . The majority are men, but there are lots of women involved in it, and they've always been fairly active in trying to influence legislation, but I don't think as much as they should be. Most of the trustees from urban centers are more aware of the necessity for this. Many of the people from small communities know their individual assemblyman or maybe their senator, and maybe have a social . . . you know, a close friendship with these people and can influence that one but don't realize the necessity of influencing the committees in the legislature at large. At least that's one of the topics of all the trustee meetings . . . is [to] get more active, [Chuckling] you know, in legislation and how you do it. Legislation is always a big topic.

The National Organization for the Community College Trustees always has a legislative conference in Washington in February, and then the state has their conferences and stress legislation and have a day in Sacramento trying to get the trustees to go in and really be heard. They aren't as well organized nearly as, for instance, teachers are or some of the others, because trustees mostly have other jobs, or

maybe they're retired. But they aren't on somebody's payroll to do that and the amount the trustees are paid varies by the size of the district and it's set by the state. And most of these districts don't have the extra money to send trustees back and forth to Sacramento or to Washington all the time, so they aren't as big of an influence as they should be. I can almost argue on either side that they should do more of that, and on the other side that education should have local control and shouldn't be as controlled from the state. Just let us have our source of income and let us do what's best here. So, I mean, there are pros and cons of each.

But I think it has changed quite a bit. I don't think the colleges have as much . . . I don't know, it isn't problems, but the school boards seem to be having a lot of controversy over who is being elected, various philosophies, or trying to control school boards. The colleges haven't seen that happen yet, but the main thing I've noticed is the college boards are becoming much more political.

When I was elected to the school board, all those years I don't think I knew what political party my fellow trustees [belonged to]--and there were only five of us. We never discussed it, it didn't seem

to influence. . . . We were nonpartisan and it didn't matter. And when I was elected to the community college board, I think I knew all four of the men that I worked with for years, and I think I knew the political party of some of them, but none of us were really involved in one party or the other. I had been on the board several years before I figured out--it just didn't even occur to me to wonder--what party people belonged to.

But increasingly it's become more political. And each time I ran, because I served two terms on each board, each time it seemed like parties were creeping in more. Suddenly they wanted to be involved. And I never felt it was right, and I wasn't involved, and we weren't, but now it's become pretty much. . . . Well, in '88, both people campaigned on "it's all politics" kind of thing, and we hadn't felt that way before. Now it was political, in that you had to run and we had tough campaigns, but it wasn't partisan political, it was just political of what your views were and be elected in that way. And I think it's too bad because I don't think education is Democratic or Republican or Independent or anything else; I think it should be for the students.

WEST: Tell me a little bit more about your quiltmaking class and how that has influenced the community.

DYER: Well, those years were some of the happiest that I have spent in education. [Laughter] I really had wonderful people in my classes, and the classes were huge. I always took more students than I should, I guess, and never had any trouble about losing them, except that one semester when the fees went in and I lost some classes then. But of the five classes I was teaching for several years--and I quit teaching in December of '81--three of the ladies still get together once a week and quilt together. Now there are a few new people that have joined, and others that didn't, I still go to two of them. Well, I can't go every week but I go quite often. They're just wonderful people. One group meets in homes, one's in the community room of one of the branches of the public library, and one in the community room of a bank, and these people love quilting. Soon after I went off the board during the next few months, some of the ladies got together and established a quilt guild, and it's a very strong guild. I'm active in that guild and there are more and more guilds.

Of course, I can't take all the credit, but the bicentennial year in '76 came along and there's more

interest nationwide and there are more quilt shops and all of that. It's very popular, so I don't want to sound like I caused all of this. [Chuckling] But it has been very, very rewarding through the years. Two of my students opened quilt shops, one here in San Diego--which she now does not have, it was sold--and then one of them went back to New York state where she was from and she opened a quilt shop there. And some of the others worked in quilt shops or fabric stores that might not have done it otherwise. So it was really a lot of fun. So vocational or not, I feel like it has really enriched a lot of people's lives, but it's also provided a few extra dollars for some or an opportunity to make things for gifts, and it's been a lot of fun. The quilters are very nice ladies.

WEST: Yes, and their quality of life was improved by your contribution. This concludes the questions I have. Is there anything else that you would like to add?

DYER: Nothing, really, except to say I really enjoyed those years. When I retired in 1990, I had been with the community college district, really, for twenty-five years. You know, eight on the K-14 board, eight teaching, and nine on the other [college] board--nine because we changed our elections from odd- to even-

numbered years, so I got a five-year term instead of a four. And those twenty-five years were wonderful. I met lots of wonderful people and worked with them, and enjoyed both on the school boards and on the community college board being active in state and national organizations and it's meant a great deal to me. I've enjoyed it very much.

I did it because I believed in education, not because I was looking for something to run for higher office. And unfortunately now and through the years some of the people see a school board or a community college board as a way of them having name identification so then they can run for something [else] in the city or county or the assembly or someplace and move on. And I think if there's one trend that I don't like it's that idea. I would hope that people are there because they want to help students and believe in education. It's been very rewarding and I loved it.

[And one final comment, please. Adult education is one of the finest opportunities our district offers. The public is supportive because it touches so many lives in its many and varied classes and programs, including vocational education, high school diploma, ESL, enrichment classes for older adults and

handicapped, citizenship, counseling for education, assistance in job search and placement, and much more. I have always been a great supporter of adult education.]

WEST: Thank you, Louise. This interview was done as a part of the California Adult Education Oral History Project.

LOUISE S. DYER

Member, Board of Trustees
San Diego Community College District

PERSONAL HISTORY

BIRTHPLACE: Des Moines, Iowa
HUSBAND: Robert W. Dyer (deceased)
CHILDREN: Raymond W., George M., Charles R., Susan L.
GRANDCHILDREN: Ryan, Marc, Laurel, David, Kirsten, Thomas

EDUCATION

B.S., Business Administration, University of Iowa, 1941

ACADEMIC HONORS

Graduated With Highest Distinction, University of Iowa
Mortar Board
Beta Gamma Sigma
Pi Gamma Mu

PROFESSIONAL BACKGROUND

Instructor, Adult Education, San Diego Community College District, 1974-81
Income Tax Preparer, 1943-45 (part-time)
Secretary, Commandant's Office, Eleventh Naval District Headquarters, San Diego, 1942-45
Actuarial Assistant, Equitable Life Insurance Company of Iowa, Des Moines, 1941-42
Swimming Instructor, summers, 1938-40

PUBLIC SERVICE

San Diego Community College District Board of Trustees, 1981-present, 1990
President, 1986, 1989
Vice-President, 1985, 1988
San Diego Unified School District Board of Education, 1965-73
President, 1968-69, 1973
Vice-President, 1967-68, 1972

EDUCATIONAL ACTIVITIES

Member, Conference Committee, California Community College Trustees, 1988
Member, Legislation and Finance Commission, California Association of Community Colleges, 1988-present
Member, several Accreditation Teams in California Community Colleges, 1987 to present
Observer from San Diego Community College District to Board of Governors, 1985-1989
Vice-President, Community College Urban District Association, 1989
Member, Accreditation Committee, City College, 1986

EDUCATIONAL ACTIVITIES (Continued)

San Diego County Grand Jury, Chairman of Educational and Editorial Committees, 1978-79
Board of Directors, California Adult Educators, 1976-79
Media Committee, Council of Great Cities, 1973
Finance Committee, California School Boards Association, 1973
Nominating Committee, California School Boards Association, 1973
Vice-President, Big Five Association of Public School Districts in California, 1973
California Community College Occupational Programs Evaluation System Team Member, George Ebey & Associates, Palo Alto, 1972-74
Chancellor's Advisory Committee, California Community Colleges, 1971-73
Committee on the Disadvantaged, California Junior College Association, 1971-73
President, Region 9, California Junior College Association, 1971-72
Steering Committee, Council of Big Cities, National School Boards Association, 1970-73
Legislation Committee, National School Boards Association, two terms
Board of Directors, San Diego County School Boards Association, 1970-73
Board of Directors, Community College Section, California School Boards Association, 1970-71
School Personnel Committee, California School Boards Association, 1969-70
Delegate Assembly, California School Boards Association, 1967-73
Advisory Board, University of California, San Diego Extension, 1967-71
Board of Directors, California Junior College Association, 1970-71

COMMUNITY SERVICE

Secretary, Board of Directors, First Lutheran Development (senior citizens housing), 1975 to present
Vice-President, California Council of Adult Education, Southern Section, 1977
Assistant Vice-President, Education, S. D. County Chapter, Freedoms Foundation at Valley Forge, 1976-77
Member, Board of Directors, San Diego Chapter, American Red Cross, 1975-76
San Diego Historical Site Board, 1974-79
Member, Board of Directors, Ecumenical Conference, 1973-1976
Comprehensive Health Planning Association, San Diego and Imperial Counties, Drug Subcommittee, 1969-71
Member, Board of Directors, San Diego Economic Opportunity Commission, 1965-69
San Diego-Yokohama Friendship General Assembly, Vice-President, 1964-65
National Conference of Christians and Jews, San Diego Region Board of Directors, 1963-66, 1971-73
Advisory Board, 1973-74

HONORS/AWARDS

California Women in Government Certificate of Tribute in Education, 1987
Point Loma High School Community and PTA Recognition Award, 1972-73
George Washington Honor Medal, Freedoms Foundation at Valley Forge
(for a Commencement Speech), 1971
San Diego Woman of Valor in Education, 1966
PTA Honorary Life Membership, 1962
Awards from Phi Gamma Nu and Kappa Alpha Theta

AFFILIATIONS

First Lutheran Church
San Diego Zoological Society
San Diego Women's Division, Freedoms Foundation at Valley Forge
American Association of University Women
San Diego Historical Society San Diego
Alumni of Kappa Alpha Theta, President, 1945
Seaside Quilters, Vice-President, 1985-86, Member; 1982 to present

Louise Dyer has published numerous articles about education. She is listed in various "Who's Who" directories.

9/20/90

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CALIFORNIA ADULT EDUCATION ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

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For and in consideration of the participation by the *California Adult Education Oral History Project*, funded by the *California Department of Education*, in any programs involving the dissemination of tape-recorded memoirs and oral history material for publication, copyright, and other uses, I hereby release all right, title, or interest in and to all of my tape-recorded memoirs to the *California Adult Education Oral History Project* and declare that they may be used without any restriction whatsoever and may be copyrighted and distributed by the *California Department of Education*, which may also assign said copyright and publication rights to serious research scholars.

In addition to the rights and authority given to you under the preceding paragraph, I hereby authorize you to edit, publish, sell and/or license the use of my oral history memoir in any other manner which the *California Department of Education* considers to be desirable, and I waive any claim to any payments which may be received as a consequence thereof by the *Department*.

PLACE San Diego, CA

DATE November 9, 1992

Louise Dyer
(Interviewee)

Linda L. West
(Interviewer)
(for California Adult Education
Oral History Project)